

An update from The Grange – September 2012

It has been an amazing summer at The Grange and we wanted to send a short update on what we have been up to, and also to use the opportunity to thank all of you who have been involved in the project so far.

As you know, our vision is to create a centre of resilience for individuals and to be part of building greater resilience for society as a whole. Our focus is on working with survivors of torture and other violence, as well as to offer opportunities for individuals and groups to develop the skills we will need in a rapidly changing world.



This first summer has been about getting to know our site, understanding what we can and can't offer based on the resources and boundaries that present themselves, and hosting a number of groups to see what works in reality. It has been an amazing experience for us, and we hope for all of you who have visited the Grange over the year. We very much look forward to welcoming you back in future years and to continuing to maximize the potential of this beautiful space.

Developing a vision – In March we hosted a small group for a weekend during which we explored what the vision for this project might be. Over two wonderful days we enjoyed some great conversations, and excellent food, that have



helped contribute significantly to the development of our vision and plans. One of the key messages from the weekend was that The Grange must try to retain its focus on being a therapeutic retreat centre and not let this be diluted by hosting, for example, business conferences. Whilst this might sound obvious we know that economic realities have led a lot of similar projects to taking bookings from an increasingly wide set of clients which has caused challenges for their

core work. This visioning work is an ongoing process and many other visitors have contributed ideas which has been invaluable.

Developing the site – We have been hard at work all summer continuing to develop the 10 acres at The Grange with the help of many visitors and our animals. A couple of highlights have been the erection of a beautiful yurt in the water meadow providing a unique and magical setting for accommodation, meditation or group work; the clearing of one acre of land ready for planting a food forest this winter; transforming the house to make it an ideal venue for hosting up to 15 people for therapeutic retreats; and establishing a kitchen garden to provide some of the food that is eaten on site.

Hosting – This summer we have been blessed by visits from a number of groups who have brought incredible energy and ideas to The Grange. We really hope to welcome them all back in future years. They have included:

A five day retreat with 10 members and 3 staff from **Room to Heal** – an organisation based in London who work with survivors of torture. The week involved a lot of gardening, bonfires, storytelling, a trip to the coast, music and fantastic food from all corners of the world.

Similarly, 10 young people from the **Baobab Centre** visited in late summer accompanied by therapeutic staff, musicians and storytellers and we had a great week learning and exploring together. The week was made

particularly memorable as Sophie and I were expecting a baby who was eventually born just days after the young people left.

As well as these two retreats which have bookended our summer, we have hosted a permaculture teaching weekend with 16 people as part of the **West Norfolk Permaculture Design Course**; hosted 2 clients from **Freedom From Torture** on a one week holiday; and hosted the first meeting of **Transition Swaffham** which is a new initiative we are setting up with several other local people.

Local links – A key part of our philosophy of developing resilience is to build strong local networks and communities. We have been overwhelmed by the support our project has received from local individuals and organisations and look forward to exploring how we can build from this. In particular we have made links with the EcoTech centre in Swaffham, Ashill fruit farm which is just two miles away from The Grange and West Lexham – a fantastic education centre nearby. We have also been very involved in local transition initiatives and in helping to develop the local permaculture network.



Where next – To some extent this is very much unknown. We will continue to develop The Grange in response to the energy that is generated around it – rather than trying to rely purely on our own vision which we believe will have far less chance of being sustainable. This ‘open door’ philosophy is working well for us so far and some of the people who have come through the door have helped more than they might imagine. However, as with any project such as ours there are economic realities that mean that some planning must take place. We will spend some time this winter evaluating our first year and identifying new organisations who might wish to work with us in the future. We will also start to look at putting in funding applications for future retreats and for the further development of our site. There are a lot of possibilities for teaching at the site and we hope to build on the first permaculture weekend that took place here this year by organizing more courses next year.

Overall we are massively grateful for a summer during which we have got married, had our first child, realized the early parts of our dream project and met some incredible people. We have a lot to think about but with your support we really do believe we can make this project work. As ever, if you want to get in touch any time do write to us at thegrangenorfolk@gmail.com.

With much love and in peace,

Ben, Sophie and Orianna

A few quotes from people who have stayed here over the summer

‘Thank you very much and to let you know I don’t have any adjective to express my joy at staying here’

‘I would like to say a big thank you for welcoming us and making us feel part of the family’

‘I have had a wonderful time at The Grange’

‘Everything in one word – Amazing! If I was given a chance to come back I would’

‘I thoroughly enjoyed my stay at The Grange. It is a beautiful place which reminds me of home’

‘The Grange is a beautiful and peaceful place – very homely and comfortable’

‘Thank you for reinforcing in me that there is good in this world’