



Rachel waters the plants

# Green shoots

If you or your autistic child enjoys gardening, there are some amazing schemes offering care, training and apprenticeships in horticulture. We found out more about **Mires Beck Nursery** in Yorkshire and nationwide company **Ground Control**

Mires Beck describes itself as a place to grow. The 14-acre horticultural nursery in East Yorkshire supports around 100 adults with learning difficulties, autism and/or physical disabilities every week.

The nursery grows around 300 perennials, 50 herbs, 100 Yorkshire wildflowers and 28 varieties of British trees. It is open to the public, and supplies garden centres and farm shops across Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. All funds from selling the plants and trees go towards financing the operation.

The Anniversary Garden within Mires Beck caters for those service users who need extra one-to-one care. Anniversary Garden Coordinator Shelley Morris says: "We promote a happy, safe and calm working environment that gives all our service users a sense of worth, and we communicate verbally and through sign language.

"Working with plants is very therapeutic for autistic people, as it puts focus and attention on tending the plants - which, in turn, helps calm anxiety and stress.

"We promote friendship that, according to some parents, wouldn't exist outside Mires Beck. Socialising can be a big thing for autistic people, so it's important they feel relaxed and comfortable around their peers.

## Callum's story

**Dawn McKenzie is mum to Callum, 22**

"Mires Beck is Callum's oasis in the desert. It allows him to be an adult, allows him to grow, develop, learn new skills, make friends - but most of all it gives a purpose to his life. We always say 'Callum's going to work.'

When at home during lockdown, he struggled to cope with the isolation, and every day he asked 'when am I going

to Mires Beck?' When he returned in November, the difference in him was obvious to see.

As parents of a vulnerable adult, the most difficult thing for us is finding a place to trust, where he's safe, where he's being cared for and where he's being nurtured. Mires Beck ticks all these boxes in full!"



"The cognitive and physical benefits of improving concentration, taking care of plants and watching them grow can really help build self-esteem."

The nursery is a thriving social enterprise. Besides horticulture, services users do crafts and woodwork, and these products are sold at onsite fairs and in its shop; bug hotels are a bestseller. Service users attend for between one and five days a week. They can start at age 18 and stay as long as they want. The nursery offers transition days to SEN students from 16 years old, with one-to-one support.

The team considers every application and tries to accommodate adults looking for a horticultural and conservation environment. They also provide places within their catering team and for garden craft work. For more information, visit [www.miresbeck.co.uk](http://www.miresbeck.co.uk)

**The cognitive and physical benefits of taking care of plants can really help build self-esteem**

## Ground Control

Garden maintenance and landscaping firm Ground Control offers inclusive apprenticeships, ensuring opportunities are available to anyone with learning difficulties. The company maintains more than 50,000 sites, with a client list including three of the country's four biggest supermarkets. It directly employs 1,000 people and supplies work to more than 5,000 contractors.

Its programme offers mentorship, practical support and advice to participants, as well as coordinating with their school or college to adjust training to make it accessible and inclusive for people with learning difficulties.

Ground Control staff have supported, mentored and now employed 20-year-old Wayne Gorman (see 'Wayne's story'). Following close on his heels is 19-year-old Jordan Brown, who has completed his supported internship and is starting his grounds maintenance apprenticeship, while Kenny Hanney's career has begun via the internship programme.

The scheme is proving popular with local school leavers. Partner school The Westminster, Dudley, West Midlands, is supporting five more pupils to move onto



Training

Liam at Mires Beck Nursery

the programme over the next 12 months. Eventually, graduates will become their own boss and work for themselves – as part of a qualified field team – and be given the support to work on maintenance contracts on behalf of Ground Control.

“We’ve worked closely with teachers and regulatory authorities to make the training courses more accessible and flexible for people with learning difficulties”, says Roy Candlin, Contracts Manager at Ground Control.

“A key to this has been the removal of

barriers – such as the requirement for five GCSEs – that were preventing a lot of people like Wayne, Jordan and Kenny from achieving their potential.”

“No other apprenticeship programme in the country compares to this,” says Oliver Flowers, Headteacher at The Westminster School. “It’s a beacon of best practice, as it gives our young people an opportunity to develop a career and gain real independence.”

For more information about the scheme, visit [www.ground-control.co.uk](http://www.ground-control.co.uk)

## Wayne’s story

Wayne Gorman, 20, has recently passed all of his exams and completed his apprenticeship with flying colours. He started his grounds maintenance apprenticeship in 2018, working on Ground Control’s Sandwell Schools contract with the support of his college, and will now be joining Ground Control full-time in September. Wayne previously struggled in learning situations because of his autism diagnosis and associated issues. But with onsite mentoring from Ground Control staff, he has flourished, and demonstrated through perseverance and hard work how capable he is. Wayne enjoyed all aspects of his course – especially earning his own money – and says he’s looking forward to saving for a house, car or bike!



Apprentices Kenny Hanney, Jordan Brown and Wayne Gorman



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