**Case Study: Rheola Walled Garden**

 **Glynneath March 2019**

**Background**

The walled garden is set in the grounds of Rheola Estate, a large private estate dating back to 1815. The garden is sloping with woods behind and a stunning view across the valley. The Victorian gardens had fallen out of use and were dilapidated.

The group have obtained grants and restored 3 hothouses/greenhouses, the gardener’s cottage (now the training centre), the garden walls and a tool shed. They cleared the growing areas in 2009 and have created an orchard of traditional fruit varieties, vibrantly coloured willow beds, growing beds, a large polytunnel, an outdoor covered area (for an outdoor kitchen) and two fire circles, one of which is in the woods behind.

In 2003 Glynneath Training Centre ran an allotment project in Glynneath. The project developed but space was limited so they carried out a feasibility study which led to a connection with Rheola Estate. The group were able to take on the site due to links with the Welsh Government and the local Council. Although the site is privately owned, the council leases the gardens and sub-lets them to the group. CLAS Cymru helped with putting the sub lease together.

**Group aims**

The main aims of the garden are

* To create training and employment opportunities
* Increase skills levels and access to employment
* Access for all the community, community events
* Promote healthy eating and access to the outdoors

**Main audience and volunteers**

Anyone who wants to come along can volunteer at the site, sessions are weekly on Tuesdays during the summer, and fortnightly during the winter. There are currently 12 – 15 regular volunteers and also a local gardening group of mainly retired people come along to do activities.

**Quotes from the garden**

Chris Day (Environmental Projects Officer): *I think what’s great is giving people of all ages the opportunity to try out different things that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to do.*

Chris Jones (Part-Time Worker): *I enjoy the produce, I find it very relaxing, it clears my mind and there is a feel-good factor after working here. It’s very satisfying to grow your own produce.*

They have strong links with the local schools who use the facilities, plus the workers also do outreach work at the school sites. Currently one of the schools comes to the site for an outdoor cooking session every Thursday and half term projects are planned at 3 of the schools. At present there are 4 part-time staff and 2 young apprentices. There are around 50 – 100 local people who attend events held at the gardens plus 4 schools and 2 nurseries who are also stakeholders.

The group have achieved an enormous feat by beautifully restoring the heritage buildings and structures in the gardens. They have also worked hard to create lovely orchards, willow beds for weaving etc and restored the pond which provides water for the site as it is cleverly placed above the gardens. Over the time they have been at the site they have run some lovely events, which have been well-attended, including apple days, wassailing, willow weaving and craft events also wood carving.