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ACCESSIBLE GARDENING BLOG ANNOUNCED ON SSIT WEBSITE

Follow the progress of SSIT Trustee Annie Maw's accessible garden in Somerset

As fundraising continues for a rehabilitation garden at the Duke of Cornwall Spinal Treatment in Salisbury, the Southern Spinal Injuries Trust (SSIT) has announced the launch of an accessible gardening blog on its website – www.ssit.org.uk – which follows the progress of a paralysed gardener and her edible plot.

Written by SSIT Trustee Annie Maw, the blog follows the development of Annie's own accessible garden at her home in Somerset. A patient at the Salisbury Spinal Unit eight years ago, Annie broke her back in a riding accident and was discharged as a permanent wheelchair occupant, paralysed from the upper chest down. Before her injury, gardening was one of Annie's greatest pleasures, and she was determined to continue if at all possible. The launch of the Jubilee Garden Appeal, which aims to fund a specially designed rehabilitation garden at the Spinal Unit in Salisbury, inspired Annie to create her very own accessible garden.

Talking about the Jubilee Garden Appeal, Annie said: "I know that the younger patients who I became so close to during my nine months in the Spinal Unit would have enjoyed having their own garden as an outdoor refuge. Many would have found a new hobby which they could continue after their discharge from hospital if such a facility had been available to them."

She continued: "To have an accessible outside space at the Spinal Unit will make such a difference to patients' lives and to be able to use gardening as part of the rehab process is a wonderful development."

Annie's own accessible garden, named The Poppy Garden after the birth of her first grandchild, includes v-shaped raised beds for easy access with thin gravel paths in between – thin gravel being the key to easy wheeling! Annie's blog details the development of her fruit and vegetable garden and highlights areas that are challenging for someone with a spinal cord injury. Written with humour and insight, the blog tells of the problems of watering the garden from a wheelchair ("without getting soaked"), dealing with balance and using long-handled garden tools. Above all, it highlights the benefits of gardening for all.

To read Annie's gardening blog, please visit www.ssit.org.uk and follow the links to the Jubilee Garden Appeal.

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Editor's Notes:

About the Southern Spinal Injuries Trust (www.ssit.org.uk)

THE Southern Spinal Injuries Trust (SSIT) has a very simple goal – to positively impact on the health and quality of life of patients with spinal cord injuries, both in the Duke of Cornwall Spinal Treatment Centre (DoCSTC) at Salisbury District Hospital and across the entire South and South West of England. As such it's the main charity fundraising for the Spinal Centre and has become a lifeline to both patients and staff.

Since its formation in September 2006, SSIT has provided £120,000 worth of equipment for the DoCSTC and £106,000 in grants for individuals to fund specialised equipment. The list of items funded for the Centre includes powered wheelchairs, physiotherapy equipment and equipment for diagnosis and treatment, while grants for individuals cover specialist mattresses and adjustable beds, suitable wheelchairs and exercise equipment.

SSIT's major appeal for 2010 is to fund a rehabilitation garden at the DoCSTC. Suitably adapted for wheelchair access, the Jubilee Garden will encourage rehabilitation and wellbeing through gardening as well as providing an important social area outside the hospital environment for patients and their families.