



GARDENS FOR CARE: HOSPICES FOR CHILDREN

GREENFINGERS

By Richard Jackson, Chairman of the charity

In December, Greenfingers, the charity of the gardening industry, opened its 31st children's hospice garden. Greenfingers is a very small charity which was set up just over ten years ago by a group of representatives from different sectors of the gardening industry including retailers, growers, manufacturers and the gardening media.

They were aware that children's hospices, who receive very little statutory funding, desperately needed gardens to aid their work but were generally unable to fund them. Each hospice has to raise somewhere in the region of £1.5m every year to cover their running costs and there is rarely any money available for creating gardens despite their proven therapeutic value to the life limited children and their families.

Over the past decade, Greenfingers has funded and built an extraordinary range of gardens for hospices throughout the UK- every one of these gardens is special and every one of them is very different. A Greenfingers garden can be a place to play or to rest, a place to laugh or to cry, a special place for memories whilst experiencing the tranquil benefits and values of nature. Above all, every garden is special because every day for the children, their families and their friends is very precious.

The gardens are designed specifically for the hospice- they might require a memorial garden for quiet reflection or a fun-packed sensory play garden. Following the initial brief from the hospice, Greenfingers invites a garden designer, who always and very generously donates their time and skills free of charge, to draw up plans. When the plans are approved by the hospice, Greenfingers run a fundraising campaign and, once the money is raised, employ a professional landscaper to construct the garden. Often the planting is carried out by volunteers from companies who have helped raise the money for that garden.

Over the years, Greenfingers has incorporated some wonderful features within the gardens including a wheelchair accessible tree-house (including periscopes for the children to watch nearby feeding or nesting birds), a wheelchair football pitch, a race track for remote controlled cars, a raised rill bubbling water stream and even a smoking volcano!

Generally our gardens, which range in cost from £10,000 to £85,000 (depending on the complexity of the specialist requirements needed such as wheelchair roundabouts) are designed for younger children and their families. However, our garden at Douglas House hospice in Oxford (*pictured*

below) that was generously funded by staff and customers of the Garden Centre Group, is the very first designed for life limited young adults who have very different needs.



The garden was designed by Clare Matthews, who has designed five other magical gardens for Greenfingers, and it transformed an area of lawn into a chill out garden providing private and social space for teenagers and young adults

It includes a water feature and a semi-circular wooden building with seating and electrics for laptops and music. The ceiling is fitted with blue LED lights which create an incredible night-time ambience. Within the garden there are shaped raised beds to encourage participation, even for patients in wheelchairs. Other design features include circular paving, sensory plants and places to sit.



Perhaps the most admired feature is Clare's specially designed copper memory vine, guests at the hospice are encouraged to write messages and memories on each of the copper leaves.

Although the garden was only opened a few weeks ago, it has been incredibly popular with the guests at the hospice, their families and the wonderfully caring staff. Like all Greenfingers gardens, it will now be cared for by volunteers at the hospice. And the Greenfingers team move on to start raising money for their next 4 projects. As you might have guessed, we've a waiting list of hospices who'd like one of our magical gardens and the faster we can raise money, the faster we can help the hospices. If you can help us, please contact info@greenfingerscharity.org.uk We'd be delighted to hear from you.

<http://www.greenfingerscharity.org.uk>

ALSO SEE:

GARDENS FOR CARE:

DESIGNER Amanda Patton writes about her children's hospice garden at Poole Dorset, a Greenfingers project