



LIFE BEYOND THE MILITARY –  
OUTDOORS



Jane Taylor

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Jane writes a monthly journal about the Horticultural Therapy service at Stanford Hall and the patients who receive it as part of their rehab. You can follow it [here](#).

## Friends of HighGround: PROFILE

Jane is a pivotal part of our Horticultural Therapy operation at DMRC Stanford Hall as we continue Carol's legacy from Headley Court. Read her Profile below.

### Tell us a bit about yourself.

I was born and raised in Derby and I've been living in Nottingham for the last fifteen years. I qualified as an Occupational Therapist in 1992. I come from a family of gardeners, both my parents are keen gardeners and my grandad on my dad's side was the gardener at Quorn Grange. He and my grandmother, who was the housekeeper there, lived onsite and we used to visit them. When he retired, they moved to Loughborough which I think he found hard as there was just a tiny bit of garden but he and I would work in it and he'd let me do little bits and pieces. I have very fond memories of that time.

### You trained as an Occupational Therapist – how did you make the transition into Horticultural Therapy?

It happened organically. Over the course of a few years I'd repeatedly been in the situation where my job as an Occupational Therapist was under threat. I was made redundant from one post and then, in another post, my job was at risk for two years running. What, once had been a stable job was suddenly less so. I was getting frustrated and started looking around for something I could do alongside my OT work. I had no real idea of what it might be – I was just literally pushing doors. I had a small garden and an allotment and an opportunity to do a City and Guilds certificate came up locally. I started taking evening classes, did a bit of volunteering in the horticultural sector and then I found out about the WRAG Scheme (Work and Retrain As a Gardener Scheme) run by the Women's Farm and Garden Association which allows people to work for two days a week alongside their actual jobs. I worked four days a week so it looked out of the question but I just asked on the off-chance that they would let me work one day a week for a longer period and they found me a position! They found me a placement at Norwell Nurseries, run by Dr Andrew Ward who is so knowledgeable; it was just brilliant, I loved it there. It was a really lovely place to work, really nice, people. I learned a lot but it also gave me the confidence to reduce my OT hours further and set up a small gardening business of my own. Then last year I decided to consolidate everything I'd learned by taking an RHS Level 2 course.

### How did you come to be involved with HighGround?

I'd not heard of HighGround or ever worked with the military. I'd only ever worked in the NHS and more recently in social-enterprise so the military angle wasn't something I knew a lot about. Then on a very snowy morning last winter I was tidying the house and putting away my magazines and OT journals. For some reason I flicked through one of them and there it was; Anna's advertisement for a Horticultural Therapist. I rang her to find out more about the job, did some research about the charity and horticultural therapy and the more I found out the more I thought "Yeah this is something I might like." It was reasonably local to me so that was good but also it was the idea of combining the two areas of my life that appealed to me.

### How have you found working with the military?

It's been a learning curve. To begin with, it was like moving into a different world and it felt really strange. Armed guards at the entrance and people in military uniform – it took a while to adjust to that. Funnily enough it was the uniforms that really threw me. I hadn't really expected that the clinicians would be in the military themselves. The first time I walked into Stanford Hall it was just a sea of faces. A lot of staff were in military uniform so I couldn't work out who did what and it all seemed very strange but it's becoming more familiar now – and I've learned a whole new set of acronyms!

### What are your goals for the short, medium and long terms?

The short term has been and gone. We've had to delay clinical delivery while we get our infrastructure up and running. We'd been hoping to start delivering service in November but Andy and I realised in December that it was going to be a significant length of time before we were able to get the greenhouse up and running and we were going to need to be creative about what activities we could do with the facilities we had. In order to deliver some sort of service. A local farmer kindly allowed us to use his orchard for fruit tree pruning which was great and at Christmas we made wreaths and started looking at plant research. It feels as if we've cleared the first hurdle and are moving into the mid-term. We've worked really hard to complete all the planning and administration which is needed to take us forward and closer to delivering the 25 sessions a week which is our agreed target.

### What are you most looking forward to?

I'm really looking forward to the greenhouse and raised beds being finished so that we can offer our patients lots of different activities without being limited by what isn't ready. We seem closer to that point now that we are sowing seeds and seeing the first shoots appearing. We are really creating a new garden from scratch and both Andy and I and the patients are part of it.

### What has the response of the patients been?

Some of our patients have come to us having started at Headley Court and so they can see for themselves how enormous the task is. At Headley Court they were in a walled garden but here we are absolutely beginning again. The patients seem to want to get involved in what we are building.

### What is your response to patients who aren't that keen on gardening or don't see the point of this kind of therapy?

Just have an open mind and give it a try. Even if it's not something you ever thought you would have done before; even if it's not something that you already have any interest in, just have a go and see where it takes you. We obviously try to tie what we are doing here in with their rehab goals and to explain how each activity can help but sometimes rational and logical explanations are not the best way of helping people see what is beneficial. Quite often the therapeutic effects make themselves felt because people are just engaging with nature and working with it.

### What do you do to de-stress?

Having a job where I can be outside is wonderful. It's very different to working in the NHS. There are times when I feel a bit overwhelmed but for me, being outside is a really good way of switching off. I find just being outdoors, whether it be on my allotment, the garden or going for a walk is a good way of calming down, reconnecting and putting things into perspective.

### If you look back to being 21 with your future ahead of you, what advice would you give yourself?

I think I would say worry less. Don't feel that you've got to have everything planned out already because you just never know what's going to happen. If you go with your instinct, with what you like and what interests you, you can't go wrong because opportunities will arise. I think looking back now, that was something, I didn't really understand then. I chose a vocational career because I thought there was security in it and then ironically, it all changed. But it led to something different so it's all worked out in the end.

For more information about HighGround's services please contact Anna Baker Cresswell  
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