

Orangeville Horticultural Society partners with Branching Out to teach neurodivergent adults how to grow microgreens indoors

By Sam Odrowski

A not-for-profit organization and a social enterprise are teaming up to teach people with disabilities how to grow food from the comfort of their homes.

The Orangeville Horticultural Society is partnering with Branching Out Support Services, which provides programming to adults who are neurodiverse, to set up an indoor grow table with microgreens. The grow table will be set up in the window sill of Branching Out, located at 5 First St., and the program participants will learn how to look after the microgreens.

Microgreens are seedlings of edible vegetables and herbs for visual, texture and flavour enhancement.

They are typically sold for around \$25 to \$50 per pound, so the program helps to teach gardening and how to make money.

"Our participants will be learning how to do a microgreen process from start to finish to be able to harvest food, sell microgreens, and make money, as an interdependent living skill," explained Kimberly Van Ryn, founder of Branching Out Support Services.

The microgreens project is seen as a building block on the work that Branching Out's participants were already involved in, said Sara Clarke, Executive Director of the organization.

"Participants have been tending to the [Orangeville] Food Bank garden for the last three years, so we have some base skills that we now have the opportunity to kind of elevate and build up to bring into the community in another way."

Jamie Richards from Am Braigh Farms is a horticultural teacher who will be guiding the program, thanks to a \$2,000 grant that the Orangeville Horticultural Society received through the Rotary Club of Orangeville Highlands' annual Community Choice Grants program.

Vivan Petho, secretary and archivist of the Orangeville Horticultural Society, told the Citizen the society's slogan is "Gardens Are For Sharing," and the partnership with BOSS is a great example of how the group aims to share with the community.

Len Meyer, the Community Choice Grants chair at the rotary club, said they selected the horticultural society because it's a charity that's sometimes overlooked for donations. It also enhances sustainability within Orangeville.

The four other organizations that received \$2,000 grants through the rotary club's Community Choice Grants program were Celebrate Your Awesome, Headwaters Health Care Foundation, Dufferin Parent Support Network and the Dufferin Arts Council.

The annual grant program lets the public select three charities to each receive \$2,000 by public vote.

Two charities that are less publicly known or less likely to receive funding are then hand-picked by the Rotary Club of Orangeville Highlands members, and the recipients are announced in April each year.