

Housing association tenants call in college's garden army

Tenants of a North Wales housing association have called on students at a top horticultural college to help them give their gardens a makeover.

Cartrefi Conwy have worked with the Northop Campus of Deeside College, the former Welsh College of Horticulture, to set up a competition with students to design a low-maintenance garden.

And Northop's Garden Army have come up with the goods with a selection of attractive and innovative designs according to Cartrefi Conwy chair Pam Lonie.

The winning design, chosen by members of the Tenants Forum and Pam Lonie, was by Holywell mature student Andy Mackie who is studying horticulture and he will receive £200 and oversee his gardens being created in a Cartrefi Conwy property.

Cartrefi Conwy took over the 3,800 properties of Conwy County Council in September 2008.

Phil Jones, the Community Involvement Manager, said: "Some tenants find it hard to cope with the garden, perhaps because they are elderly or perhaps they just don't know how to go about it.

"We wanted to help them by creating a garden design that was easier to maintain so we contacted the college who were very helpful and we gave them a brief on various kinds of gardens, the cost and the ease of installation and they have come back with the entries.

"Now we can create the winning garden design in one of our properties with the successful entrant overseeing the building of the new garden."

Nicolette Evans, Horticultural Lecturer at the college, said: "We agreed with Cartrefi Conwy that it would be a great initiative for the students to help the community and at the same time gain the experience of working in the real world.

"It brings in all the logistics of organising materials and meeting deadlines and fits beautifully with the core reason for students wanting to go into horticulture which is to create gardens.

“They had to go to the site, measure it, take soil samples and check the levels and it means they have to think outside the box. Many of them have never had to work for a real client before and it gives them discipline.

“They were outside in a place they’d never been before and in the pouring rain – they were shocked, concerned and excited by it.

“The range of students we’ve had goes from 19-year-olds to 48 including some for whom this is a change of career.

“It’s been great and there’s plenty of potential for the future.”

Cartrefi Conwy Chair Pam Lonie said: “The entries have been excellent and the winner really has come up with something outstanding with a lot of thought going into it so that he has even put the rotary washing line near the house rather than at the bottom of the garden.

“He has recognised it’s about choice for the tenant and has said ‘This is how the plot could look and then you ‘dress’ it.’

“To put the kind of time and effort into the entries that we have seen shows a really good sense of community by the students and we had a really hard job in picking a winner but we did feel that this entry had really taken on board the needs of all our tenants.

“This is a garden that can be used, enjoyed and maintained whether by a single older person or by a young family.

“The tenants have become involved and they’ve taken the lead and that’s what we promised would happen in Cartrefi Conwy – that the tenants would have a real voice.”

The competition was the brainchild of Cartrefi Conwy Chief Executive Andrew Bowden who said: “We wanted to involve Cartrefi Conwy with the community and with young people.

“We approached the college which takes students from all over North Wales and the lecturers told us that so much of their time was spent in lecture rooms and they wanted the students to have experience of what it’s like when they have left and are out in the real world.

“It was a matter of linking up with the college – we’ve got the gardens and they’ve got the skills to make them bloom.

“We definitely want to make this an annual event and the college have even said they can offer our tenants free six-week gardening classes to help them gain the skills they need to make the most of their gardens and perhaps start growing their own.”



Pictured: Nicolette Evans, Lecturer at Deeside College, looks over a garden design with Cartrefi Conwy tenants (Sylvia Duxbury, Jay Williams, Phil Batty and Brian Williamson).