

Trevor Stringer Mr Big Skill



Trevor Stringer is the founder of The Big Skill. We spoke to him from his mastermind lair in the west country.

When did you start The Big Skill and why?

The Big Skill was set up to preserve rural traditions, crafts and to support practitioners in sharing their skills for the benefit, wellbeing of all sections of the community.

From the time I ran Rural Warwickshire Agency in the mid 80s with 500 formerly long term unemployed adults employed 40 project, as part of the Community Programme, I have believed that procedures should be in place to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved in community activities, whether that be in a training, learning, volunteering, or in a paid capacity. Everyone has the ability to contribute, the only difference is the support that different people need. We need to get away from the idea of caring to that of sharing.

Some say that learning a skill is the new gardening. What are the benefits?

Studies have found that the mental health benefits of gardening are extensive. Not only can regular gardening reduce mental health problems like depression and anxiety, but it can also reduce stress and combat high blood pressure, as well as improving overall physical fitness.

Workshop participants are predominantly female. Why do you think men find it hard to get involved?

Many men my age, a good deal younger were brought up not to share our emotions. I was brought up to "Don't Snitch, Don't Cry, Don't use sickness as an excuse". Also at school many creative activities were portrayed as too girly. Although sewing, embroidery was used to help with mental health issues in the first world war, many of the physical ailments, anxiety for soldiers in both world wars, many of the regimental badges were made by men, the educational system in the 50s & 60s tended to decide what crafts boys should do, what was more 'suitable' for girls. Covid may have had a devastating effect on so many things, but for possibly to first time many men seemed willingly to discuss their mental health issues.

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