



# Orchard Round-Up

FRESH FROM THE FARM



## DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

*End of Year Round Up from Orchard Therapeutic Farm*

Every time I sit down to write the end-of-year newsletter, I find myself pausing more than usual. Not for any particular reason – but because, if I'm honest, I always get a bit emotional.

When you're in the thick of the year – solving problems, juggling priorities, supporting students – you're not always aware of what you're actually achieving. It's only when you stop and look back that you realise how far we've come, how much has changed, and just how much has been achieved.

A close friend once told me, "You can't see the picture when you're inside the frame," and that's always stayed with me. It's only now, stepping back, that I can truly see the incredible growth – not just of our provision, but of our young people, our team, and our whole community.

This year I've seen tears of laughter, tears of happiness, and moments of such deep pride that they'll stay with me for a long time. I've seen students face fears, find joy, and start believing in themselves again – and I've seen the impact of a team who go above and beyond, every single day.

That's especially true in a year like this one, where we've navigated a great deal of change. One thing I've realised – no matter how old you are, managing change is always a leadership skill, and it's rarely easy. It can be tough both for the people leading it and for those living through it. Yet through every shift and transition, our team has shown resilience, humour, and unwavering focus on what matters most: the young people.

It isn't always easy. Behind the scenes there's the constant pressure of making sure we deliver the safety, consistency and quality that our children so rightly deserve. It's our duty to get it right – to be what we say we are, and to ensure the memories we create here are the kind that last a lifetime.

That means keeping our priorities straight – even when you're shouting (lovingly!) at Toby to hurry up and build the next building to give the children just one more incredible experience. It's funny, but it's also true – we grow because our young people need us to.

The progress our children have made this year has been nothing short of extraordinary. From small steps in confidence to major leaps in learning, every achievement – big or small – has been hard-won and deeply meaningful. And none of it would be possible without the compassion, consistency, and hard work of our whole team.

Whether you're working directly with the children or supporting in other ways – from admin to maintenance and everything in between – you are part of that change. Every one of you helps make this place what it is, and I'm endlessly proud of what we've built together.

And just as importantly, thank you to our parents and families. Your trust, collaboration, and honesty have helped us build the kind of relationships that children can thrive within.

Thank you for walking this journey with us. Wishing you all a restful, happy summer – and we look forward to continuing our work together in September.

LUDIVINE PARMENTIER  
CEO/FOUNDER

## GARDENING UPDATE



### A Season of Growth, Creativity, and Resilience in the Garden

This term, our young gardeners have once again shown remarkable dedication and enthusiasm—particularly impressive given the hot and dry start to the summer. One of the most essential tasks has been consistent watering, and thanks to their efforts, our plants have continued to thrive. The outdoor sprinkler, a simple but joyful addition, has not only supported the garden but also brought welcome relief and laughter on those especially warm afternoons.

Despite the heat, our learners have stayed fully engaged, taking on a wide variety of gardening tasks. They've prepared garden beds and carefully planted out seedlings they nurtured with care throughout the spring. Now, pumpkins, squash, sweetcorn, courgettes, and tall sunflowers are beginning to take shape—living proof of their hard work and patience.

But our garden has grown more than just plants this season—it's been a space where creativity has flourished, too. From crafting vibrant sun catchers to designing unique bird feeders and painting colourful rocks, our learners have added beautiful, personal touches that brighten every corner of our outdoor space.

This season has been a true celebration of growth—in every sense of the word. Through the challenges of the weather, our young gardeners have demonstrated resilience, creativity, and care. We couldn't be prouder of what they've achieved.



## ART UPDATE



### Art with Purpose: A Term of Creativity and Care

This term in Art, we've taken inspiration from important environmental themes, including Big Green Week and Plastic Free Week. Our focus on sustainability encouraged learners to think creatively about how we can care for the planet—using recycled and repurposed materials to make beautiful, imaginative pieces such as bugs, flower bouquets, and other eco-friendly crafts.

These projects offered more than just creative fun—they sparked meaningful conversations about waste, the environment, and how small actions can make a big difference. It's been wonderful to see learners embrace new materials, experiment with ideas, and grow in both confidence and creativity.

Many stepped out of their comfort zones, showing openness, curiosity, and pride in their work. Their thoughtful engagement and enthusiasm have been truly inspiring.

A huge well done to everyone—it's been a joy to watch your creativity flourish while contributing to something with purpose.

## SPORT UPDATE



### Sports This Year - Teamwork, Tennis & Trying Our Best.

More than anything, Sports this year has been about more than just the games themselves. We've developed important life skills like communication, teamwork, resilience, and learning to handle both success and setbacks with maturity. Whether on the pitch or the court, it's been fantastic to see everyone growing in confidence, supporting one another, and enjoying the journey. These varied experiences have helped us build fitness, try new things, and, most importantly, have fun together along the way.

In football, we've been working hard on our passing, positioning, shooting, and teamwork. There's been plenty of enthusiasm on the pitch, with great progress made, and more than a few impressive goals!

More recently, we stepped out of our comfort zones and tried our hand at tennis. While we might not be quite ready for Wimbledon just yet, it's been a fun and valuable experience that brought lots of laughter, plenty of extra steps from collecting balls over the fence and even provided a few lucky dogs with new toys.

We also embraced a range of other activities this year, including mountain biking sessions, which quickly became a firm favourite for many. Circuit training was met with slightly less enthusiasm, but everyone gave it their best and pushed through. We also gave golf a go, which delivered plenty of laughs, even if our skills were a little less convincing.

## BUSHCRAFT



### Bushcraft Adventures: A Summer of Skill, Creativity and Connection

This term's warm weather brought both challenges and plenty of joy—from digging and water fights to crafting and cooking. We began by foraging elderflowers to make cordial and repurposed their soft-centred sticks into beads and whistles. Our trusty mud oven continues to serve us well, with successful experiments in baking bread and cooking over the fire.

Learners have developed practical skills through hands-on projects—whittling, square lashing, and constructing a shelter over the old pond using bendy hazel sticks. Built-in seats (thanks to lots of enthusiastic digging!) made it even more special.

Pitching tents offered opportunities for teamwork and problem-solving, helping prepare for OFT Fest and building confidence for future camping adventures.

Bushcraft sports, linked with Disability Awareness Week, were a huge hit. “Onion fencing” (yes, really!) sparked laughter, movement, and imagination—proving that creativity thrives when we use what's around us.

Woodwork has been another highlight, with our goat shelter project giving learners the chance to safely use power tools and work towards a shared goal.

Looking ahead, bushcraft will take a more play-based approach for our younger learners, offering rich sensory and risk-based experiences. For our older learners, we're excited to invite them to co-design their own projects—building a portfolio that showcases not only their practical skills, but also their creativity, teamwork, and independence.

### Supporting Well-being Through Understanding and Connection

This term, we've been exploring the brain's “feel-good” chemicals—oxytocin, endorphins, dopamine, and serotonin—and how they influence our mental health and overall well-being.

Learners have engaged in one-to-one sessions designed to provide a safe, supportive space to share worries, talk openly, or simply connect. Guided by a trauma-informed approach, these sessions have encouraged honest conversations around mental health in a way that feels respectful and empowering.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many learners expressing how much they value the opportunity to feel heard and supported. These small, meaningful moments have made a big impact—helping learners build confidence, self-awareness, and a stronger sense of control over their own well-being.

## WELLBEING & MENTAL HEALTH



## B2B/ACTIVE PROGRAMME



Our students continue to amaze us with their resilience, enthusiasm, and willingness to dive into new experiences. Their confidence in the water has grown so much that some now say it is their “natural habitat”, and we couldn't agree more!

They've had a great time swimming, kayaking, paddle boarding, and even taking on some tougher challenges from navigating river currents to mastering proper paddling techniques. It's been fantastic to see them support each other, try new things, and keep pushing themselves.

We're really looking forward to welcoming even more students to the programme. It's been so rewarding to watch our current group grow more confident, resilient, and adventurous with every session.

## OUTREACH/BARN

Orchard Therapeutic Outreach is the new part of our family. It has been fantastic to see this grow exponentially and even give us the new idea to develop a next step which we call the Orchard Therapeutic Barn.

So, what is Outreach?

It is where one of a small group of specialist teachers visit children in their own home or a venue of the young person's choice, such as a library. We build relationships, tap into the young person's interests to help them reengage not only learning but the wider world around them.

Our team have been so lucky to be welcomed into people's homes to work with their children. This has ranged from taking my dog Nero with me just for a dog walk to have a chat and get out of the house to 2 hours of full 1 to 1 teaching in a more traditional style, where health has become a barrier to attending a school setting. One young person has moved from being practically mute to sharing their feelings as to why school did not work for them. This has opened the doors to a school being found and for them to return to a school setting this term. We have continued to be in touch with the family to give that sense of support and continuity which is so important not just for vulnerable young people, but for all young people when change happens.

Another wonderful situation is where a young person with ASD started by engaging in 1:1 learning but became overwhelmed once the masking stopped. Working with other professionals and the family it has taken a long time but the outcomes for this young person are now more positive in all areas of their life. 'Proud' can be a word that is overused however we are immensely proud of the achievements of all the young people we have visited and mentored since February this year.

From this idea we have put the Orchard Therapeutic Barn in place for those young people who need a further step from being mentored in their own environment to a being in the same place as just a couple of other people to bridge the gap between home and whatever their next steps might be, our wonderful farm or a fresh new start in a school.



From planting seeds, making candles, cooking, sewing, learning to shop and using child led approaches for learning outcomes, such as potion making in a garden to inspire story telling.

As well as making memories as a young person moves to their new learning environment.



## COOKING

As the school year draws to a close, we want to celebrate the incredible journey our young chefs have taken in the kitchen. This year has been bursting with exciting cooking sessions, meaningful themes, and hands-on learning that brought together food, culture, sustainability, and creativity.

A Taste of the World... and Our Planet!

Throughout the term, students have explored flavours and issues from around the globe. Our cooking sessions were themed around:

- World Environment Day & Zero Waste Week – Students made use of leftovers and learned to reduce food waste through clever recipes.
- World Food Day – A flavourful celebration! Pupils explored spices, grains, and vegetables from around the world.
- Big Green Week & World Oceans Week – We explored sustainable eating, including plant-based meals, meat alternatives, and ocean-friendly seafood dishes.
- Insect Week & World Snake Day – Don't worry – we didn't eat insects or snakes! But students learned about edible insects in other cultures and got creative with snake-shaped breadsticks and bug-themed fruit snacks.

Celebrating Diversity Through Food

Cooking has been a joyful way to explore inclusivity, health, and wellbeing:

- Learning Disability Week – We focused on accessible recipes and sensory experiences, empowering all learners with adapted equipment and teamwork.
- Pride Month – Rainbow-themed fruit skewers, cupcakes, and colourful salads gave us a vibrant way to celebrate love, identity, and inclusion.
- Sports Week – High-energy snacks and healthy recipes kept us fuelled for fitness, from protein-packed wraps to fun filled flap jacks.

Skills for Life

Across every session, students have developed essential life skills:

Knife safety and cutting techniques

Safe food handling and hygiene

Cooking methods: baking, boiling, frying, blending

Tasting, evaluating, and adapting recipes

Working as a team in the kitchen

Learning to cook with sustainability in mind

Tasting Adventures

This term we've enjoyed trying a wide variety of ingredients and cuisines.

Thank You!

Thank you to all the families for your continued support and encouragement. We've had a fantastic year of flavour, fun, and food education. We're excited to build on this next year with even more inspiring themes and creative cooking.

Heads up for September

From September, due to Health and Safety recommendations and compliance has meant that we need to wear uniforms, thus there will be strict requirements in place for any young person entering the kitchen. These expectations are non-negotiable and must be followed without exception to ensuring we maintain a professional, safe, and realistic working environment.

Uniform Requirements:

- All students must wear chefs' jackets and hair nets when cooking.
- Staff will be always wearing the same attire in the kitchen to lead by example and reinforce expectations.

Health and Safety Measures:

- A new sign will be installed specifying a maximum of four people in the kitchen at any one time for health and safety reasons as well as the wearing of uniforms and workwear.
- These requirements are being clearly outlined in the student handbook and induction material.



## EVENTS & TRIPS

### Celebrating Milestones and Making Memories

This term has been full of exciting firsts and memorable moments for OTF. From our very first Camping at OTF experience to the end-of-year trip to Cotswold Wildlife Park, and finally our on-site End of Year Celebrations, each event has brought joy, connection, and a sense of achievement.

These moments have not only created lasting memories but also strengthened our community. It's been wonderful to see everyone fully embracing the experiences, trying new things, and celebrating a fantastic year together.

### Camp Out event

The idea for Camping at OTF came directly from our young people as a special way to celebrate their year with us. It was truly wonderful to witness how much progress many had made—especially those who stepped outside their comfort zones to try something they never thought possible.

Seeing their smiles and confidence the next morning was a real marvel. They were not only proud of their achievement but radiated positivity and joy. Many parents who came to collect their children shared in that amazement, expressing how proud they were of the incredible growth their young people have made.

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It was a powerful reminder of the strength, courage, and potential within each of our learners—well done to everyone who took part!

### Cotswold Wildlife Trip

To round off the 2024/25 year, we enjoyed a fantastic trip to Cotswold Wildlife Park. Seeing the smiles, laughter, and genuine joy of everyone involved was truly heartwarming. The teamwork and camaraderie on display made the day even more special.

This trip beautifully brought together many of the skills we've focused on throughout the year—animal care, social skills, practical ways of using functional skills elements and teamwork—offering a meaningful and fun way for both students and staff to celebrate their progress. It was a perfect ending to a remarkable year.

### End of Year Celebration

Our final event of the year was the End of Year celebration—a wonderful opportunity to showcase OTF in all its vibrancy. It was a joy to welcome so many of you, giving you the chance to explore the spaces your young people often talk about and even sample some of their impressive culinary skills.

It was truly special to share relaxed conversations, witness the connections your young people have built, and offer a glimpse into and try some of the activities that shape their weekly experience.

Here's to many more events like this—moments that deepen the bonds between families, learners, and staff, and celebrate the community we continue to grow together.



## STAFF UPDATE - Exciting new Team members joining OTF and some Team members taking on new roles

### Nick Maitland

We're pleased to welcome **Nick Maitland** to OTF for the new term. Nick will be leading on **Art**, the **Post-16 BTEC Art qualification**, and **City & Guilds Carpentry**.

Nick is an established artist in his own right, with some of his work having been purchased by well-known figures. He brings with him a strong background in education, having worked in a variety of school settings, including those with a focus on SEN. His passion for creativity is matched by his enthusiasm for teaching, and he has shared how excited he is to bring new ideas and opportunities to our students.

With a love of the outdoors inspired by his time in Canada, and a wealth of experience working across various artistic mediums, Nick is eager to help students explore the joys of Art and express themselves creatively.

Please join us in giving Nick a warm welcome to the team!

### Melody Kaplicz

We're excited to share that Melody Kaplicz—known to all the students as Mel—will be stepping into the role of **Learning Mentor** in the new term.

Mel will be leading on our new **Reptile and Curious Creatures** space, a dedicated area she is truly passionate about. She's especially looking forward to sharing her recently completed **training in Taxidermy**, which will bring a fascinating new element to our learning environment.

We know Mel's enthusiasm and hands-on approach will make this an exciting and enriching experience for our students.

### Daniela (Dani) Belcredi Kiersnowski

We're pleased to announce that **Daniela (Dani) Belcredi Kiersnowski** will be taking the lead on the Active programme, formerly known as **B2B (Bridge to Brilliance)** and now renamed **Orchard Active** for the Autumn term.

Since joining OTF, Dani has been supporting **Renata** with the programme and has shown great dedication and enthusiasm. She is already busy planning a range of exciting **outward-bound activities** for the new academic year and is looking forward to building on the programme's success.

We're confident Dani will bring great energy and fresh ideas to the role, and we know you'll join us in supporting her as she steps into this new position.

### Jiri (Ziggy) Zirmund

We're delighted to welcome **Ziggy** to OTF as our very own **highly skilled arborist and horticulture expert**.

You may have already noticed some of the **transformations** taking place around the site—Jiri has begun work on new planting schemes and redesigned green spaces.

With his **extensive knowledge and deep passion for all things 'green'**, we're excited to see how he will continue to **work his magic** on our grounds throughout the changing seasons.

We're thrilled to have him on board and can't wait to see the landscape flourish under his care.

### Simon Canning

A new face you may spot around the site is **Simon Canning**, who has been working hard to set up our bee colonies here at the farm.

Simon is an **experienced beekeeper** and will be responsible for caring for our hives. With a wealth of knowledge in apiculture, we're delighted to have him on board as we continue to make **OTF as rich and diverse in nature as possible**.

### A change for the new term

We will be bidding a fond farewell to two brilliant members of our team during next term: **Bobby Lynch** and **Laura Bretherton**.

Bobby, our fantastic **Assistant Head of Centre and Designated Safeguarding Lead**, has been with us for the past three years. She joined at the very start of OTF and has been instrumental in shaping it into what it is today. With her wealth of experience and knowledge, Bobby brought her own unique approach to everything she did—especially in sport—and was always the first person to turn to with any concerns or worries, offering thoughtful solutions and unwavering support.

Laura, our **Mental Health and Art Lead**, joined shortly after Bobby. With her calming presence and passion for creative expression, she brought art to life at OTF. Laura has always had time to listen to students' concerns and offer guidance, helping them find positive and constructive ways forward.

Both Bobby and Laura are **long-standing, valued members** of the team, with **incredible talent and deep dedication** to the young people in our care. While we are very sad to see them go, we—like all of you—will be wishing them every success as they begin their next adventures.

From all of us at OTF, thank you, Bobby and Laura, for everything you've given to our students, past and present. You will be greatly missed.

### Alex Smith

With the new term approaching, we're pleased to share that **Alex Smith** will be stepping into the role of **Assistant Head of Centre**, taking over from **Bobby**.

This change has been carefully planned to ensure a **smooth and seamless transition** for the students. Alex will be on hand to offer continued support and consistency, and we know she'll bring great energy and care to the role.

We hope everyone will take the opportunity to **say hello and offer a warm welcome** to Alex in her new position as the term begins.

## NEW FOR AUTUMN 2025 - Campus/Grounds update

### Launching Soon - New Post-16 Provision for 2025/26

We're excited to announce the launch of a **new Post-16 provision** at OTF, starting in the **2025/26 academic year**. This expanded offering will include **BTEC** and **City & Guilds qualifications** in the following areas:

- **Catering, Hospitality and Tourism**
- **Sport**
- **Construction and Engineering**
- **Independence and Employability**
- **Animal Care**
- **Art**

This new provision offers students the opportunity to leave OTF after two years with up to **five recognised qualifications**, including:

- **Life Skills**
- **Functional Skills in English**
- **Functional Skills in Maths**
- Plus **subject-specific qualifications** based on their chosen pathway

Everyone at OTF is excited about the opportunities this will bring. Whether students choose to **progress into further education** or take their first steps into the **world of work**, they'll be equipped with valuable skills and credentials to support their next chapter

### Exciting New Addition - The OTF Teepee & Coffee Shop

One of the first things you'll notice as you arrive on site is our new Teepee, recently constructed near the entrance. This unique space will be home to our new Coffee Shop, opening this, Autumn.

The Coffee Shop will offer hands-on work experience for students, providing valuable opportunities in customer service, working in a professional kitchen, and contributing to events. It will also form part of the new post-16 provision, supporting the Certificate in Skills for Professions in Catering, Hospitality and Tourism, as well as Skills for Independence and Employability.

In addition to daily use, the Teepee will be a venue for hosting events and functions, giving our young people even more opportunities to build real-world skills in the hospitality industry.

We're excited about the experiences this will create and the growth it will support in our students.

### Coming Soon - The Creamery

We're excited to announce the upcoming opening of The Creamery—a new space that will showcase a range of delicious jams, chutneys, and condiments, all made from our own produce and locally sourced ingredients.

Each product will feature specially designed packaging and labels, overseen by Sharon Garrod, who will be leading the project with her usual care and creativity.

Importantly, The Creamery will also offer valuable work experience opportunities for our students, linking directly with their learning and qualifications in areas such as food production, enterprise, and employability.

We can't wait to share the results—and the flavours—with you all!

### Outreach Expansion - Opening of 'The Barn'

As part of our ongoing Outreach expansion, we're pleased to announce the opening of 'The Barn'—a dedicated space on the farm designed to support small groups of students as they begin their transition from home-centred visits to engaging with the wider opportunities available at OTF.

'The Barn' will also provide a calmer, less busy environment for referred students, helping them to build resilience and confidence at their own pace. This nurturing space is tailored to support individual learning journeys, with a focus on enabling students to work toward their personal targets and outcomes.

Our long-term goal is to support students in developing the skills and confidence needed to prepare them for their next step in education.

### Introducing the Curious Creatures Bus

Many of you will have spotted the 'big red—now green—bus' on site, and we're thrilled to share its future purpose! It's being transformed into our very own Curious Creatures Bus—a dedicated space for Peculiar Reptiles and other fascinating animals.

Once completed and home to its new inhabitants, the bus will also serve as the base for Taxidermy sessions, led by Mel, who recently completed specialist training in the field.

**Summer Site Developments at OTF**

Over the summer, we've been busy planning and progressing a number of exciting developments across the OTF site.

We'll be expanding and improving our animal enclosures, including the creation of a new small animals area for our ferrets, guinea pigs, and rabbit—providing more space, comfort, and opportunities for student interaction and care.

In addition, the entrance road is being redesigned to include a passing area, helping to ease congestion and reduce the bottleneck that has occasionally occurred during busy times. Work has also been carried out in the orchards, with the raising of lower limbs and the removal of less productive trees to encourage healthier growth and improved access.

Most excitingly, the long-awaited Aquaponics Tunnels project is set to begin. This will bring yet another valuable learning resource to OTF, combining sustainable farming and science in a hands-on, engaging way for our students.

We're moving quickly, and we're confident that when you return in September, you'll notice some truly positive transformations across the site.

**Term Dates – Academic Year 2025/26**

To help everyone get those all-important dates locked into calendars nice and early, please find below the term dates for the upcoming 2025/26 academic year.

**Term Dates – Autumn 2025**

**Inset Days:**

- Monday 1st September 2025
- Tuesday 2nd September 2025

**Term 1:**

- Starts: Wednesday 3rd September 2025
- Ends: Friday 24th October 2025

**Half Term Break:**

- Monday 27th October – Friday 31st October 2025

**Term 2:**

- Starts: Monday 3rd November 2025
- Ends: Thursday 18th December 2025

**Inset Day:**

- Friday 19th December 2025

We recommend keeping a copy handy and checking in with us regularly for any updates or changes as the year progresses.

**Important Reminder for Parents, Carers and Guardians**

As we prepare for the new term, we kindly ask all Parents, Carers, and Guardians to notify us of any concerns, incidents, or updates regarding your young person before they return to OTF.

This information will help us prepare appropriately and ensure that a specific staff member is available to welcome and support them. Our aim is to make their transition back to OTF as smooth and positive as possible. Thank you for your continued support and cooperation.

**Final Housekeeping Note:**

We'd like to kindly remind everyone that no dogs—whether loose or on leads—are permitted on site. This is essential for the safety of all visitors, young people and staff, and the wellbeing of the animals here.

**Montage of the Summer Term**

