

Edinburgh Reporter Chats – Mark Vrionides



Mark Vrionides is the Community Gardening Development Officer at the [Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust](#). Having launched the ‘Growing Communities for Health Grants Scheme’ at the start of February, which aims to award up to £750 for community gardening projects, he is now considering and vetting the applications. We caught up with him to find out more about him.

Who are you?

I’m Mark Vrionides, born near London, started working in the care sector and getting involved in environmental activism in Norwich and Brighton, and arrived in Edinburgh five years ago. From the City Centre to Dalkeith Road to the Meadows to Bruntsfield Place to Morningside – I’ve been steadily moving south since arriving in the city (but still planning to live in Leith one day!).

Now living in the only house on my street without a garden (leading to extreme window box activities). Worked for the [Rock Trust](#) just off Broughton Street for three of those years, supporting young homeless people to find secure housing and new opportunities. Good work and lovely folk, am still keeping in touch by doing the odd shift at their drop in or on their volunteering programme, Compass Step Up.

Can you describe what the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust is in one sentence?

A regional charity working to ensure people have access to quality greenspace, and finding many ways to help them enjoy it.

What are the daily duties of a Community Gardening Development Officer?

As it's a [brand new post](#) I've been busy scratching my head and figuring that out since I started in January! There is a primary focus on supporting people affected by health inequalities to access and enjoy the benefits of community gardening. I split my time between working with the gardens to help reach out to new groups, promoting community gardening amongst health agencies, and helping to set up new gardens. I've noticed that there's also quite a need for skilled horticultural volunteers at a number of gardens so part of my work has been to promote community gardening within this group and put them in touch with the appropriate gardens.

Most recently, I've been putting together plans for a new series of monthly events to invite people from different cultures into different gardens to get a 'taster' of what community gardening can be like – as well as a chance to taste (and cook!) all the new crops coming up over the summer. These days will also be something of a cultural exchange to give the participants and the gardeners a chance to learn from each other and experience each others' way of growing, eating, and being outdoors.

What is the one best thing and one not-so-good thing about your job?

The best thing has to be getting out into the gardens, seeing all the very different things going on (**everyone** has their own way of growing, designing, composting, getting together) and meeting all the lovely folk.

Not-so-good is really hard to think of!

When did you first become interested in the great outdoors?

It was all pretty tame coastline and woodlands that got me first – North Norfolk, Sussex Downs – just the odd walk with

friends, anything that wasn't the suburbs where I grew up. But then when I arrived in Scotland something changed. The outdoors wasn't just a place for a walk anymore, now it's where the important stuff happens, it's the whole point.

Was it always your hope to be in a job like the one you are in now?

I've wanted to work outdoors for a while now. This job is a good balance between that and building on my experiences of youth work and care work – supporting people to get more out of life really, and learning how to do the same along the way.

What does the rest of 2012 have in store for you?

Fingers crossed... Making this job my own, running some successful events engaging different communities, helping to set up a successful community garden from scratch, start growing some trees from seed.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

Outdoors. Mostly woodworking.

You can contact Mark at the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust at mark@elgt.org.uk.