

COMFREY PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

WELLBEING

GROWING

CREATIVITY

GARDENING

COOKING

COMMUNITY



THE TEAM

ADVISORY GROUP

Belmira Montiero
Hawi Kussa
Mussei Abrha
Nadheera Reeza
Shanthini Varnakulasingham
Shuhana Jalaldeen
Sultan Kayani

TRUSTEES

Pippa Kendall – Chair
Gail Young – Secretary
Jo Price - Treasurer
Mick Dixon
Tim Kenny
Christine Wright
Penny Schofield

The Comfrey Project
Windmill Hills Centre
Chester Place
Gateshead
Tyne and Wear
NE8 1QB

info@thecomfreyproject.org.uk
www.thecomfreyproject.org.uk

Registered charity 1093365

We would also like to thank all Comfrey Project participants. They have an equal role and contribute their time, energy and kindness to the Comfrey Project. In the interests of confidentiality they have not been named.

STAFF

Yvonne Hartnett - Manager
Craig Puranen Wilson - Communications Manager
Sanja Ratkusic - Horticulturalist
Ian Hendry - Joiner

VOLUNTEERS

Aramata Jatta
Ayad Hamad
Belmira Monteiro
Charlotte Ridley
Fardowsa Gurham
Gebremichael Heile
Hawi Kussa
Jamal Tassisa
Jane Kidd
John Smerdon
Julia Ebbens
Krista Puranen Wilson
Lucy Gabriel
Martin Greenfield
Mussei Abrha
Nadheera Reeza
Pippa Kendall
Sandra Rolston
Shanthini Varnakulasingham
Shuhana Jalaldeen
Sultan Kayani
Yvonne Grant-Mills

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Last year, I talked about the ever more challenging UK context for refugees trying to rebuild their lives.

Little did we anticipate the events of 2015 and 2016 – the rapidly rising numbers of people moving north into Europe in their struggle to find safer, better lives, the increasingly treacherous journeys undertaken and inexhaustible inhumanity of people smugglers, the appalling conditions at refugee camps such as in Calais, Kos and Lampedusa, the tightening of European borders and rise of nationalistic politics and media coverage which has actively promoted racism, and diminishing resources made available in many European countries including the UK to provide welcome and support.

These global events have vastly changed the landscape in just one year in which the Comfrey Project works. But we continue, alongside many individuals and newly formed and more established organisations, to work with the same commitment to support refugees as they endure the asylum process and seek to establish an independent and successful future for themselves.

We've been working hard to ensure that we respond flexibly to what can really make a difference to all our participants' real life experiences and aspirations.

This year:

- we have put together a forward-looking five-year plan that is reviewed and revised every two months by our Trustees to help us to respond effectively to so much change both locally and nationally
- we have revised our Project vision and values to give more emphasis to building skills, resilience and purpose through our activities alongside providing a safe and welcoming 'place to be'. In this way, participants can more quickly establish their new lives when they are given a decision on their asylum application;
- we have made the big and exciting move to a new base in the Windmill Hills Centre. When the Windmill Hills charity decided to cease trading we were asked by Gateshead Council to take the Centre over as an asset transfer so as to continue to develop its use by the local community alongside specific activities for refugees.

We saw a unique opportunity to progress the aims of the Project, both in terms of the range of activities that could be offered as well as working constructively and cooperatively with local residents and organisations and more widely with groups across Tyneside.

We have been able to keep the two original allotment gardens, and now we can offer different kinds of support to participants. We co-work with the Medical Foundation at the Fenham garden to provide a more therapeutic, 1:1 experience for participants.

In contrast, the Walkergate allotment site provides an opportunity for experienced participants to garden independently – HUGE quantities of healthy fresh vegetables have been harvested!

We have developed lots of new partnerships with other people and organisations such as with Greening Wingrove, mosaic making with Hive Arts, with the Red Cross on practical First Aid training, and started a longer term link



with the digital story telling group Curiosity Creative. We also collaborated with Benoit Joret (on a placement from VetAgro Sup in Lempdes, France) on a water conservation and re-use project.

These networks all help with sharing skills and expertise, raising funds, and informing others about refugee experience and issues.

Despite the bleak landscape it has been another very busy and exciting year at the Comfrey Project!

In the past 12 months we have delivered 168 activities and directly supported 119 refugees/people seeking asylum (indirectly supporting over 600 family members), and had 2,273 visits to our three sites.

Information in this report that will give you much more detail about what has been going on. As ever, we remain very thankful indeed to everyone that volunteers and works for the Project, and to our funders large and small.

Together we look forward to tackling whatever the year ahead throws up with the same energy and commitment to ensure the Comfrey Project continues to provide a 'place to be and a space to grow'.

Pippa Kendall

Pippa Kendall
Chair
The Comfrey Project

WHO WE ARE

The Comfrey Project is an unincorporated association with a constitution and was registered as a charity in 2002.

The Comfrey Project is managed by a Board of Trustees who are elected each year at the AGM and normally hold office until the following AGM. Trustees may also be co-opted onto the board until the next AGM.

Day-to-day management of the organisation is delegated to the Manager.

The Chair supervises the Manager and the Manager supervises the other staff members.

All Trustees give their time voluntarily and receive no remuneration or other benefits.



WHAT WE DO

The objects of The Comfrey Project are to provide facilities for the recreation or other leisure-time occupation of refugees and asylum seekers with the object of improving their conditions of life and general well-being, primarily, though not exclusively, through the provision of horticultural activities.

This is achieved by various shared creative activities including allotment gardening, cooking and creative activities. The Comfrey Project facilitate weekly group sessions on three allotment sites in Newcastle and Gateshead. Participants attend weekly sessions and take part in gardening activities, with time to socialise, make friends, and learn about other cultures over a shared lunch.

We aim to provide a safe, welcoming environment, which promotes personal well being through a sense of place and belonging. The allotments are a place of peace and tranquillity in which participants can relax and forget about some of their worries.

Gardening promotes well-being because it takes place outdoors; interacting with the natural world, helping and seeing things grow, with the empowerment and fulfilment that brings. Growing and sharing food is a fundamental human activity that unites us all.

WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED

As we look back on 2015-16, we do so through the lens of our principal mission.

At our core is respect for all participants regardless of background, which includes age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and race. To encourage respect and to improve integration we ensure each activity includes a shared lunch - a time to practice English language skills and be introduced to other's cultures and celebrations.

This year we worked with other community groups to raise awareness about refugee issues and promote equality particularly during Refugee Week, with Manager Yvonne Hartnett and Communications Manager Craig Puranen Wilson involved in both the Citywide Group and the Refugee Week Committee.

We cooked at Denton Community Fayre, attended (and won prizes) at the Newcastle and Moorside allotment shows, and worked with Northumbria University Medical students to facilitate ways of challenging negative comments or aggressive behaviour from other allotment holders.

Staff and trustees are well-informed about asylum seeker/refugee issues and have contributed to Human Rights Roadshow workshops, as well as attending Legal Aid and Immigration Act awareness training. We have provided e-links to published reports about asylum issues, through our social media outlets and newsletter.

We continue to ensure the emotional and physical (safety) and wellbeing of everyone at the project and the offer to participate in a shared activity; a time to eat together and an opportunity to practise English makes a huge difference to participants' confidence and self-esteem, providing a chance to meet people from different countries, receive peer and practical support, learn new skills and sometimes just relax.

The sometimes distressing circumstances of individual participants is a priority at all times and we're aware that in a crisis, other, less pressing, needs may have to wait.

The Comfrey Project continually improves staff and individual knowledge around local and national support organisations and the help they offer, and by keeping ahead of changes we aim to better deal with difficult conversations about issues that may increase anxiety (e.g. detention and removal) leading to the production of a detention information leaflet, giving participants vital information on preparation, and mental health and how to access support.

AT A GLANCE

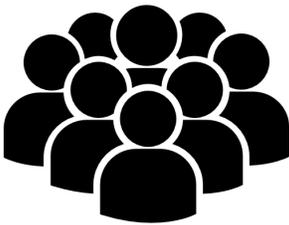
119
PARTICIPANTS
WHO ATTENDED
THREE TIMES OR MORE



26
COUNTRIES
OUR PARTICIPANTS ARE
FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE



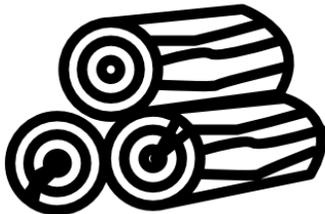
2,273
VISITS
FROM PEOPLE WHO WANT
TO KNOW MORE ABOUT OUR PROJECT



HALF A TON
OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES
GROWN ON OUR ALLOTMENTS
BY OUR PARTICIPANTS



384 SQ. FT.
OF PLYWOOD
USED BY OUR
WOODWORKERS AND BUILDERS



21,000 SQ. FT.
OF LAND UNDER CULTIVATION
THAT'S 0.6 HECTARES OR
ONE & A HALF ACRES



IT'S ABOUT POTENTIAL

Our aim this year has to been to ensure every activity enables each participant to take the next step to achieve their potential.

With that in mind we've taken an individual approach - talking to and getting to know what makes a difference to each person and what can be a barrier to their participation - whether that is confidence, language, hunger, money or skills.

Our collaboration with Curiosity Creative produced a range of digital stories that can be viewed online, each story being an opportunity to learn new skills and discover individual stories and story-telling skills which have included stories about family, spirituality, fear of detention and depression ... and a cat that rescued a baby.

We continue to create a friendly, welcoming, environment that encourages peer support, and carried out a research project with Northumbria University Students to identify important training needs. What did our participants think was important in regards to skills, training and certification? We aim to use this information to plan the future of the project.

We continue to signpost and provide information on 'next steps'; how can participants take up other opportunities, for instance short courses, ESOL, and volunteering with other organisations.

An important part of our work at the Comfrey Project is in 'Building Community Resilience'.

We've built a broad network for profile raising and communications, reaching out to local authorities, public health bodies, grant funders and managers, and business and voluntary sector organisations (both refugee and asylum support organisations and others including those involved in food strategy).



DEVELOPING LINKS

We've developed our links to and involvement with strategic groups such as HAREF, the Migrant Forum and the Clinical Commissioning Group.

We've also connected with Newcastle and Gateshead Food Strategy, Bensham and Saltwell Live and with Detention Forum.

We regularly attend network meetings contributing to discussion on national and local issues and the impact on refugees and people seeking asylum; all linking back to the issues raised through evaluation and by the Comfrey Project Participant Advisory Group.

One of our initiatives was the Living Notice Board, where we invited other organisations to allotments/activity sessions to build trust between them and our participants, increasing knowledge and awareness of available support and opportunities in their communities, enabling increased choice and empowering participants in their choices.

This included visits from Community Police, NHS services (including dental nurses and diabetes teams), the Greening Wingrove community, British Red Cross and Newcastle Volunteer Centre.

A case study

Mr P was having difficulties at the GP surgery and brought a warning letter he received regarding his behaviour. He had never presented any aggressive behaviour at the Comfrey Project.

We knew he was diabetic. It was suggested he meet with a health worker, who had visited the Project on a number of occasions.

He agreed and they drew up a care plan, including having an interpreter when he visited the surgery so that he could articulate his needs and access the health care he needed to regulate his diabetes as well as manage other medical problems.

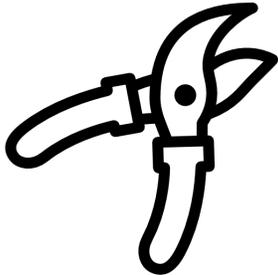
He is now attending ESOL classes



AT A GLANCE

2,392
HOURS SPENT GARDENING

ACROSS TWO ALLOTMENTS
AND AT WINDMILL HILLS



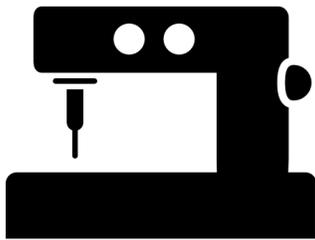
1,776
HOURS SPENT COOKING

AT WEEKLY SESSIONS
AND BY THE COOKING CLUB



960
HOURS OF CRAFTS

INCLUDING SEWING,
KNITTING AND OTHER ART PROJECTS



2,080
HEALTHY MEALS SERVED

OUR PARTICIPANTS EAT
A GOOD MEAL AT EVERY SESSION



6,240
CUPS OF TEA & COFFEE

HAVE BEEN MADE BY OUR
PARTICIPANTS TO KEEP THEMSELVES WARM



SIX
FAMILY DAYS & OUTINGS

HELPING OUR PARTICIPANTS
ENJOY HEALTHY OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES



A POSITIVE APPROACH

In 2015-16 we embarked on a period of strategic development and planning for the future.

We began by taking a positive approach to communications, at all times being sensitive to personal experiences and balancing the need to tell personal stories with individual needs.

This resulted in:

- positive news stories with both BBC and Tyne Tees
- increased knowledge of asylum issues
- increased requests for partnership/collaborative working
- increased awareness of the Comfrey Project and the work it does.
- adapting to a changing landscape

We committed to continuous improvements to our referral pathway, resulting in:

- increased early referral
- an holistic approach recognising that we offer only part of a range of support
- extending an invite to service providers to signpost their activities in order for participants to have direct access to information

We identified organisations with whom we have aims in common including:

- asylum and refugee organisations
- food strategy and health forums
- mental health forums

Increased understanding of where we can change and what we can influence:

- focused on what participants identified was important to them
- receive and distribute newsletter updates of key service providers
- identified a sensitive way of gathering information about the issues that are important to people .



THE FUTURE

The future is looking exciting

This year we're working hard to support and facilitate the involvement of Comfrey Project participants in the creation of our community garden – supporting health activity for both them and well-being for the wider local community and wildlife.

In our Community Space, we'll be:

- learning about the environment and nature
- learning about food production and sustainability
- encouraging social interaction – conversation and exchange of ideas
- training and 'learning by doing', which facilitates change at both a cultural and philosophical level
- providing an information point, which removes barriers to participation, through partnership and collaborative working with a range of advice organisations.

In our physical space, we'll develop:

- an organic garden
- a training room and meeting space
- designated outdoor learning spaces – e.g. hedgerows, a herb garden, perennial plants, and food growing, including fruit bushes and trees and a kitchen garden
- a community/learning kitchen - and using our 'kitchen in a box'
- space for neighbourhood events and celebration
- a "market place"



FINANCE

THE COMFREY PROJECT

Notes to the accounts For the Year Ended 31 March 2016

1 Accounting Policies

The accounts have been prepared on the receipts and payments basis.
An audit is not required by the Charity's constitution and has not been requested by the Trustees.

2 Funds

| | Brought fwd 1 Apr 2015 £ | Incoming resources £ | Outgoing resources £ | Carried fwd 31 Mar 2016 £ |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Restricted Funds | | | | |
| Tudor Trust | - | 25,000 | -25,000 | - |
| Community Foundation - Henry Smith | 13,066 | 5,000 | -18,066 | - |
| Awards for all | - | 10,000 | -5,195 | 4,805 |
| Catherine Cookson | - | 500 | -500 | - |
| Gateshead Council | - | 10,000 | -6,917 | 3,083 |
| Community Food Initiative | - | 2,500 | -1,524 | 976 |
| Grow Wild | - | 4,000 | -984 | 3,016 |
| Garfield Weston Foundation | 2,613 | - | -2,613 | - |
| Allen Lane Foundation | 1,307 | 5,000 | -6,307 | - |
| Barbour Foundation | - | 2,500 | -2,500 | - |
| Pea Green Boat Fund | - | 5,000 | -5,000 | - |
| Willan Trust | 747 | - | -747 | - |
| Rothley Trust | - | 800 | -800 | - |
| Woodward Charitable Trust | - | 500 | -500 | - |
| Hadrian Trust | 933 | - | -933 | - |
| Totals | 18,666 | 70,800 | (77,586) | 11,880 |
| Unrestricted Funds | | | | |
| General unrestricted | 25,657 | 11,373 | (16,487) | 20,543 |
| Totals | 25,657 | 11,373 | (16,487) | 20,543 |

THE COMFREY PROJECT

Receipts and Payments

For the Year Ended 31 March 2016

| | Unrestricted | Restricted | Total 2016 | Total 2015 |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Receipts | | | | |
| Grants | | | | |
| The Big Lottery Fund - local food | - | - | - | 6,563 |
| Awards for all | - | 10,000 | 10,000 | - |
| Tudor Trust | - | 25,000 | 25,000 | - |
| Community Foundation - Henry Smith | - | 5,000 | 5,000 | 37,500 |
| Catherine Cookson | - | 500 | 500 | - |
| Community Food Initiative | - | 2,500 | 2,500 | 930 |
| Sherburn House Trust | - | - | - | 2,000 |
| Garfield Weston Foundation | - | - | - | 5,000 |
| Allen Lane Foundation | - | 5,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| Barbour Foundation | - | 2,500 | 2,500 | 1,000 |
| The Joicey Trust | - | - | - | 2,500 |
| Willan Trust | - | - | - | 5,000 |
| Hadrian Trust | - | - | - | 1,000 |
| Gateshead Council | - | 10,000 | 10,000 | - |
| Grow Wild | - | 4,000 | 4,000 | - |
| Pea Green Boat Fund | - | 5,000 | 5,000 | - |
| Rothley Trust | - | 800 | 800 | - |
| Woodward Charitable Trust | - | 500 | 500 | - |
| Individual Donations | 8,294 | - | 8,294 | 4,728 |
| Rental income | 1,470 | - | 1,470 | - |
| Other income | 1,609 | - | 1,609 | 2,212 |
| Total Receipts | 11,373 | 70,800 | 82,173 | 73,433 |
| Payments | | | | |
| Salaries | 9998 | 49,249 | 59,247 | 65,863 |
| Staff training | - | 535 | 535 | 292 |
| Travel | - | 984 | 984 | 1,513 |
| Session costs and material costs | 703 | 5,074 | 5,777 | 7,069 |
| Garden equipment and materials | 1224 | 1,847 | 3,071 | 218 |
| Participant and volunteer expenses | 360 | 7,313 | 7,673 | 11,359 |
| Rent/Rates | - | 7,398 | 7,398 | 13,390 |
| Insurance | 1033 | - | 1,033 | 971 |
| Office Equipment | - | 342 | 342 | - |
| Repairs and Maintenance | 127 | 69 | 196 | - |
| Light heat and power | - | 376 | 376 | - |
| Printing postage and stationery | 310 | 534 | 844 | 1,447 |
| Cleaning | - | 94 | 94 | - |
| Telephone | 246 | 1,071 | 1,317 | 1,033 |
| Publicity | - | - | - | 190 |
| Subscriptions | - | 174 | 174 | 182 |
| Health and safety expenses | 2332 | 428 | 2,760 | 72 |
| IT costs | - | 492 | 492 | 447 |
| Bank charges | - | 97 | 97 | 144 |
| Relocation costs | - | 867 | 867 | - |
| Accountancy | 154 | 643 | 797 | 805 |
| Miscellaneous | - | - | - | 133 |
| Total Payments | 16,487 | 77,586 | 94,073 | 105,127 |
| Net of Receipts / - Payments | (5,114) | (6,786) | (11,900) | (31,695) |
| Fund balances brought forward | 25,657 | 18,666 | 44,323 | 76,018 |
| Cash funds this year end | 20,543 | 11,880 | 32,423 | 44,323 |

THE COMFREY PROJECT

Statement of Assets and Liabilities At 31 March 2016

| | Unrestricted £ | Restricted £ | Total 2016 £ | Total 2015 £ |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| <u>Cash at Bank and in Hand</u> | | | | |
| Current Account | 21,350 | 11,880 | 33,230 | 28,799 |
| Petty cash | 573 | - | 573 | 280 |
| Ellison services | (1,380) | - | (1,380) | 15,244 |
| | <u>20,543</u> | <u>11,880</u> | <u>32,423</u> | <u>44,323</u> |
| | | | | |
| <u>Assets Retained for Charity's own use:</u> | | | | |
| | | | Office Furniture and IT equipment | |
| | | | | |
| <u>Debtors</u> | | | | |
| | - | 38,949 | 38,949 | - |
| | <u>-</u> | <u>38,949</u> | <u>38,949</u> | <u>-</u> |
| | | | | |
| <u>Liabilities</u> | | | | |
| Creditors | - | 2,514 | 2,514 | - |
| Accountancy | - | 660 | 660 | 600 |
| | <u>-</u> | <u>3,174</u> | <u>3,174</u> | <u>600</u> |

Approved by the management committee on:

10/01/2017

And signed on their behalf by:



Name and Position:

Phillippa Kendall Chair of Trustees

OUR THANKS

During the year a number of people and organisations have helped the Comfrey Project deliver its work. We are very grateful to our funders and the many others who have helped us in 2015-16.

1989 Willan Trust

Awards for All

Tudor Trust

Henry Smith Charity

Catherine Cookson Charitable Trust

Community Food Initiative

Allen Lane Foundation

LEAF

Barbour Foundation

Gateshead Council Capacity Building Grant

Grow Wild

Rothley Trust

Garfield Weston Foundatoin

Hadrian Trust

Woodward Charitable Trust

