



Benefits of community growing: Health and wellbeing

Over the last few years there has been a growing body of evidence supporting the benefits of community growing for physical and mental wellbeing.

Horticultural and other tasks involved in community gardening (such as regular exercise) alongside healthier eating patterns (usually the result of eating fresh produce grown in the garden) are often cited in such research.

The Growing Well project was set up by FCFCG in 2014 to provide support, record and share good practice in this field, and to help other groups who want to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits of their work.

The following case studies investigate how groups work to increase health and wellbeing in their neighbourhoods through innovative projects, workshops and activities and how local people benefit as a result.

Woodlands Community Garden, Glasgow

Based on a former derelict urban site, Woodlands Community Garden, has been transformed over the past six years into a thriving community garden and 'outdoor community centre'. The garden is run by the Woodlands Community Development Trust and used to promote outdoor education. It is also a centre for community arts activities.



Around 45 households currently grow their own food in the garden and there are also twice weekly drop-in volunteer communal gardening sessions.

Since 2013 the Trust has placed a stronger emphasis on promoting health and wellbeing, more than trebling the number of volunteers taking part in sessions. Total volunteer numbers rose from 36 in 2013 to 114 in 2015. It has also increased the percentage of minority ethnic volunteers from 8% to 20%.

This expansion has been achieved, in part, by introducing more structured volunteer training opportunities, with new courses for both the garden and community café volunteers.

The Trust's 'Growing A Community Garden' training has a strong focus on further developing the community as a therapeutic space and in increasing volunteers' confidence to take on more responsibilities in managing the garden.

Partnership working has also been key to the project's expansion, as it has formed links with organisations such as Flourish House (mental health), Turning Point (long term addictions) and Greater Maryhill Foodbank (food poverty). Activities have included outdoor classes in tai-chi and yoga, healthy eating on a budget, cookery classes and gardening activities.

For example, during 2014/15 the Trust conducted 26 outdoor garden workouts for members of Garscube House, a residential support unit run by Turning Point in Maryhill for people with long term alcohol addiction issues.

Most sessions focused on gardening themed activities, while seven sessions were specifically health related. Gardening activities included planting, composting and landscaping and health activities included tai-chi, dance, yoga and hula-hooping.

In total there were 166 participants in gardening related activities and 56 participants in health activities. The project helped consolidate the Trust's relationship with Turning Point, diversify the pool of volunteers and enabled the Trust to run more activities across the winter and autumn months.

Partnerships have also been integral to increasing the projects reach among a more diverse group of volunteers. Since 2013 it has developed new working partnerships with three local minority ethnic organisations – Maryhill Integration Network, West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (WSREC) and Dar-Al-Falaah Arabic Association.

Activities with these groups include delivering 18 gardening workshops for WRSEC attended by 8 –10 people per week, running bio-diversity activities

Voices from Woodlands

"I have really benefited from volunteering at Woodlands.

"I was referred to the garden through the 'Inspire' programme via Glasgow Royal Infirmary Intensive Care Unit as part of my rehabilitation having been seriously injured in the Clutha Pub Helicopter accident.

"I have been unable to return to work due to physical health issues since the accident but the garden has allowed me to slowly build up my physical and mental well-being.

"It has restored my confidence and promoted my independence and I feel less isolated and ultimately healthier."

(Anonymous)

"My brother, Colin Platt, has been volunteering at Woodlands Community Garden over the last 15 months.

"Colin...has autism, learning and speech difficulties. Due to Colin's speech difficulty he has never really engaged fully in conversation and has always answered questions with one or two words. Since his time at the garden this has radically changed. Colin always returns excited and with a full story to tell of his work there.

"This has had a knock on effect with Colin communicating far more freely and openly about other aspects of his life. I have been staggered by this change in Colin.

"The support and respect of the workers has had a huge impact for him. His self-confidence and self-esteem has grown hugely as a direct result of Woodlands Community Garden, the support of the workers and the work itself. I would say, without exaggeration, that attending the garden has been transformative to Colin and his life. Given the opportunity Colin would attend the garden every day."

(Stuart Platt, brother of community garden volunteer)



for more than 250 Dar-Al-Falaah students and hosted a trip to an organic farm in Spring 2015 as part of British Science Week. It has also provided cookery demonstrations for Maryhill Integration Network attended by over 120 people and garden workshops attended by more than 50 people.

Since January 2014, Woodlands Community Development Trust has pioneered a community food initiative that offers an alternative model of emergency food provision to most food banks centring around a shared meal rather than food parcels. The food served is freshly cooked, healthy and sourced locally, including some ingredients grown directly at Woodlands Community Garden. The meals are cooked by trained volunteers drawn from a wide range of backgrounds who also provide "front of house" support to individuals affected.

The garden has also delivered 35 cookery demonstrations/workshops since January 2015 for users of Greater Maryhill Foodbank, with an average of 8-10 attendees each week. Users are given a vegetable pack of the ingredients to take away that supplements their dried food parcels and provided with simple tips and advice about reducing food waste and cooking on a budget.

During 2014/15 over 600 people participated in WCG's cookery classes and demonstrations, around a third of whom have long term mental health problems. The garden has also supported 40 people as volunteers at the community cafe, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For further information

www.woodlandscommunitygarden.org.uk

Feel Good Foods (FGF), Nottinghamshire



Feel Good Foods (FGF) is a project run by Ollerton and District Economic Forum (ODEF), a charitable company that was formed over 20 years ago to improve life chances and quality of life for local people following the pit closures in Ollerton, North Nottinghamshire, and its surroundings.

Feel Good Foods started life as a community allotment project that aimed to inspire local people to learn about growing, cooking and eating fresh locally-grown produce.

It now operates on part of a 4-acre, Forestry Commission-owned site near Sherwood pines in Nottinghamshire, where it has established an orchard, a herb garden, and various experimental growing areas. Feel Good Foods also work one day a week at a church in a busy residential area.

FGF's programme has been aimed at an area whose population, like many deprived ex-mining communities, still suffers poor general health outcomes. FGF has delivered regular work parties at the Sherwood Pines site, overseen by a horticultural ranger and project co-ordinator, plus a series of fun, educational and practical workshop sessions – cookery sessions and demonstrations, natural crafts, talks, and day trips.

Dan's story - "I'm in my element..."

Dan's life has had chaotic periods. He has been in and out of prison and was a user of hard drugs.

He has a drugs worker and was living with his parents when he started volunteering for Feel Good Foods.

Dan was taking legal highs when he started volunteering at the garden, but was unhappy taking them and was trying to stop.

Dan likes coming to the garden because he is trusted: to carry out tasks, to help the other volunteers, and to go into the building without anyone suspecting that he is stealing things.

In addition, he is able to use his carpentry skills to make things for the garden (garden furniture, bird boxes, insect hotels, etc) and to help mend and fix things like the rabbit-proof fence and the tool store.

Staff and the other volunteers express their appreciation for this and Dan feels valued and part of the team.

Dan also makes useful contacts at the gardens, local people who want to buy the things he makes, which gives him a useful and creative outlet.

One of the most interesting things Dan said during his interview is that he enjoys the garden so much that he does not take any drugs (legal highs) when he is coming, in fact he expressed a wish to come every day. The way he puts it is that he is 'in his element' in the outdoor environment.



Participants complete regular client journey charts so that staff can track how they are getting on. There are also comment sheets, a suggestions box, and workshop evaluation sheets. A list of seasonal tasks has been drawn up which shows in detail what horticultural tasks have been completed by the garden participants. Verbal feedback from participants is actively sought and the administrator keeps a record of this.

These evaluation tools show that out of 93 local participants, 77 people reported feeling better mentally, emotionally and physically as a result of the project; 58 people felt they had improved their horticultural skills and can grow their own food and 74 reported increased confidence and involvement in their communities.

www.odef.org.uk/feel-good-foods.html

Resources

Other case studies in this series:

- Benefits of community growing, green spaces and outdoor education - summary of research and evidence
- Mental health
- Older people and dementia sufferers
- Refugees and asylum seekers

www.farmgarden.org.uk/resources/health-wellbeing-case-studies-ellerman-project

Which tool to use?

A new guide to evaluating health and wellbeing outcomes for community growing programmes.

www.farmgarden.org.uk/resources/whichtool