

## **7.1 Accessing practical support for the GROW project or the Treforest Wholesome Food Association: a summary report**

### **1. Background**

Dr Robin Cook, a part time lecturer at the University of Glamorgan in the Department of Advanced Technology, approached Science Shops Wales in October 2006 to ask for assistance in establishing a small scale organic farming project.

Dr Cook had obtained plots of land in Treforest, close to the university, from the local authority. The local council had agreed renewable leases on favourable terms on condition that the land use would contribute to an improvement of the local environment. Dr Cook's plan was to set up an organic farming project that would serve the needs of the local community, improve the local environment, provide work experience for local young people, raise awareness of environmental sustainability issues among the local community, and also produce organic vegetables to sell. The project was named GROW, or Treforest Wholesome Food Association. For the first stage, the project would take place on just one of the three plots obtained, measuring 2.9 acres (300x100metres).

The project had initially been set up during the academic year 2005-2006 in collaboration with local comprehensive schools who were introducing the Welsh Bacculaureate scheme into their six forms. In addition to classroom work, the scheme requires students to undertake practical work relating to their chosen subjects. Dr Cook and colleagues designed modules to meet the academic requirements and included practical experience of preparing and tending the land for organic vegetable farming.

### **2. Funding issue**

It was initially planned for the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to fund the cost of the delivering the Welsh Bacculaureate modules. This funding would have been sufficient to establish the first stage of the project. However, the funding was disallowed on the basis that school-age participants would not be eligible as beneficiaries. Participation by school age students then had to cease.

The project had received some small injections of funding from the Prince's Trust and the Allotments Association. £5000 had also been granted by 'Unlimited' with a promise of a further £20,000 when the project was established. There had also been a number of 'in-kind' donations such as fencing for the plot.

### **3. Situation in October 2006**

The first plot of land had already been cleared and rotivated during the summer 2006 but was becoming overgrown again. There was a need to remove the weeds in order to be able to sow seeds by spring. The site was equipped with a lock-up hut for storage, toilets and a polytunnel, and six bee hives.

At that point, there was not a great deal of interest in the project from the community, and the project lacked volunteers to make the land productive. Dr Cook had explored the possibility of engaging with certain organisations that made use of work experience opportunities, but had not yet been successful in finding a source of labour. With the future of the project in doubt, he approached SSW to ask for assistance.

### **4. Project aim**

SSW was asked to find out how a suitable supply of labour could be accessed to set up the project. The work force would need to comprise groups of individuals who would benefit from the experience as well as make a contribution to the project.

Having discovered a source of labour, SSW would also assist in meeting any administrative or practical arrangements needed to comply with university regulations, such as health and safety policy.

### **5. Action taken**

A site visit was carried out in November to find out the level of facilities and conditions for work experience volunteers. As the facilities were adequate, it was decided to contact private training organisations to discuss the possibility of client work placements. It was necessary to ascertain their precise requirements in terms of supervision, protective clothing, health and safety, insurance, refreshments, etc.

In December, SSW contacted Associated Community Training (ACT), a private training organisation with an excellent track record in working with local communities and bringing new opportunities to unemployed people of all ages. The director, Andrew Cooksley, welcomed the proposal, and a meeting was arranged for January 2007 to discuss the next steps.

The meeting took place on 29 January. It was agreed that ACT's health and safety officer would visit the site to carry out risk assessments. Then, the first

work party would start on 14 February. Clients on work experience from the Caerphilly 'Learnabout' scheme would attend every Wednesday and Thursday. Parties of 8-10 would work from 9.30 to 3.30 each day and be supervised by Dr Cook.