

News from Jersey Employment Trust

'Acorn is such a unique place – I feel like I have found my people'

All the latest news from Jersey Employment Trust, by **Caroline Spencer**

'Acorn boosts your soul'

EVERY time you buy a plant from Acorn's nursery, you are supporting work and training for Islanders who have a disability or long-term health condition. In the spring the nursery takes on more people to help with the busy period leading up to bedding season.

Sylvie Simpson is one of the people who has been working at Acorn for the busy bedding season at the plant nursery. It's the busiest time of year for the nursery, when they offer paid roles for five clients, who all have a disability or long-term health condition, to help prepare all the plants for spring.

Sylvie has been coming to Acorn for a couple of years now. She used to work as a carer, primarily for dementia patients, and she spent four years in Australia working in a retinal clinic in Macquarie Street, "the Harley Street of Sydney".

Back in Jersey, she continued to work as a medical secretary. But then, after having her first child, Sylvie's back issues started. After a second child and working from home as a baker, which involved a lot of time on her feet, her back problems worsened, to the point where she had to stop working.

"The high cost of living just added to my depression," she said. "Every week, just not getting by."

When Sylvie came to Acorn, she started on the allotment on a Thursday, which she loved. "My dad was a gardener and he had taught me from a young age. Then I did a voluntary placement in the plant nursery last year and I was thrilled when I was offered a paid position for the bedding season this year.

"The routine of getting up and coming to Acorn really helps mentally. I had been fearful of going back to work. I had no understanding of what Acorn did. It is such a unique place, but I feel like I have found my people.

"They are so kind and caring. I feel so well supported. It has built up my confi-



dence again and I sleep so much better. "The extra money each week really helps, too. And my family are thrilled to see me so much happier. I have never felt so

positive in ten years. It's good for anyone to know that support is there and how much it can benefit you. When you're not working, it is easy to isolate yourself, almost

to protect yourself. Coming to Acorn has done me the world of good. It boosts your soul and confidence. It has been transforming for me."

■ Sylvie Simpson: 'My family are thrilled to see me so much happier. When you're not working, it is easy to isolate yourself. Coming to Acorn has done me the world of good. It has been transforming for me'

Go nuts for Acorn

It's time to go nuts for Acorn again as the Squirrel Scurry brings fun and community spirit to the St Helier Marina.

This year's Squirrel Scurry, sponsored by TMF, is in aid of Acorn Enterprises and the Lowes Legacy Fund and is being held on Saturday 25 April at Jardins de la Mer.

Adults and children are invited to dress up as squirrels to jog around a one-mile route. Facepainting will be available.

Squirrels should arrive from 10.45 am in time for the 11.15 scurry. Spectators are, of course, welcome.

Les Quennevais Steel Band will be on site to help everyone get in the mood, and the entertainment runs as follows: 12pm – Tony & Anita (Retro Fusion) 1pm – Dr Adam Perchard 2pm – The Beantles

Times are approximate and music will be played while bands change over.

Acorn fundraising lead Georgia Hodgson said: "The first Squirrel Run was held last year in memory of Dean Lowe, to mark what would have been his 50th birthday. This year we have collaborated with the Lowes Legacy Fund and made it more of a family event, as we remember Dean's son Charlie, too.

"We hope that as many people as possible will support the event. You can come down for the free entertainment even if you are not a squirrel, but we would welcome donations, which can be given to any squirrel who is carrying an official bucket."

■ Sign up for the Squirrel Scurry here: tinyurl.com/SquirrelRun2026

Bike safety checks

Acorn's qualified bike mechanics will be giving free bicycle safety checks and doing minor repairs at the Cycle Sunday event on Sunday 26 April.

The event is organised by the Government of Jersey to encourage Islanders to discover the joy of cycling. There will be plenty going on, including try-a-bike, with adapted cycles and ebikes, and learn-to-ride sessions with Jersey Sport.

If you have a good quality bike that you would like to donate to Acorn, this can be dropped off at our stand.

■ Cycle Sunday is on from 11am-4pm at Les Quennevais Cycle Track near the playground

Meet the trustee

Three new people have joined the JET Board of Trustees, Robyn Le Gallais, Norson Harris and Neville Benbow. Today we feature Robyn Le Gallais.

Who are you?

"I am a committed advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion, with my entire professional career rooted in human resources. Over the years, I've seen DEI delivered both effectively and ineffectively in practice, which has given me a grounded and realistic perspective. As a person with a disability, I also bring lived experience. I understand first-hand the difference it makes when organisations get inclusion right, and the impact when they do not.

"I am a multi-jurisdictional HR Manager, supporting approximately 175 colleagues across several locations. One of the things I value most about HR is its variety. No two days are ever the same. I'm particularly passionate about the fast-paced environment of food retail and enjoy the operational and people challenges it brings."

Why did you want to be a JET trustee?

"JET is deeply personal to me. As both a disabled individual and someone with disabled family members, I understand how challenging it can be to find workplaces where we are genuinely included and valued. I strongly believe the work JET delivers is essential, and I am proud to contribute to that mission at trustee level. I bring practical HR expertise, multi-sector experience, and a strong grounding in inclusive employment practice, along with a strategic and people-centred perspective."

What was your very first job?

"My first job was in the gift shop at the Jersey War Tunnels. When I started, I was quite nervous about interacting with customers, but working in such a busy visitor environment quickly built my confidence. It taught me early lessons in communication, problem-solving, and handling challenging situations calmly, skills that later proved invaluable in my HR career. I worked there for two years before going travelling. I recommend that everyone does a stint in a retail or hospitality environment."

Best piece of advice?

"One principle that has stayed with me comes from The Living Leader by Penny Ferguson: 'Leadership is primarily about developing individuals to be the best that they are capable of being'. I strongly believe in this personal responsibility model of leadership. Good leadership is fundamentally about enabling others to grow, succeed, and contribute in ways that align with their strengths."



Pollinators at the ready

Acorn's greenhouse has been redesigned over the winter, creating a larger display area to showcase its plants.

This year there will be a huge increase in the range of herbaceous perennials, particularly plants that pollinators love to gorge on, including Gaura, Scabiosa, Geum, Digitalis and Echinacea.

There will also be a more extensive range of evergreen and deciduous shrubs, such as hydrangea, leptospermum, grevilleia, hebe, buddleja and caryopteris, as well as an increase in the range and the quantities of exotic plants and succulents.

There will also be more herbs, vegetables and strawberries, because last year they were sold out by the middle of May, which resulted in lots of disappointed customers.

A wider range of specimen plants will be available during July and August, for creating an instant impact for any gaps that need filling.

The nursery will also stock "the usual suspects", including upright, trailing and specimen begonias, geraniums and petunias, marigolds, osteospermum, cosmos and lobelia.

Deputy manager Matt Caboz said: "We had an outstanding season last year and sold out of every group of plants. Customer feedback was very positive and the plants

were of a very high standard. As always, all the team worked very hard to make this happen.

"We have recruited five clients who have a disability or long-term health condition for help during the bedding season, providing them with work skills and confidence, with the aim being that they can go onto open employment.

"Without the help of the clients there is absolutely no way we would be able to provide the quality plants that are lovingly produced at Acorn."

■ Look out for the borders around the Acorn site for inspiration – all of the plants on display can be purchased from the Nursery, which is open from 10am to 3.30pm, Monday to Saturday

■ Acorn nursery deputy manager Matt Caboz: "We have recruited five clients who have a disability or long-term health condition for help during the bedding season, providing them with work skills and confidence"



The Jersey Employment Trust supports the stance taken by the Association of Jersey Charities who have set out a clear message to candidates in this year's Island-wide elections.

The AJC are inviting candidates to support a pledge "to recognise the vital role charities play in Jersey and commit to strengthening partnership between Government and the charitable sector."

In an event at the Royal Jersey Showground, attended by many of the Island's charities, sitting politicians and election hopefuls heard from AJC chief executive Marcus Liddiard (pictured) that they wanted candidates to support the third sector in the following ways:

- Recognise that charities are strategic partners in policymaking and strategic delivery;
- Provide stable, multi-year funding for essential services;
- Consult charities early in policies affecting the communities they serve;
- Ensure fair commissioning and procurement processes;
- Invest in the long-term strength and sustainability of Jersey's charitable sector.

JET's message reinforces this: We ask candidates to champion diversity and inclusion across government, public services

and the community; to stand up for the most vulnerable in our society, ensuring that policy decisions reflect compassion, fairness and dignity for all residents; and to help build a kinder, more inclusive Jer-

sey, where everyone feels valued, respected and supported, regardless of background, identity or circumstance.

To read more about issues that we face, please go to tinyurl.com/JETelection

