



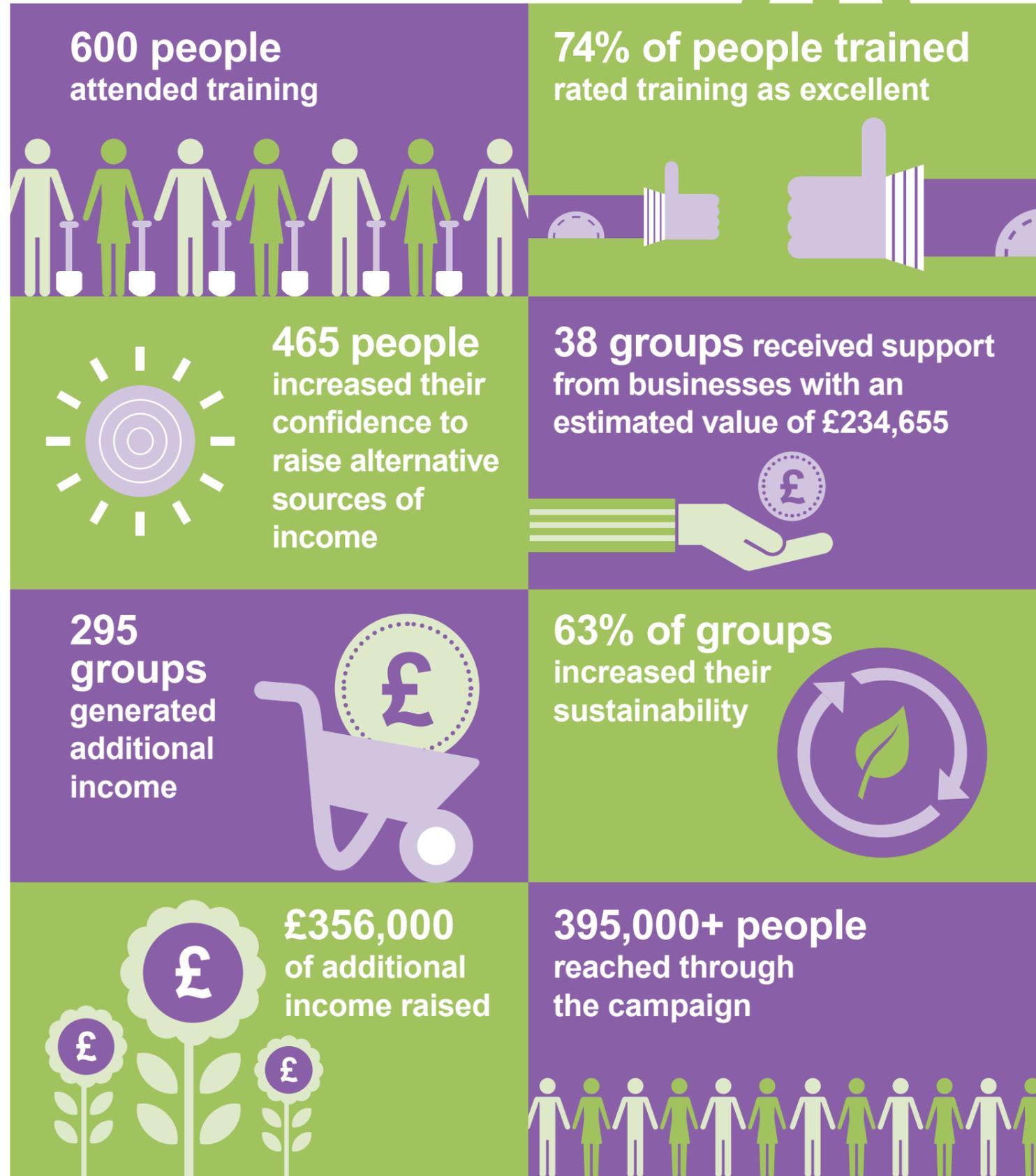
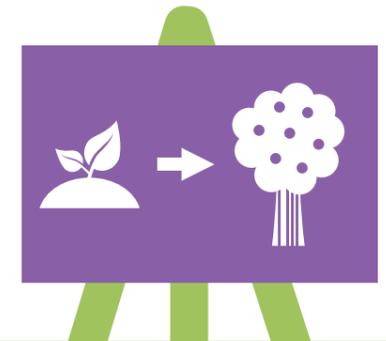
# Final Evaluation Report



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# 70 training events held





## 1. Introduction

This is the final evaluation report of the Growing Together project delivered by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG). This report aims to review the progress of the project against its stated outcomes and outputs and outline key findings and learning from the project.



## 2. Background

Growing Together was a UK wide partnership project with FCFCG acting as the accountable body and the lead partner.

### The other partners forming the Steering Group were:

- Permaculture Association
- Groundwork UK
- Incredible Edible Network
- Plunkett Foundation
- Cooperative Alternative NI
- Wales Cooperative Centre
- Community Shares Scotland

The project also engaged other organisations as stakeholders who supported Growing Together but who were not formal partners.

### These organisations included:

- The Soil Association
- ACRE
- Co-ops UK
- Garden Organic
- Sustain



Growing Together received funding from the Big Lottery of

£804,916

The main aim of the programme was to kick-start the financial sustainability and security of the community-growing sector in the UK by giving community growing groups the confidence, skills and knowledge needed to integrate community enterprise and more pro-active forms of income generation into their future funding plans.

### The project did this by:

- Promoting the widespread uptake of innovative community enterprise and alternative funding approaches
- Delivering training, specialist advice and information resources to upskill groups
- Operating at a strategic/policy level to inspire and engage others, including government funders and other decision makers

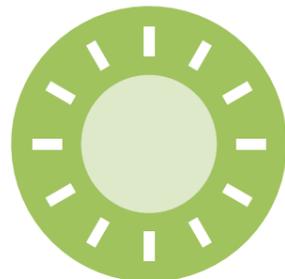


### 3. Delivery and Management

#### Growing Together employed 5 geographical advisors



The two advisors in England cover the north and the south of the country. An additional Business Partnerships Coordinator was employed specifically to develop links between community growing initiatives and businesses across the UK. The advisors worked to identify how the services offered by Growing Together may benefit each growing project for example through the allocation of specialist consultants following an initial diagnostic assessment of need. In some instances, the advisors also supported and advised projects directly. The Business Partnerships Co-ordinator was employed to develop links with businesses both at local level and at national level. They acted as a broker for groups looking to engage businesses in their activities on-the ground and at a more strategic level in developing longer term more sustainable partnerships. The whole project was managed by the Growing Together UK Co-ordinator, initially supported by a Steering Group which met 2/3 times per year.



### 4. Aims of the external evaluation

#### The external evaluation focused on the following:

-  Advising and developing with programme staff a robust system of monitoring and evaluation which can assess progress towards the programmes key objectives
-  Reviewing quantitative data gathered by the programme staff and volunteers and advising on the data capture mechanism
-  Supplying an evaluation framework
-  Attending, and reporting to, regular Steering Group meetings; and applying action research principles
-  Engaging key stakeholders and beneficiaries and ensuring the use of appropriate quantitative and qualitative techniques to meet the aims of the evaluation



## 5. Methods

The following methods were used in the process of conducting the final evaluation:



Review of progress reports submitted to the Big Lottery



Review of monitoring data



Focus group session with programme staff (which took place in November 2017)



Online survey to all community groups that had received support through the project (during Autumn 2017)



Telephone interviews with a sample of projects that had received one to one support through the project



Site visits to nominated case studies in all four countries



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## 6. Evaluation Findings

The three intended outcomes of Growing Together were:

- 1** Up-skilling communities. Community growing initiatives will acquire new skills and knowledge, enabling them to take advantage of more resilient and sustainable forms of income generation to take them into the future
- 2** Kick-starting a long term cultural shift in income generation within the UK's community growing sector
- 3** Working together to influence policy. By uniting so many key organisations, the Growing Together partnership will significantly influence the direction of future policies for the community growing sector, improving their resourcing and sustainability.

Growing Together successfully met these outcomes by:

- Providing training and one to one support which ensured those involved in running community growing initiatives acquired new skills and knowledge
- Working with Businesses to explore new partnerships and ways of working
- Providing the support to enable and encourage groups to diversify income and develop more sustainable models of working
- Raising awareness of the community growing sector



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## 6.1 Community growing initiatives acquire new skills and knowledge

**Key learning** – The provision of a range of support including the offer of bespoke one-to-one consultancy is most effective at meeting the diverse needs of the sector.

There is strong evidence to show that Growing Together was successful in developing the skills and knowledge of the individuals that received support through the project. This was primarily achieved through:

- The delivery of one to one and tailored support
- Training workshop and events
- Learning visits and knowledge exchange between projects

One of the key strengths of Growing Together was how it transferred skills and knowledge in a variety of different ways and across a wide range of subject matters. This enabled the project to proactively respond to both the diverse needs of the sector and to tailor support to the specific needs of individual groups. Analysis of the responses to the community groups survey shows that in most cases groups accessed multiple forms of support from the project, enabling them to access relevant information as when and however they needed it.

### One to one and tailored support

Bespoke, one to one support, provided by advisors and the pool of specialist consultants, was a highly valued aspect of the services offered by Growing Together. The diagnostic tool used with all groups seeking more intensive support through the project was an effective way of ensuring groups were directed towards the support needed which in some cases was different to what had been requested. This ensured that the foundations of groups, E.G governance and management were included alongside income diversification ensuring that resilience was considered in the round rather than simply from a financial perspective.

In addition, through offering groups tailor made support packages the project was able to best meet the individual needs of groups.

**“It was clearly tailored to our needs. The consultant who gave us one to one support was fantastic and really understood our project and how she could best help us.”**

Project beneficiary

**“It was very tailored to the needs of our particular project, and the advisor had a wealth of knowledge based on personal experience and other projects.”**

Project beneficiary

That the consultants used to provide support had both specialist knowledge of the community growing sector and specific areas of expertise was also highly valued.

**“The fact that the consultant, Emma Galloway had specific knowledge of working with churches in addition to her social-entrepreneur skills was of great value to us.”**

Project beneficiary

**“Having sector-specific support is invaluable – often business advisors do not understand the community gardening world at all...or volunteers!”**

Project beneficiary

Another key to the project’s success was the flexible, case by case approach it took to the one-to-one support it provided. Whilst advisors were conscious of the need to spread the resource available to the project they also recognised that in some cases groups required one to one support from more than one consultant to enable them to progress onto the next phase of their developmental journey.



## Delivery of Training

**70** training sessions / events were held during the programme attended by over **600 people** 

Training workshops and events were a core component of the support offered through Growing Together. During the programme 70 training sessions / events were held which were attended by over 600 people. Training sessions covered a wide range of subjects encompassing generic advice on running and managing a community group, workshops on specialist horticultural approaches such as aquaponics, information and advice on specific forms of income generation and practical 'how to' sessions E.G. making cider. The range and quality of the training provided was highly valued with 74% of people rating it as excellent and 26% as good.

The value of the training extended beyond the provision of high quality information and advice as it also provided opportunities for community growing groups to network and share knowledge and experience first-hand.

“...it helped me to be with people we will or will likely meet again – so we can follow up and share and inspire one another.”

Project beneficiary

In addition, by paying groups that hosted or sent representatives to speak at events Growing Together used the training element of the programme as a chance to demonstrate to groups the value of their knowledge, skills and facilities and how this could be used to generate income for the group.

“We have had a general increase in confidence in valuing our services as an organisation.”

Project beneficiary

## Learning visits and knowledge exchange

Knowledge exchange was also facilitated by the project through arranging for groups to visit flagship community growing sites. During the project, representatives from 214 community growing groups visited such flagship projects. Opportunities to see and hear first-hand the experiences of successful established community growing projects was commonly cited by beneficiaries as one of the aspects of the project that they most valued.

“I enjoyed that the business plan training was held in various community gardens so that we could visit and learn from other set ups.”

Project beneficiary



## Growing confidence

In addition to developing the skills and knowledge of community growing groups, Growing Together also aimed to increase their confidence to take new approaches to income generation. Feedback gathered from training workshops, events and flagship visits shows that the project was successful in building confidence to develop alternative sources of income with 465 people stating their confidence had increased.

85%

of groups reported an increase in confidence as a direct result of the support received through the project



This is further evidenced through the survey results that show that 85% of groups reported an increase in confidence as a direct result of the support received through the project, with 26% reporting a significant increase. Over three quarters of these had received one-to-one consultancy support further evidencing the deeper impact of this intensive method of support.



“The support has given us enormous encouragement and confidence that we can have a future and bring our expertise and resources together to be stronger and work more effectively.”

Project beneficiary



## 6.2 Working with Businesses

**Key learning** – There are significant opportunities for the sector to strengthen and build meaningful relationships with businesses particularly considering the buy local movement. To make the most of these opportunities and develop mutually beneficial partnerships on-going brokerage advice and support is needed.

A key strand of the Growing Together programme was its focus on strengthening relationships between businesses (local and national) and community growing initiatives as this offers an alternative avenue through which to diversify their income. Prior to the Growing Together project the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and its membership organisations had little direct experience of corporate partnerships. As such this represented an untapped market for the sector. This presented Growing Together with an opportunity to use the project as a test-bed to explore what the sector may be able to offer in terms of corporate relationships, how these relationships could be mutually beneficial and how it could maximise these opportunities.

Over the course of the project the Business Advisor brokered business links with 38 groups with an estimated value of £234,655<sup>1</sup>. Support resulted in a range of outcomes including, the receiving of direct fundraising, sponsorship, donations of venues, materials or discounted supplies and the donation of time through staff volunteering opportunities. Results from the survey show that the most common form of support was employees volunteering days which included pro-bono support as well as staff giving their time to community growing sites. Anecdotal feedback from groups and staff highlights that the most meaningful and impactful



<sup>1</sup> Based on 403 employee volunteers days @£250 and £133,905 worth of sponsorship included.

relationships built with businesses were those that were longer term and where there was clear strategic value to both parties.

Some specific examples of how businesses supported community growing projects are provided below:

- **Marks and Spencer** – customers and employees got involved with several community growing groups across the UK and provided a budget to help purchase quality materials and equipment
- **Wilkos** – provided vouchers for spending in store as part of their Helping Hands scheme
- **Thames Water** – provided funding for Oxford City Farm to purchase and install a compost toilet
- **Anglian Water** – provided compost bins to community gardens in their region
- **KPMG** – members of staff supported London groups to set up new systems to manage data

By raising awareness of the community growing sector and brokering relationships between business and local community growing initiatives in their area Growing Together was able to influence some companies to adopt a 'Buy Social' policy to help support their local growing groups trading activities.



Growing Together successfully demonstrated the potential for community growing initiatives to galvanise support from businesses and has shown the range of ways that businesses and growing initiatives can work together for mutual benefit. This was particularly evident in the more strategic relationships the FCGCF was able to establish such as that developed with Thompson and Morgan and the Marcus Wareing Restaurant and Calthorpe project partnership, which is provided as a case study below.

## The Gilbert Scott and Growing Together



Marcus Wareing, Masterchef judge and owner and chef of The Gilbert Scott and Tredwell restaurants both located in London developed a partnership with Growing Together as part of their commitment to promote London-based urban farming communities. Tredwells had an existing commitment to buy salad leaves from their local community farm and through discussions with Growing Together The Gilbert Scott developed a local partnership with the Calthorpe Project, a community garden in the heart of Kings Cross. The partnership went beyond supplying the restaurant with fresh produce as both parties were keen to be able to ensure the relationship was mutually beneficial. The Gilbert Scott saw it as an opportunity to get their own staff involved in growing produce whilst contributing to the wellbeing of their staff and getting them involved in the local community.

Chefs from The Gilbert Scott took over a large, disused vegetable bed on the Calthorpe site, enabling a fork-to-farm approach in the restaurant. In addition staff from the front of house and kitchen from both restaurants committed to volunteering at the OrganicLea site, a workers' cooperative growing food on London's edge in the Lea Valley. In return staff receive a hands-on education into agriculture, where seasonal produce comes from and how it is cultivated.

The Calthorpe project also benefitted from Chef Patron Chantelle, dedicating time with the cooks at Calthorpe to help them in the kitchen. In addition, The Gilbert Scott committed to raising funds towards the renovation of the kitchen at Calthorpe by adding an additional pound to each diner's meal.

Whilst the challenges and complexities of developing strategic relationships with businesses may rule out this avenue as a viable source of alternative income for many within the sector the project has demonstrated the potential of working with businesses for a segment of the sector. It has also highlighted the need for specialist 'brokerage' support to help growing groups to identify potential corporate partnerships and to develop their approach and offer to businesses. FCGCF are well placed to provide this brokerage support at a local level and to develop strategic corporate relationships at a national level that can benefit its wider membership.

### 6.3 Diversifying income generation and reducing grant dependency

**Key learning** - There is a demand for learning more about income diversification within the sector however the diversity of the sector means that reducing grant dependency is more challenging for some organisations. Where groups are able to diversify, trading and sales provide the greatest opportunities for income diversification.

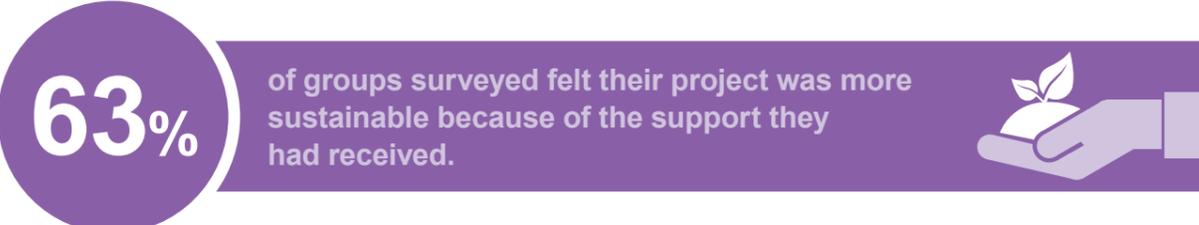
The primary focus of Growing Together was to support groups to diversify their income as a way of increasing their financial resilience. Through this movement Growing Together hoped to kick-start a long term cultural shift away from a culture of grant dependency and towards a more sustainable financial future for the community growing sector. Given the current funding climate and the challenges facing the voluntary sector as a whole this ambition whilst ambitious was driven by a real need for community growing groups to re-evaluate and re-design how and where income is going to come from in the future. This ambition also needs to be considered within the context of the sector itself which is largely made up of small, local, unincorporated, wholly volunteer led organisations.



Growing Together supported 295 groups to generate additional income which represents just under half of the original target of 600. The majority of these were successfully supported to develop small income generating activities to raise essential funds. 37 organisations, most of whom received intensive one-to-one support, developed new alternative income generation activities generating additional income of £356,000 during the period of the project. These figures are reflected in the survey findings with 46% of survey respondents reporting they had generated alternative sources of income for their groups as a direct result of support provided by Growing Together.



Of the groups surveyed 48% stated that they had reduced their dependency on grant funding as a direct result of support from the project. In all cases this was a moderate reduction as opposed to anything more significant however given the timescales of the project and that many groups are at the start of their income diversification journeys this success should be celebrated.



When asked if they felt their project was more sustainable because of the support they had received 63% of those surveyed felt it was. This perception of increased sustainability was not necessarily linked directly to a reduction in grant dependency. This is likely to reflect that for many groups sustainability is as much about good governance, strong management and a solid volunteer base as it is about diversifying their income.

Of those that did generate alternative sources of income through their engagement in the project just under half of those surveyed (48%) secured between £1,000 - £10,000. Whilst there are examples from the project of groups securing substantially larger amounts of income these are in the minority. However, it is important to note here that levels of income are relative to the size and scale of the group and therefore what may seem like a relatively small sum of additional income may have a significant impact and be the difference between survival or dissolution for some.

On reflection given the profile of the sector and the intensive nature of the support provided through the project the original outputs set by the project were ambitious.

It is also worth reiterating here that for many of the projects supported the longer-term gains of the support received have yet to be realised and as such the impact of the support provided through Growing Together will continue far beyond the lifetime of the project.

**“We have not drawn up our business plan yet, but it has been helpful in focusing on planning what direction the project will go in and in exploring viable options to generate income.”**

Project beneficiary

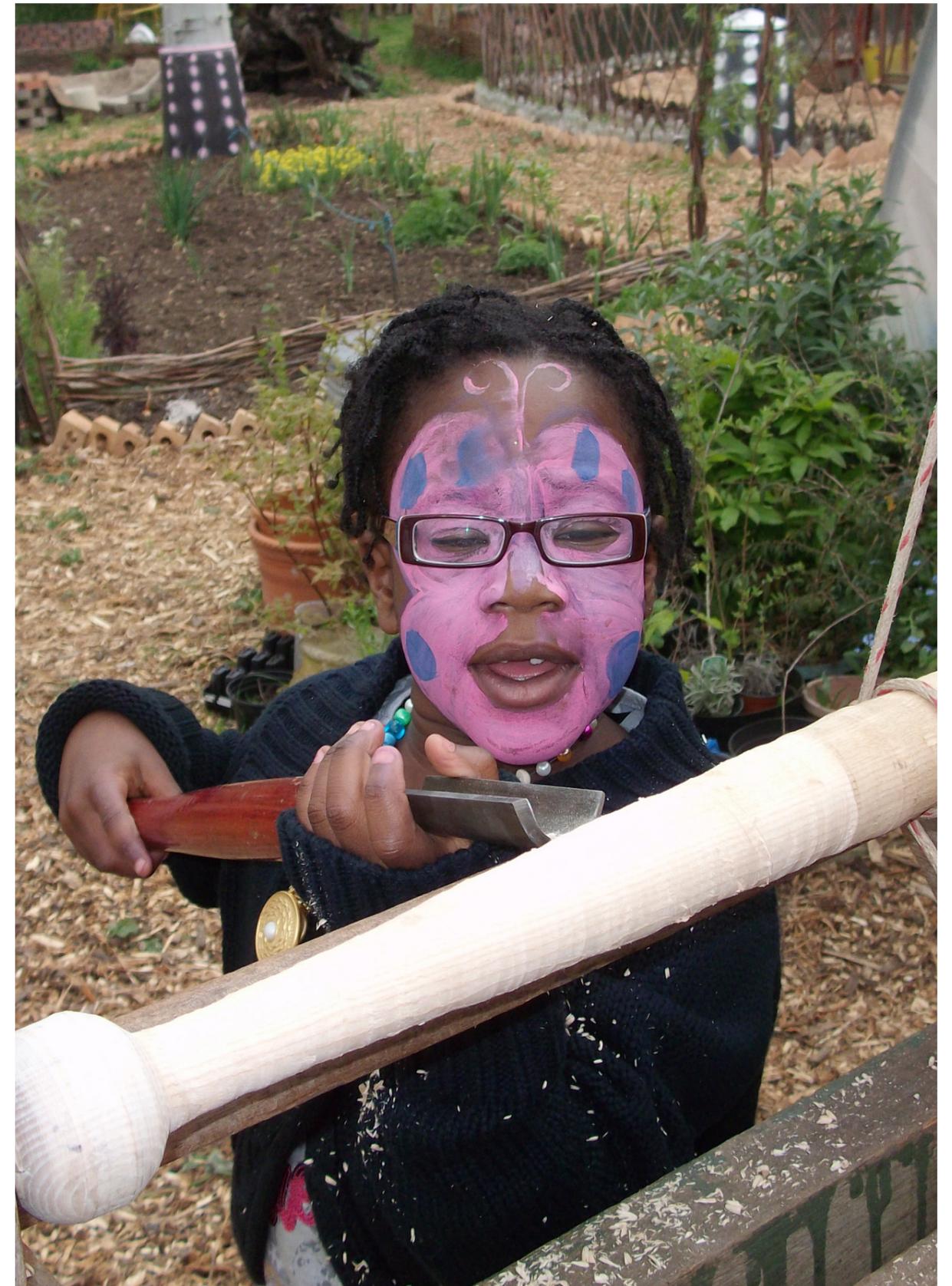
Whilst the project has highlighted that there will always be a section of community growing groups that are either not in a position, or do not see the need, to diversify their income it has also shown the high value and need for support to help those groups who are looking to re-dress the balance from grant dependency to earned income. There is also a clear need for this support to be on-going with 88% of the groups surveyed stating that they could still benefit from support provided through the project.

Growing Together provided information, advice and support on a wide range of subjects relating to income diversification e.g. community shares, trading and sales, procurement. Project monitoring figures show that of the groups that did generate alternative income the most common ways of raising this income were through trading / sales (41%) and running events (26%). Financial support from businesses and crowd-funding campaigns were the next most popular forms of generating income. The number of groups that generated income through community shares, e-commerce, procurement, appeals and visits was low. The propensity of groups to raise income through trading and sales and events is mirrored in the findings of the survey as 72% of income was generated through trading and sales and 48% through events and training. Whilst it may not be surprising that sales is the most common way of generating income given that what unites these projects is their focus on producing food/plants/flowers it does highlight the need for community growing groups to be supported to become more enterprising in their approach and to recognise the value of both what they produce and their knowledge.

The project provided an interesting test-bed for different income generation approaches and their alignment/compatibility with the sector. A good example of this was that community shares had initially been identified as a specific area of opportunity for community growing projects to secure more sustainable funding. As such a specific target around community shares was included in the bid. Whilst the project exceeded its target of supporting groups to generate income through community shares (11 groups were supported) this was not a model that was popular amongst community growing groups. Whilst the evaluation did not explore the reasons behind this the perception was that this was in part to do with community growing projects by their very nature already being 'owned' by the community thus reducing the impetus for people wanting to buy into a scheme.

Growing Together has undoubtedly provided the kick-start it set out to achieve for community growing groups in terms of a 'cultural shift' towards a more financial resilient sector and has acted as an essential catalyst for change for many groups.

Growing Together was never about providing quick fix solutions rather an investment in long term systemic change. As with any cultural change this is a long term aim and one that will require on-going investment over a longer period if it is to be fully realised.



## 6.4 More sustainable models of working

**Key learning** - The resilience and sustainability of organisations will be strengthened through engaging in collaborative and cooperative models of working.

One of the key strengths of Growing Together was its ability to facilitate collaboration and mutual learning between community growing groups. This was partly achieved through training and site visits but also the more intensive support it provided to groups looking to set up as consortiums. Growing Together initially provided this support to a network of community growing groups in Manchester who saw the value of working collectively both in terms of the benefits of shared resources and the ability to negotiate as a single entity. The short case study below provides further details of the consortium:

### The Green Health Alliance



The Green Health Alliance was formed when five<sup>2</sup> community garden projects in Manchester came together as a way of being able to secure large scale contracts that would have been unobtainable as individual organisations. The group received support through Growing Together to establish the consortia and to broker a relationship with U&I, a development company that was looking to create some community gardens as part of the Mayfield development, a large 24-acre site of housing and shops. In addition to advising in the establishment of the community gardens on the site the alliance has been contracted to undertake some of the public consultation activities with the local community.

The learning gained through supporting the Manchester consortium has provided the Federation and the sector with valuable insight that has been used to replicate the consortia model in other parts of the UK with community growing consortiums now becoming established in the Isle of Skye and Mid-Lothian, Scotland.

“For many years a number of groups in Manchester have been talking about coming together to deliver contracts and now we are actually doing it – and being held up as an example of good practice to others.” (Green Health Alliance member)

This is another example of how Growing Together has been a valuable test-bed for exploring new approaches and different models of working and highlights FCFCG’s crucial role in brokering these relationships

<sup>2</sup> Growing in the City/Men’s Shed Project, Hulme Community Garden Centre, Real Food Wythenshawe, Debdale Eco Centre.

## 6.5 Raising awareness of community growing

In addition to increasing the resilience and sustainability of community growing groups Growing Together also hoped to raise awareness of the sector as a whole and increase its profile. This was primarily achieved through the Local Heroes Campaign, a social media based campaign which encouraged people to actively support community growing groups and local food projects in their neighbourhoods. The campaign attracted support from high profile supporters and business sponsorship and successfully engaged in excess of 395,000<sup>3</sup> followers. The campaign also directly targeted 1000 community growing groups which were used as conduits through which to disseminate information about the campaign. Whilst there is no way of quantifying how many more people were reached as a result it is likely to be significant given the ‘community’ nature of many of these organisations.

The campaign also involved the development of four ‘Young Heroes – Stick Man Trails’ located in City Farms or Community Gardens around the UK. The aim of the trails was to introduce more families to City Farms and Community Gardens by providing a fun and interactive trail aimed at 3-7 year olds. These were trails based on Julia Donaldson’s book ‘Stick Man’ and developed in partnership with Magic Light Pictures Ltd.

Undertaking a campaign of this scale with an aim of reaching one million people was hugely ambitious, particularly given the lack of in-house campaigning expertise and the resource allocated to this aspect of the project. Despite this Growing Together was able to reach out to a significantly wider and new audience through its campaign activity and to raise awareness of community growing at both a local and national level. In addition it provided direct, and on-going, benefit to the City Farms and Community Gardens that hosted the trails and was an opportunity to develop a number of strategic relationships including one with the horticultural business Thompson and Morgan.

In addition to the campaign Growing Together raised awareness of the sector through its website, its newsletter and the activity it delivered on the ground. As such the actual reach of the programme is likely to far exceed the numbers reached by the campaign alone.



<sup>3</sup> Based on media intelligence figures provided by Kantar Media.

## 7. Supporting the Community Growing Sector in the future

Growing Together's original intention was to use its knowledge of the sector to influence policy that could support community growing. It aimed to do this primarily through working with policy makers within local and national government, utilising the influence and knowledge of the steering group partners and drawing on insights emerging through the project. This aspect of the project proved difficult to achieve for a number of reasons. Externally political priorities during the period of the programme were focused on improving economic performance, austerity measures and Brexit, which were all factors that impacted upon the ability of Growing Together to have strategic influence. Understandably, the focus on delivering support on the ground to groups meant there was little capacity or focus on undertaking strategic engagement work.

Whilst Growing Together was not able to fully realise its ambition to influence policy within the timeframe of the project the knowledge and insight gathered through the project is an asset and one that FCFCG should consider how it can make best use of.

This is particularly important if the sector is going to thrive in countries like Northern Ireland where community growing is less established. Growing Together has acted as an important catalyst for community growing in Northern Ireland and has demonstrated that there is both an appetite for these types of projects and that they fulfil an important social need. However, without policies that support the transfer and management of land into community ownership the sector may struggle to fully meet its potential and its growth may be limited.



### The key impacts of the programme may be described as the following:

- Increase in skills and knowledge of the Community Growing Sector. Growing Together has clearly led to more community growing groups being more confident and having more knowledge about how to diversify income streams and become more entrepreneurial. The legacy of the programme for these individual groups is therefore likely to have an impact in future years and contribute towards their financial sustainability. It is important to acknowledge the essential role that one-to-one specialist advice and support plays in bridging the gap between knowledge and action
- Increased knowledge, expertise and insight of the Community Growing Sector needs within FCFCG. Extensive knowledge has been built up through working with the diversity of groups that make up the Community Growing Sector across all four countries of the UK. The learning that has emerged from the programme is an important part of this knowledge but equally important is the knowledge and expertise of the individual advisors in offering support to Community Growing Groups. This knowledge will be valuable in terms of shaping future programmes and projects that aim to support the sector
- The network of specialist advisors built up through Growing Together is a key legacy of the project and is a valuable asset for the sector as it combines knowledge and understanding of community growing with specialist expertise
- Toolkits and case studies produced demonstrate both the diversity of the sector and the importance of the support offered by Growing Together. The case studies and toolkits will remain an important asset of the programme and should be used in the future to demonstrate the importance of support as well as to raise awareness of the sector
- Partnership with businesses - Growing Together has enabled the exploration of partnerships with businesses and as a result tangible collaborations have been developed, for example the relationship with Magic Light. If possible, these relationships should continue to be nurtured
- Increased awareness of the Community Growing Sector with the public and potential partners and stakeholders

## Key Learning

The key learning which emerged from delivering Growing Together is:

- The one to one bespoke support received by groups was the key to enabling many groups to progress groups along the trajectory of financial sustainability
- In order to build resilience groups are likely to need on-going support on a range of different areas and therefore long-term access to support is vital
- Often the support needed by the group may be different to their perception of their own needs. Therefore, a holistic diagnostic approach is most effective in delivering support that is more likely to lead to sustainable change
- There is a clear need for a brokerage service which links groups with advisors who understand the sector or have specialist knowledge that they can transfer to the community growing sector
- Each community group is different and will have a different rate of growth
- The shift to non-grant dependency is huge for some groups and may not be appropriate for many within the sector. The sector often works in areas where market forces do not address the needs of the local community – therefore whilst lessons may be learned from an entrepreneurial approach it is likely that many groups will continue to need grant funding
- There are substantial benefits to running a project across the UK. Sharing experiences between the different countries and different policy contexts is useful in terms of building up knowledge about the sector. The project provides useful evidence that different approaches and types of support may be needed in different areas. For example, in some areas there may be the need to stimulate demand whereas in other areas where support for the sector is more prolific and the sector itself more vibrant the focus is on being explicit about the support on offer and clearly articulating the benefits of diversifying income.



## 8. Case studies

The case studies below were tracked during the lifetime of the programme and are used to highlight the range of projects supported through the programme and the impact of the support received. All of them received consultancy support either from an Advisor or a specialist consultant.

### Urban Roots

Urban Roots is a community led environmental charity working on the south side of Glasgow focusing on community growing and local food projects. One of the main projects run by Urban Roots is 'Food for Thought' which is funded by local Housing Associations, the Scottish Government and the NHS. The project works in Govan, Priesthill and Gorbals developing food and growing projects with the local community.

Support was first given to Urban Roots from Growing Together at a time when the organisation was in a period a growth due to securing funding for 'Food for Thought', during which time the annual turnover of the organisation was in excess of half a million pounds. The initial support focused on developing links with the Corporate Sector as a way of exploring an alternative and more sustainable form of income.

However, it soon became clear that the needs of the organisation were changing and that the size of the turnover alone was not enough to ensure it was able to withstand difficulties. The period of growth experienced by Urban Roots led to the need to consolidate and carefully manage the organisation as it faced numerous challenges. At this point Growing Together was able to put in place a package of support involving Business Planning advice and one to one mentoring to develop a Fundraising Strategy.

**"If the support offered by Growing Together had not been in place then the organisation could have faced closure."**

Emma Iller, Project Manager @ Urban Roots

The support offered by Growing Together built the skills and confidence of the organisation at just the right time.

“It’s easier to get caught up in the day to day challenges but the support from Growing Together helped us to take a step back and make some changes.”

Emma Iller, Project Manager @ Urban Roots

Consequently, Urban Roots was able to develop a sustainable Business Plan and Fundraising strategy inclusive of:

- Online giving
- Additional earned income through the delivery of training
- Additional grant and contract funding

The support has led to Urban Roots being more financially resilient through the diversification of income streams. Contract funding is however likely to remain a significant part of turnover. In March 2017 Urban Roots was awarded the contract to run Food for Thought for another three years.

**The key learning as a result of the Growing Together support was:**

- Belief and confidence in the outcomes of the organisations activities is key to ensuring success
- It is important to take advantage of any funding opportunities and not be held back by the difficulties of proving impact.



## Macmaethlon

Macmaethlon is a project that works in the Dyfi Valley in Wales. It aims to give the community access to land for growing and creating edible public spaces. It also involves Land Share and veg box schemes.

Macmaethlon first accessed support from Growing Together to explore appropriate legal forms for the company. At this point the group was a collection of 3 projects. Growing Together was able to appoint a specialist advisor from Co-operatives UK to develop a Memorandum and Articles of Association. This was a key stage of development for the organisation and the support brokered and provided by Growing Together was fundamental to ensuring it was able to adopt a company structure that enabled growth in the way envisaged by the Directors.

Approximately 12 months after the company was set up, Macmaethlon contacted Growing Together for additional support. At this point support was sought for marketing and fundraising. Once again Growing Together was able to broker appropriate and effective support. The company received training and advice on the use of Social Media as a marketing tool. This proved invaluable and has successfully extended the reach and awareness of Macmaethlon. Advice was also given in developing a successful European Funding application resulting in Macmaethlon receiving funding of £80,000 over 3 years. This is the first time that the company has received funding for longer than a 12-month period.

The support offered by Growing Together was crucial to the development of Macmaethlon. Directors have particularly appreciated professional input:

“The advice on constitutional issues was really useful as we just didn’t have the skills or knowledge to be able to do this. This built our skills and confidence. Being able to run things past a professional has also been useful...We jumped from 3 separate projects to a Limited Company and having someone say ‘it’s Ok’ and ‘it’s the best thing to do’ was reassuring.”

Grainne – Director @ Macmaethlon

Overall Macmaethlon feel that the support offered through Growing Together has made the company more financially resilient. In particular, putting in place an appropriate company structure means that they have been able to access longer term funding whilst the Veg Box scheme also provides steady earned income.

**The key things that Macmaethlon feel that they have learned from the support are:**

- Knowledge about company structures
- How to be better Directors
- How to use Social Media to market the activities of the Company

## L'Arche

Grow, Cook, Cater is a lottery funding project run by L'Arche in Belfast. It provides young people aged 18-25 with a learning disability the opportunity to learn a range of horticultural skills through planting, tending and harvesting. The project also gives people valuable life skills through teaching them how to prepare, cook and serve meals as well as increasing awareness about nutrition and healthy eating. Participants attend the project for 1.5 days per week for a period of 10 months with a view to them moving on to further training or work.

Initial support from Growing Together came in the form of one-to-one advice from the Northern Ireland Advisor, prior to lottery funding being secured, helping the group to explore how they might diversify their income by looking at statutory funding and contracts and commercial opportunities. This support encouraged them to set up a veg box scheme and develop a garden maintenance service that runs alongside the lottery project. Whilst both schemes are still small scale they have regular customers and provide the participants with direct work experience and have acted as an opportunity to test-out the market.

**“For us it’s great because we are growing the veg anyway – any money we can bring in like this is a bonus and we have discovered there is a market for it locally.”**

Scott Shively, L'Arche

Since starting the project the group has also accessed specialist advice from Growing Together. This is their project and essentially we are running a ‘service’ so we have to be realistic about what we can and can’t do. We will never be able to compete with a commercial provider but people like what we are doing and we are able to say we are doing something different. specialist fruit and vegetables that they are experimenting growing on the allotment. Whilst this provides them with an opportunity to move into a more niche market, project leader Scott Shively is realistic about the practicalities of supply and demand and the fact that ultimately decisions about what the group grow are decided by the participants.

**“This is their project and essentially we are running a ‘service’ so we have to be realistic about what we can and can’t do. We will never be able to compete with a commercial provider but people like what we are doing and we are able to say we are doing something different.”**

Scott Shively, L'Arche

The support provided through the project has enabled the group to approach things in a more professional way and given them the confidence and knowledge to be able to explore alternative ways of generating income.

**“The great thing about Growing Together is that they are working with a lot of other organisations so they are able to connect us up and tell us who we should be speaking to. It has saved us a lot of time – I would never have had the time to figure out which cafes locally might be interested in buying from us.”**

Scott Shively, L'Arche

The group’s ambitions are to establish a cooperative and to secure a significantly bigger site that could accommodate not only growing space but also a small herd of cattle, a flock of sheep and more chickens. They hope that in the future they will be able to finance the project through direct payment which would allow them to move to a more sustainable model.



## Green Backyard Case Study

The Green Backyard project was started by Sophie Antonelli and her father in recognition of the value of providing local people from an urban environment the opportunity to reconnect with the land through growing and horticulture. The Green Backyard is situated on a council owned site on the edge of Peterborough City Centre and provides a space for local people and groups to come together to meet, connect and grow. As well as providing land for people to plant and grow the site has a community shop and a number of semi-permanent structures that are used to host events, courses and meetings. After hosting the project for x years the council announced that they wanted to sell off the site for development which would leave the project looking for a new home. After a long campaign to retain the site the council agreed to reconsider the sale pending the successful submission of a business plan that could demonstrate both the need and financial viability of the project.

The project accessed specialist consultancy support from Growing Together on two separate occasions. Initially this support was to help them develop a business plan that would provide the council with the confidence to agree to extend the lease on the site. The business planning process helped them to think through the options of diversifying their income and test out the reality of some of their ideas.

“We had lots of ideas about how we could generate income but the consultant helped us to identify the ones that were most viable.”

Sophie Antonelli, Green Backyard



Consultancy support provided through Community Matters helped the project demonstrate the case for the community growing space but also showed the long term sustainability of the project. On the strength of the business plan the council agreed to extend the lease. Although the Council were happy to extend the lease the terms of the agreement were unsatisfactory and did not provide the group with the length of lease that would provide them with real security and the assurances that potential funders would require to support the project. Growing Together was able to provide specialist consultancy support to advise them on the legalities of the lease and to help them negotiate the terms of the lease. This external advice provided the group with expertise and an external independent perspective that provided the trustee with the reassurance they need to sign the final agreement despite it not being the length of lease that they had originally hoped for.

“Securing the land and the lease has enabled us to start to plan for the future again, we had been living with so much uncertainty we had put all our plans on hold.”

Sophie Antonelli, Green Backyard





Since securing the lease the project has subsequently secured funding for 2 paid part time staff and are in the process of implementing their new business plans. The plan builds on existing ventures such as extending the wedding offer, running floristry/horticultural courses and developing income through the on-site shop. In addition they are looking to explore new ventures including hosting Forest Schools, setting up a plant nursery and developing growing initiatives in partnership with the prison service and establishing a cutting garden to supply local florists and restaurants with edible flowers.

Growing Together provided The Green Backyard project with access to free independent expertise at the times they needed it most. The impact of this support was significant both in terms of retaining the project site and also providing the project with a robust and diverse development plan for the future. Going forward the project hopes to be able to expand the staff team grow and would like to meet more of the projects core costs through earned income.

“I think there will always be a place for grant funding to run specific activities like running healthy eating sessions with low income families but we’d like to be in a position where all our core costs were covered by non-grant related projects.”

Sophie Antonelli, Green Backyard



## 9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Growing Together was an ambitious programme that set itself challenging targets and aspirations, many of which have been achieved. The programme has been particularly successful at increasing the skills and knowledge of the Community Growing Sector and has demonstrated its success at enabling organisations to diversify their income and become less reliant on grants. One of the key aspects which led to this success was the flexible and responsive approach of the programme. Flexibility in terms of the management and delivery of the programme has meant that advisors have been able to respond to individual organisations needs and offer bespoke support packages that has been key to ensuring growth and development. It has also meant that the programme has been able to respond to and maximise new opportunities that have arisen during the course of the programme.

The programme has also successfully raised the profile of the Community Growing Sector, and through its public campaign and the development of high profile initiatives such as the Stick Man Trails has been able to successfully reach and engage new audiences.



Perhaps, though, the most impressive aspect of Growing Together is that it has demonstrated how the sector can most effectively be supported on a UK wide basis. For example the diagnostic approach which enabled tailored one to one support, the importance of building long term relationship with groups and offering different types of support and interventions have all been key to ensuring effective and lasting impact for organisations. This learning should be harnessed and where practicable replicated in order to maximise the impact of the programme. This should also encompass using the learning to inform and influence policy that can strengthen and support the sector and help to ensure the sector can thrive in all parts of the UK.

Furthermore there are tangible benefits and assets that have emerged from the programme which could form a valuable part of the infrastructure of support in the future. For example the network of skilled advisors, the strategic relationships established with businesses and the partnerships between community growing organisations. It is recommended that resources are used to continue to develop and support this infrastructure and also to continue the knowledge exchange which has been facilitated through the programme.

Growing Together has acted as an important catalyst for many community growing groups to broaden their approach to how they generate income and has opened up the possibility of a more sustainable future for many. As such it has strengthened the foundation for a more sustainable and resilient sector. However if the cultural shift towards financial resilience that has been kick-started by the programme is to continue then on-going support such as that provided by Growing Together is essential. The knowledge and learning that has emerged from Growing Together now needs to be built upon to ensure the needs of the sector are effectively met and that more organisations are supported to progress along the spectrum of sustainability.



## Appendix A - Growing Together Outputs Table

**Project outcome one: Up-skilling communities:** Community growing initiatives will acquire new skills and knowledge, enabling them to take advantage of more resilient and sustainable forms of income generation to take them into the future.

Indicators	Indicator level	Outputs achieved
The number of representatives from community growing initiatives who have accessed support through Growing Together who report that they are more confident about diversifying their income sources.	250 representatives from community growing initiatives report increased confidence in developing alternative income sources.	465 people with increased confidence
The number of community growing initiatives who report that a lack of finance is the biggest threat to their sustainability is reduced.	20% reduction in surveyed groups who report funding as a significant threat to their future.  Groups reporting an increase in sustainability	Inconclusive evidence to support this <sup>1</sup>  63% of groups surveyed reported increased sustainability

<sup>1</sup> Comparisons were unable to be drawn as many of the groups that completed the baseline survey did not complete the end of project survey. It is worth noting that the baseline survey identified that the majority of groups did not see funding as a significant threat to their future.

<sup>2</sup> Based on survey results to which 64 groups responded

<sup>3</sup> As above

## Project outcome two: Kickstarting a long term cultural shift in income generation within the UK's community growing sector

GT Phase II will create the conditions that enable the sector, across the UK, to move from passive reliance on grants to a more dynamic and sustainable model that blends grant funding with active income generation.

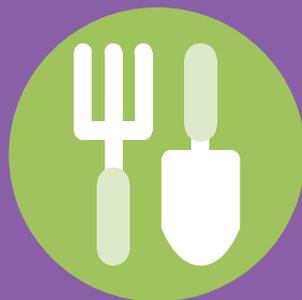
Indicators	Indicator level	Outputs achieved
The level to which new financial approaches, including community enterprise, community shares, crowdfunding and DIG, are adopted by community growing initiatives.	100 groups will develop new alternative income generation activities (eg 100 groups undertaking crowd-funding or trading, each raising £5,000 = £500,000) and will continue to raise funds through these activities beyond the end of the project.  10 groups will be supported to issue community shares (eg 10 x £50,000 = £500,000).  500 groups will develop small income generating activities to raise essential funds (500 groups generating £200 through trading sales = £100,000)	37 groups brought in £356,000  11 groups supported to issue community shares  258 Groups developed income of £200 or less
The number of community growing initiatives that demonstrate less dependence on grants and will actively review their future income generation strategy accordingly.	100 groups will revise their business plans to generate a greater proportion of alternative income.  150 community growing initiatives will report a decrease in grant dependency and an increase in earned income.	104 groups implemented new plans  48% <sup>2</sup> reduced dependency on grant funding  46% <sup>3</sup> increased earned income
The extent to which relationships between businesses (local and national) and community growing initiatives are strengthened to improve corporate support for community growing initiatives.	Businesses will have given sponsorship to 50 community growing groups (50 groups x average £2,000 = £100,000).  Increase of 500 Corporate Social Responsibility days donated to community growing initiatives (500 days x £250 per day = £125,000).	£133,905  403 CSR days

**Project outcome three: Working together to influence policy**

By uniting so many key organisations, the Growing Together partnership will significantly influence the direction of future policies for the community growing sector, improving their resourcing and sustainability.

Indicators	Indicator level	Outputs achieved
The number of meetings the Growing Together will hold with Government, funders and other decision makers that will impact upon future strategies.	10 meetings with key decision makers each year, centring on getting promises to investigate changes or instigate consultations in policy around land access issues, plus incentives for corporates offering match funding and a charter to encourage workplace allotments.  20 case studies and toolkits will be produced that will showcase innovative models of good practice that will be adopted as standard across the community growing sector.	32 meetings 29 Case studies 8 Toolkits produced
The extent to which work delivered will be promoted through the media and in information resources to raise its national profile and increase support.	A GT web portal will be developed and promoted; 25 articles will be published (dual language).  Campaign is run aimed at getting 1m people in the UK supporting community growing through donations, volunteering or skills.	Growing Together website 69 articles published 395,000 people reached through the campaign





The evaluation was conducted by Impact Consultancy & Research