

INFORM

Recently revealed as an ambassador for the horticultural charities Thrive and Groundwork, Mark Lane spoke to Pro Landscaper about why he took on the roles

Mark Lane has been announced as an ambassador for the disability charity Thrive, and for the environmental community charity Groundwork. Mark became involved with both organisations last year and, having explored how they positively help people through horticulture, was keen to showcase the substantial work they carry out.

Through gardening, Thrive aims to help those with disabilities to improve their health and communication skills. As someone who used horticulture to bring about positive change in his own life, Mark feels a personal attachment to Thrive. "Following a car accident 17 years ago, I spent a long period at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Stanmore," Mark tells us. "There was a wonderful horticultural therapist there, who told me that I had to go forward, and to champion being in a wheelchair.

"I'd always had an interest in gardening, and read about garden designers, their approaches and the ethos behind their work. So over a four-year rehabilitation period, I completed an open learning course in garden design. Ten years ago, Mark Lane Designs began."

“A WONDERFUL HORTICULTURAL THERAPIST TOLD ME I HAD TO GO FORWARD, AND TO CHAMPION BEING IN A WHEELCHAIR”



TWO NEW ROLES FOR MARK LANE



After meeting the charity's business development manager, Sandy Fitzgerald, in September last year, Mark went on to visit its Trunkwell Garden Project in Reading. He realised both he and Thrive shared the same belief in changing the lives of people with disabilities through gardening and horticulture.

"The visit was a real eye-opener. I was shown around the ward garden, where people had their own plots that they could grow whatever they wanted in. The most beautiful part was seeing them interacting, as beforehand they had been quite introverted. Through Thrive, they really came out of their shells. It was a really touching moment, and I thought to myself then that I would love to be an ambassador for the charity."

Groundwork also uses horticulture to improve lives, focusing on helping communities and assisting young people into further education and employment. It creates green jobs and carries out projects to improve local areas, as well as looking for ways to reduce water usage, landfill waste and energy bills.

Mark researched the charity after designing a garden for the Kent charity Pilgrims Hospices, funded by Groundwork's partnership with Tesco. He reached out to Sarah Reece-Mills, director of partnerships and programmes at Groundwork, who invited him to visit its Birmingham head office. "I thought it was incredible. Last year alone, Groundwork raised £62m, and either developed or maintained 19.3 million m² of land. They also helped around 3,000 young people get into further education or employment. There's the environmental aspect, but there's also the



community aspect, which brings people together and makes them aware of their capabilities."

Being an ambassador for both Thrive and Groundwork will entail promoting the charities' work and the difference it makes, raising their profiles through the media, and helping with fundraising events where possible, as well as writing articles for both newsletters. "It's about promoting the charities, what they do each year, how much they raise, how many spaces they improve, and how many individuals they help. Both charities really change lives, and this is what makes me so passionate about them."