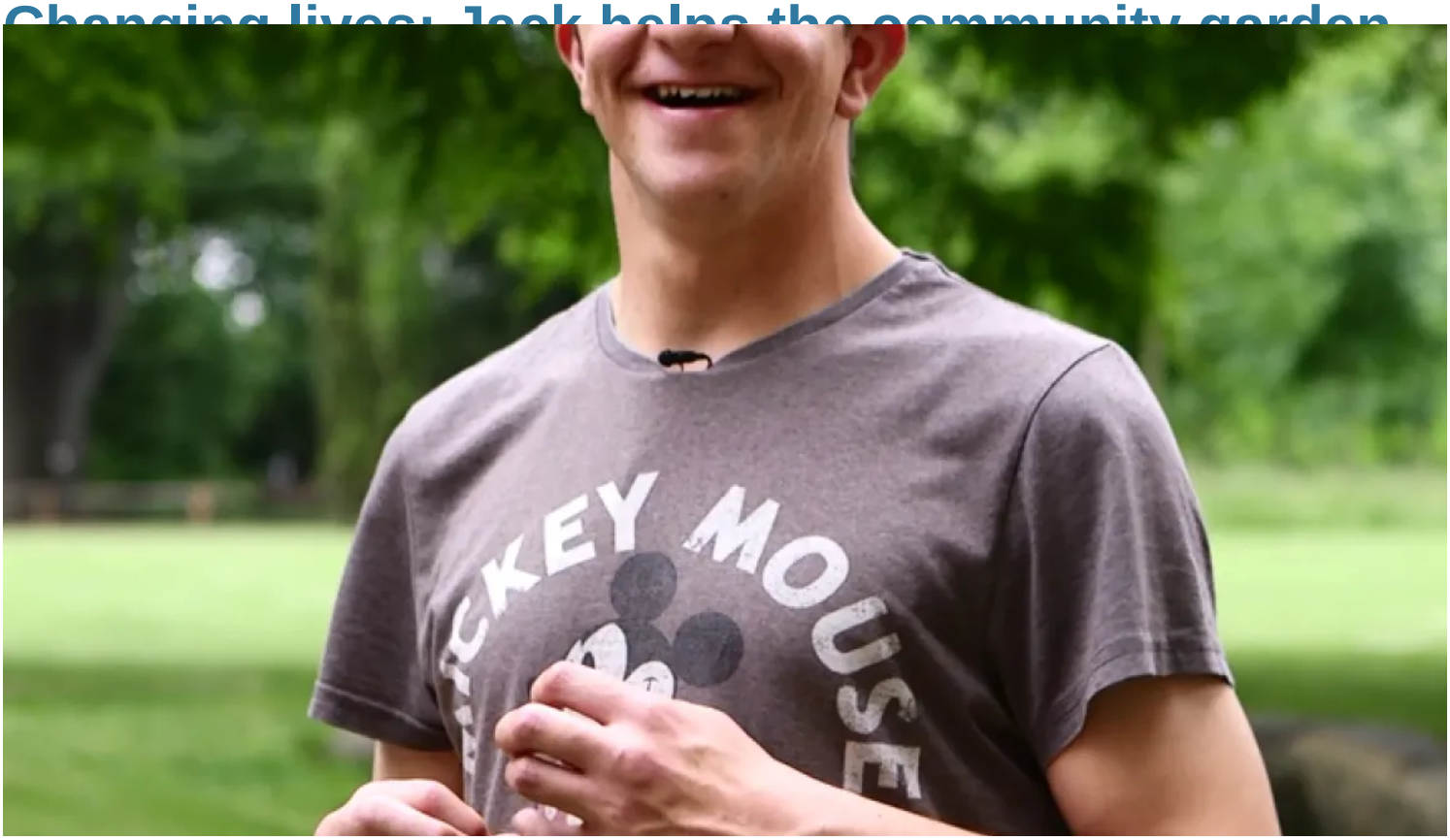
Changing lives: Jack helps the community garden



Jack Kafka first visited Strawberry Hill with his carer in 2013 in response to an appeal for volunteers to work with the HLF-supported Growing Together project.

The visit led to his involvement in the work to create a sustainable community garden in the grounds of the fairytale 18th-century Gothic villa in Twickenham, west London.

Jack, 26, who has learning difficulties, is one of a group of up to ten volunteers of mixed ages, abilities and backgrounds that work in the garden every Tuesday.

“We see this project making a positive difference to Jack and the others involved in a supportive environment in a beautiful location in which to work,” says Sally Stratton, Strawberry Hill House’s Learning Manager.

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"Jack really looks forward to coming here, he has a really sunny personality and cheers everyone up,” says Sally.

This is not his first involvement in gardening. He also volunteers to look after the Isabella Plantation in Richmond Park on a Thursday.

Jack was also enrolled on a Prince's Trust course designed for people who had not completed their education. The course required three-weeks of work experience and this was completed at Strawberry Hill. Previously the Trust was unaware of the work experience being offered by Strawberry Hill so Jack's involvement has helped put the villa on the map.

Jack is one of some 200 volunteers that help in a variety of roles at Strawberry Hill. As with all the volunteers Jack's involvement is a two-way thing. Cathy Kafka, Jack's mum says: "It's somewhere that Jack feels valued and it is also giving back to the community. He treats everyone the same but is also very sensitive to people feeling sad and tries to cheer them up."

Strawberry Hill nominated Jack for the 2014 London Volunteers in Museum Awards in the young volunteers category and he was highly commended.

"What is important," says Kathy, "is that here he is part of a community. It is somewhere that he has made a life. He is meeting different people." He is also learning about different plants and vegetables.

The community garden, thanks to HLF support, runs throughout the year so offers an ongoing volunteering opportunity on a regular basis. Its location, at the rear of the House, close to the Strawberry Hill café means that when the site is open to the public the gardeners' work can be enjoyed by the visitors.

The garden produces a range of crops, including herbs that are used in the café, and vegetables. The produce is also displayed, and sold, at the annual Twickenham Garden Festival.

Jack and his fellow gardeners were also recognised by 'It's Your Neighbourhood', London in Bloom's major community participation programme run on behalf of the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom Campaign. In both 2014 and 2015 the Strawberry Hill community garden has been judged to be in the Level 5 'outstanding' category of the programme.

"Without National Lottery players this thing would never happen," says Jack's carer Iza Bombala, "and we're all so pleased and grateful for giving us the whole opportunity."

The work being undertaken on the grounds of Strawberry Hill would doubtless have pleased the building's original owner and designer Horace Walpole. He also created the Gothic mansion's gardens and was the author of a seminal essay 'On Modern Gardening' published in 1780 and said to be the most influential essay written on English garden history over a period of two centuries.