



# Business Heroes

Inspiring business to partner with local community growing groups



A community engagement toolkit from the Growing Together initiative



# Get Inspired

## Why your company should become a Business Hero

"Spending a day out of the store or office to help a growing group is a great opportunity for our employees to make a real difference locally and be in touch with the community where they operate. Volunteering in this sociable and enjoyable environment helps team building and has positive effects on employee wellbeing and health (outdoor exercise and a tasty home-grown lunch!). It's both motivating and inspiring, something I am sure our colleagues take back their daily jobs."

**Sophie Collett**, Project Manager, Marks and Spencer

"The Printworks and Hard Rock Cafe in Manchester have a strong commitment to working with, and supporting, local community groups. In 2012, we launched our rooftop garden, where staff can volunteer in their spare time, and work in a friendly, 'green' environment, tending to bees, vegetables, or spend some in a different 'healthier' space. Working with community growing groups, or having a growing space in your own workplace, definitely has a positive impact on employees."

**Emma Livingstone**, Sales, Marketing & Events Manager, Hard Rock Cafe Manchester

"Working with community growing groups has been an excellent opportunity to focus on the benefits of recycling food waste and fats into composting and producing fresh healthy produce. This contributes not only to our overall health and well-being but also protects the environment."

**Collette Parker**, Customer Engagement Manager, Keep It Clear, Anglian Water

"We have found that supporting community growing groups, in particular to create wildlife eco, wildflower and vegetable gardens for local schools and passing passengers, a wholly positive and rewarding experience for our staff."

**Sarah Borien**, Social Performance Manager, Network Rail

"Volunteering for a community growing group is a win-win situation for us. We get to get out of the office and give something back to the local community, whilst working in a healthy and friendly outdoor environment. We all get a great sense of satisfaction from volunteering on a community growing site and strengthen our team building and personal skills as well as making a positive impact on people living in the local community."

**Vicky Shaw**, MS&S Fleet Co-ordinator, Jaguar Landrover

There are a number of inspiring case studies featuring examples of partnerships between business and community growing groups on our website at:

**[www.growingtogether.community/business-heroes](http://www.growingtogether.community/business-heroes)**



# Business Heroes Ambassador Katie Rushworth

**Katie Rushworth co-presents ITV's Love Your Garden with Alan Titchmarsh and runs her own garden design company. She is passionate about the role business can play in supporting community-run gardening, farming and local food initiatives across the UK.**

"I know from running my own business and working on Love Your Garden how important growing plants and food can be to people. There's loads of research showing that community growing makes neighbourhoods better, healthier, and friendlier places.

But community growing groups sometimes struggle to make ends meet, especially these days with less grant funding around. They need to find ways of generating their own income and saving money on running costs. That's why finding Business Heroes to help is so vital.

Take my home village in Yorkshire as an example. There's a community garden nearby where local residents get together to transform flowerbeds, containers and hanging baskets. This only happens because of local business sponsorship and volunteers who want to give something back to the place where they live and work.

It doesn't matter what size of company you run, or what type of business you are in, there's always something you can offer. And by getting involved, your business will benefit too. Not just by helping make a better place for your customers and workforce to live in, but also through enhancing your local reputation and status, by improving the skills and well-being of your workforce and by creating goodwill to your business from customers, potential employees and even investors.

Sounds great doesn't it? There are an estimated 2,500 community growing groups in the UK doing fantastic work, so I encourage you to read this toolkit, get inspired and then become Business Heroes by teaming up with local growing groups in your area!







# What is Community Growing?

Community growing is a simple idea - a group of local people, usually volunteers, get together to transform a patch of land into an oasis of nature, where people can gather, learn, grow and relax. This is often in areas of deprivation where access to 'green space' is limited.

Among the estimated 2,500 community growing groups across the UK, there are 63 city farms, around 1,200 community gardens, 116 school farms, more than 100 Community Supported Agriculture initiatives and an increasing number of community orchards and devolved managed allotments. Between them they attract thousands of volunteers and millions of visitors.

Many of these groups provide an amazing array of social opportunities, including education programmes, play schemes, healthy living initiatives, work and skills training, social enterprises, volunteer opportunities, environmental schemes, horticultural therapy groups, facilities for people with a disability...the list goes on!

They also contribute to higher levels of physical activity, better mental health and the facilitation of social interaction, inclusion and community cohesion.

Community growing groups can also produce significant and tangible benefits of specific interest to local employers and business, such as helping reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, increasing well-being in the community and having a positive effect on the local economy.

**A number of reports and studies in recent years have highlighted the benefits of community growing:**

### **Communities Living Sustainably Learning Report, 2015**

This report, produced by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, demonstrates that involvement in community growing can act as a 'powerful tool' to help vulnerable people, bring communities together and encourage people to adopt greener and healthier behaviours. The report also found robust evidence that local projects can stimulate the local economy.

### **Natural England Review of Nature-Based Interventions for Mental Health Care, 2016**

This study provides compelling evidence that the 'green care' offered by many community growing groups can help people with mental ill-health. Taking part in community growing can also contribute, more generally, to a reduction in levels of anxiety, stress and depression.

### **Gardening and Well Being Study, 2015**

A study published by Westminster and Essex Universities found that just 30 minutes of gardening a week has a beneficial effect on mental health. Academics found that one session resulted in significant improvements in self-esteem and mood, with reductions in tension, depression, anger, and confusion. The study also found that less than half of gardeners were overweight or obese, compared to nearly 70 per cent of non-gardeners.

### **Glasgow's Community Gardens: Sustainable Communities of Care, 2015**

The report concluded that community gardening promotes community empowerment and "offers a learning environment that goes beyond the skills associated with horticulture to include individual health, self and community wellbeing and democratic citizenship." Participants acquired knowledge and skills that build self-confidence and encourage team working. The report also found that the community gardens can provide important employment and training opportunities and have "considerable potential to be expanded, given the right support."



**"Just 30 minutes of gardening a week has a beneficial effect on mental health."**

# The Benefits To Your Business

It has long been acknowledged that community growing spaces can make positive impacts on both local and regional economic regeneration, especially for job creation, business start-ups and inward investment. Becoming a community partner also demonstrates to clients that you care about the place where your employees and customers live.

There are also more direct benefits to your business. A number of reports (including those from the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, Business In The Community and Invest Northern Ireland) highlight the following:



## Better staff morale

'Donating' specialist skills or volunteering days can increase total job satisfaction and strengthen attachment to your workplace. Studies suggest people often value these kinds of rewards more highly than a big salary. These activities build a sense of camaraderie among employees and make them feel good about representing a company that supports important local causes.



## Improved teamwork

Community activities can develop team performance. Corporate volunteering, for example, can encourage everyone to work in a more co-ordinated way.



## Reputation

Building relationships within the community can create word-of-mouth recommendations, which support your marketing activities. Becoming a socially-responsible business can enhance your reputation with customers, employees and the local media.



## Skills

Getting involved with community growing groups can improve both 'hard' skills, such as project management and 'soft' skills, such as the ability to get on with a wide range of people.



## Networking

Supporting local initiatives generates goodwill and can foster relationships with people who can be helpful to your business. Your employees may develop links with potential customers and suppliers and colleagues or gain understanding of local trends and issues.



## Recruitment

Many potential recruits will be more attracted to businesses with a social agenda and volunteering opportunities. Increased connections with your local community can also produce potential recruits.



## Sales

According to the UK Small Business Consortium, 88 per cent of consumers are more likely to buy from a company that engages in 'socially responsible' activities. Cause-related marketing (where businesses make a charitable donation for every product sold) is very popular with consumers. Your social (and environmental) credentials may also impress public sector buyers.



## Attracting investment

Business' social and environmental credentials are increasingly important to potential investors, who are becoming more aware of corporate social responsibility issues.



## Local economy

Whether the support you give is financial, practical or educational, it's recognised that small businesses have an important role to play in economic regeneration - and a vibrant local economy presents a range of commercial opportunities.



Statistics from Employee Volunteering, an organisation involved in bringing together business and local communities, reinforces the benefits of community support and volunteering:

**97%** of volunteers said activities help **develop a strong team**

**95%** felt that volunteering had a **positive influence on them**

**76%** said it had a **positive influence on how they feel about their employer**

**87%** felt that volunteering **improved their understanding of issues affecting their community**

**98%** rated enjoyment as **excellent or good** - volunteering has to be fun!

Of course, it is not just smaller firms which can gain. Large companies operating a Corporate Social Responsibility policy can reap the benefits outlined above, as well as enhancing the impact and reputation of your business on a regional or national scale.

More information about the benefits of community growing and benefits to business of working with these community groups is available at:  
**[www.growingtogether.community/business-heroes](http://www.growingtogether.community/business-heroes)**



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# How to Get Involved

Regardless of your size, what you do, or previous experience of working with community groups, all businesses can offer something. Often it is better to make contact with a local group or groups and discuss their needs first. For example, not all groups can cope with corporate volunteer days and some may already have specialist skills in-house. It's a matter of finding how best to fit in with their needs.

**Here are just some of the ways your business could get involved:**

## Sponsorship

Some groups may prefer larger sponsorship for a specific project or a smaller amount over a longer period to help with core costs. A business could sponsor an ongoing project such as a group's educational activities, or a particular building or area of the site.

## Volunteering

Large teams of volunteers are ideal for clearing a patch of overgrown land, helping build a structure or making a site more accessible for wheelchair users. Smaller teams or individuals can help at events and open days, or donate volunteering time.

## Donating Skills or Training

Perhaps your business can offer specialist skills that local growing groups need. For example website design, social media advice, office equipment repairs, bookkeeping or accountancy skills to planning advice, architectural services, marketing and promotional training, or trades skills (such as plumbing, heating, electrics, joinery, bricklaying etc).

## Match-funding

Crowdfunding is an increasingly popular way for groups to raise revenue for specific projects. Businesses can offer to match funds raised by the general public. Being able to announce that match funding is in place can help groups to secure other large donations to their appeal.

## Employee Fundraising Activities

Company employees can initiate or participate in regular fundraising activities for a particular site. These could be created by your business with the co-operation of the group and be something that fits in with the group's ethos.

## Discounts or Free Use of Equipment

Providing 'in kind' support is a great way to help. For example, a group clearing a site would benefit from discounted skips or perhaps you can offer free or discounted use of plant hire equipment (and qualified operators where applicable). Creating discount deals builds long-term relationships - for example, Jewsons currently offer a discount scheme on materials to community farms and gardens, as do seed suppliers Kings Seeds.

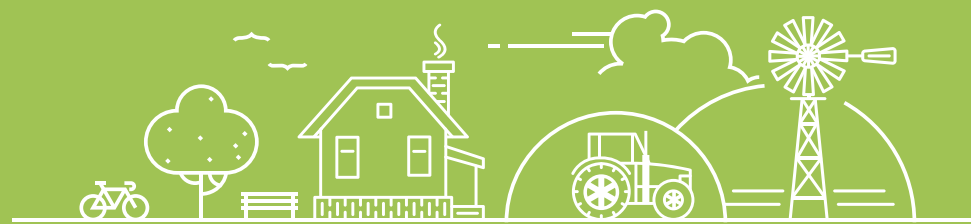
## Business Mentoring Schemes

Elements of business practice, such as marketing, human resources or information on working with public sector organisations could be useful to share.

## Social Entrepreneur Partnerships

Entrepreneurs running sustainable businesses can find much in common with community growing groups. For example, Hackney City Farm in London works closely with Sole Share, a sustainable fish supply company, which rents space at the farm to run its Fish Box scheme. Both benefit from the joint publicity generated.

*Please note: It's important to remember that many groups are led by volunteers with limited time. Decision making can sometimes be slow. Time and patience may be needed to sort out the details of how to help, but it is worth the effort!*





# Growing Together & Business Heroes

Although you can get involved with community growing at any time, this toolkit has been created as part of the 'Local Heroes' campaign run by Growing Together, a Big Lottery funded initiative which aims to help local community growing groups become more financially self-sustaining.

Many groups struggle to make ends meet and rely on grant-funding to stay in operation. But in recent years there has been less of this funding around and more groups competing for it. Growing Together helps groups break their reliance on grant funding and generate more of their own income, including getting support, help in kind and financial resources from business.

We have a team of advisors across the UK who offer information and workshops on alternative and innovative income generation. We use experienced consultants to provide in-depth support. And we have a website with useful resources and case studies to act as inspiration.

Growing Together is also about getting more people actively engaged with community growing groups as visitors, business partners and volunteers. And that's why the 'Local Heroes' campaign is so important.

We hope the campaign will inspire thousands of people and businesses to take action and do something to support the fantastic work these groups do in their communities. And the more heroes we can create, the more people and businesses will be inspired to do the same, long after the campaign is over.

We have enlisted the help of resident BBC One Show and Gardeners' Question Time gardener Christine Walkden to promote the campaign, along with ITV gardener Katie Rushworth and celebrity chef Mark Greenaway. And we are keen that one legacy of this campaign is to ensure the ongoing involvement and interest of business.

Christine Walkden



Katie Rushworth



Mark Greenaway



# Further Information

[www.growingtogether.community/business-heroes](http://www.growingtogether.community/business-heroes)

✉ [localheroes@farmgarden.org.uk](mailto:localheroes@farmgarden.org.uk)

f [www.facebook.com/growingtogether.community](https://www.facebook.com/growingtogether.community)

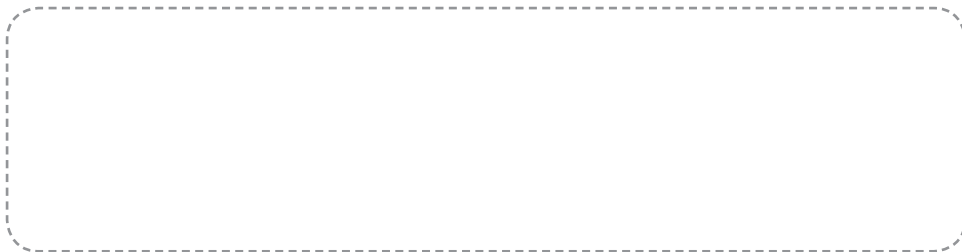
🐦 @gtcommunities

📷 [www.instagram.com/gtlocalheroes/](https://www.instagram.com/gtlocalheroes/)

## Growing Together is a partnership initiative comprising:

- Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
- Groundwork UK
- Incredible Edible Network
- Permaculture Association
- Plunkett Foundation
- Development Trusts Association (Scotland)
- Wales Cooperative Centre (Wales)
- Cooperative Alternatives (Northern Ireland)

## Information about your local group(s)



Wales Co-operative Centre  
Canolfan Cydweithredol Cymru

