

the comfrey project

Annual Report

1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010



The Comfrey Project Team

Trustees

- Ruth Hofbauer – Chair
- Clive Moon – Secretary
- Pippa Kendall – Treasurer
- Richard Adams OBE
- Susan Rowley
- Sead Masic (until September 2009)
- Gail Young (from November 2009)

Staff

- Jayne Butler – Manager (until April 2010)
- Sanja Ratkusic – Project Worker (until December 2009)
- Dorota Antoniak – Project Worker (from September 2009)
- Rebecca Wright – Project Worker (from June 2009)
- Yvonne Hartnett – Garden Support Worker (from January 2010)
- Joe Hughes – Finance Officer
- Peter Prior – Sessional Project Worker (from February 2010)

Volunteers

- John Mills
- Mark Cookson
- Sandra Rolston
- Marianne Butler
- Dave White
- William Mortada
- Johnathan Longrigg
- Will Emmerson
- Esti Rimmer
- Katie Sheinman
- Kathryn Rawe
- Ian Malone
- Jo Cottrell
- Laura Walmsley
- Danielle Peet
- Ben Jewell

*Photo credit – cover and right:
Simon Veit-Wilson*



Structure, governance, and management

The Comfrey Project is an unincorporated association with a constitution. It registered as a charity in 2002. The Comfrey Project is managed by a board of trustees. Trustees are elected each year at the AGM and 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.

The Comfrey Project requires all staff and volunteers that work directly with project users to obtain enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks.

The trustees would like to thank the staff for all their hard work and dedication to the project. In particular we would like to thank Jayne Butler and Sanja Ratkusic, both of whom left the project in the past year. The new staff team have brought fresh enthusiasm and energy to the project and we look forward to seeing the project develop at their hands over the coming year.

Objectives and activities

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.

To achieve these objects, the Comfrey Project runs weekly group sessions on three allotment sites in Newcastle and Gateshead. Up to twenty five project users attend the sessions each week and take part in gardening activities. A shared lunch is also provided for the group.



Many of our project users have suffered severe trauma, so we aim to provide a safe, supportive place of peace and tranquillity in which they can relax and forget about some of their worries. Gardening can be a very therapeutic activity and the act of putting a seed in the ground, nurturing it and watching it grow can have a wonderful healing effect on the individuals we support.

Project workers are on hand to provide support and advice about both gardening related issues and personal issues of concern to individual project users. Where relevant, project users are referred on to appropriate support organisations.

We are fortunate to have a number of volunteers who provide invaluable help with the allotment sessions, both through their gardening skills and by talking and socialising with project users. We also have volunteers that help in other areas such as with human resources, document design, database development and website design. We would like to thank the volunteers for all of the hard work that they have done for the project over the past year.

Achievements and performance

In the period from 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010 we worked with 79 project users over 111 group sessions. We had 31 new referrals in this period of which 19 went on to join the project.

The summer months were particularly busy on the allotments. School holidays and good weather meant that many project users brought their children to the sessions and we arranged activities for them so that their parents could continue gardening.

In the cold winter months of November to February, we moved indoors to community venues. These were generally run as cooking sessions, although we had visits from a range of organisations including Newcastle Libraries and the Aspen Culture Project. As a result of our link with Newcastle Libraries a number of project users took part in their other activities including six who went to London to visit the British Library.

We have taken project users on several visits and trips this year, including to Jesmond Dene, The Great North Museum, Ouseburn Farm and Stepney Bank Stables. In February, we had a fabulous visit to Newcastle Botanical Gardens, who put on a series of activities for our project users and, as a result, we have started our own pineapple plantation!

Impact on the lives of project users

We have introduced ways of working more individually with project users to ensure that they can achieve what they want from the groups they attend. We have had a number of successes and a few sad events too.



Two of our long standing project users, a husband and wife, recently received their refugee status. This has been a big boost for the whole group. We also have two families in the project who have given birth to babies.

One project user was deported to Afghanistan. Two others were held in detention for a month, but have thankfully since been released and have rejoined their group. Many of our project users have had their cases reviewed this year and anxiously await more news on their

decisions. We support them where we can, providing references for their character and contribution to the project.

We have worked with some particularly vulnerable project users this year; some are extremely unwell and we estimate that almost a quarter are destitute. This has led to us working more closely with partner organisations to support them. At times this has been challenging, but we have seen people grow and blossom in the sessions, becoming more confident, attending regularly and taking on more responsibilities on the site, not just for their own areas, but for welcoming and supporting new project users.

We have supported several project users to explore IT training and qualifications. Others are actively seeking work (paid and voluntary) and have asked for our support with applications and references.

Evaluation

An external evaluation of the project was undertaken by Christopher Hartworth of Barefoot Research and Evaluation. This was published in January 2010 and is available on our website.

A number of project users were interviewed for the evaluation. It found that service users were unanimously positive and spoke highly about the project, the activities and staff. "They spoke about the benefits of the project and there was a particular appreciation of the activities that were provided by the project; the gardening, cooking and trips."

The evaluation highlighted the benefits of gardening to the mental and physical health of project users. As one of the project user states: "I come to the project to meet friends and I like gardening. Gardening gives me something to do. Staying at home makes me feel anxious and lonely, but I am happy in the gardening group."

In addition to health, the report also mentions the social development benefits for project users. Many are isolated in their homes but the sessions give them an opportunity to make friends and mix with a truly international group of people. This is also a valuable opportunity for project users to practise and improve their English languages skills in a relaxed informal environment.

Publicity

The profile of the project has increased dramatically in the last year. This is partly as a result of the publicity gained from winning the Guardian Charity Award 2009 and also due to staff giving presentations to other organisations and attending networking events. As well as the award publicity, we were featured on BBC Tyne website and have arranged for ITV Tyne Tees to film.

We launched a new website in February 2010, which has helped to raise the profile of the organisation further and allows us to easily publish news and updates about the work we do.

Future Plans

The current financial climate leaves most small charities in an uncertain financial position and the Comfrey Project is certainly not immune from this. However, we believe that our raised profile and the positive evaluation we received puts us in a good position to obtain further funding and continue the important work that we do to support a very vulnerable group of people.

The board of trustees is currently looking at ways to take the project forwards and expand the service we offer. This work is supported by consultancy from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and will result in the development of a strategic plan for the organisation.



Financial Review

The Comfrey Project does not currently have a reserves policy. However, at the end of the financial year we had £23,229 in unrestricted funds, which would provide about three months running costs in the case of financial difficulty. Any funds that are not needed for the day to day running of the charity are invested in an interest-bearing deposit account.

As you can see from our accounts, the majority of our funding comes from trusts and foundations. We also receive some funding from local authorities and individual donors. We are very grateful for the generous support we have received from our funders and from individuals. We would not be able to provide the service that we do without your help. Thank you!

Declaration

The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' report set out above.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Hofbauer', is displayed on a light blue rectangular background.

Ruth Hofbauer
Chair
26 October 2010

Independent examiner's report on the accounts

On accounts for the year ended 31 MARCH 2010

Charity no 1093365

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 43(2) of the Charities Act 1993 (the 1993 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 43 of the 1993 Act,
- to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 43(7)(b) of the 1993 Act, and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's statement My examination was carried out in accordance with general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair' view and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent examiner's statement In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention

1. which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in, any material respect, the requirements:
 - to keep accounting records in accordance with section 41 of the 1993 Act; and
 - to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 1993 Acthave not been met; or
2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed: 

Date: 13 MAY 2010

Name: EDITH M GREGG

Address: 3 ARUNDEL DRIVE
DUMPLING HALL ESTATE
NEWCASTLE

THE COMFREY PROJECT
Charity Regn. No: 1093365

RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

Restricted 2008/09	Unrestricted		Income Receipts:	Restricted Funds	Unrestricted Funds	Total
£	£			£	£	£
34,041			Big Lottery Fund	0		0
22,546			Northern Rock Foundation (1st Grant)	0		0
9,136			Northern Rock Foundation (2nd Grant)	0		0
			Northern Rock Foundation (3rd Grant)	40,000		40,000
2,600			Your Homes Newcastle	1,802		1,802
	2,000		The Emerton Christie Charity	0		0
	2,000		Sir James Knott Trust	0		0
	20,000		Tudor Trust	0	20,000	20,000
			1989 Willan Charitable Trust	3,000		3,000
			Hadrian Trust	1,000		1,000
			Henry Smith Charity	15,000		15,000
			Gateshead Council	4,000		4,000
			Esmée Fairburn Foundation	5,000		5,000
			eaga Community Fund	5,000		5,000
			Christ's Hospital in Sherburn	5,000		5,000
			Joicey Trust	1,000		1,000
	298		Interest on Investment		46	46
	150		Petty Cash			0
	60		Gift Aid		130	130
	335		Other		1,595	1,595
68,323	24,843	93,166	Total receipts	80,802	21,771	102,573
			Direct Expenditure:			
1,745			Activites	399	171	570
861			Station/Postage/p.copy	552	403	955
			Publicity	397	0	397
33			Sundry		12	12
921			Insurance/Audit fees	920	75	995
2,630			Freelance workers	1,140	200	1,341
			Interpreters	142	117	259
			PU & Staff Protect. Cloth.	211	0	211
			Allotment Rent	258	38	296
30			Staff Training	880	354	1,235
			Garden Equipment & seeds	2,911	31	2,942
			Refreshment Costs	2,217	545	2,762
			Evaluation		3,000	3,000
897			Telephone	496	257	753
4,239			Travel - Beneficiary	1,685	320	2,004
3			Travel - Vol			0
1,274			Travel - staff	580	616	1,196
4,734			Rent	4,421	454	4,875
			Redundancy		3,092	3,092
7,013			IT & Office Equipment	601	84	685
49,476	12,282		Salaries	38,363	6,773	45,136
410			Recruitment	87	41	128
74,266	12,282	-86,548	Total Expenditure	56,260	16,583	72,844
-5,943	12,560	6,618	Excess Income over Expenditure	24,542	5,188	29,730
13,447	4,342	17,789	Fund Balance b/fwd 2008/09	4,365	20,041	24,406
7,504	16,902	24,406		28,907	25,229	54,136
-3,139	3,139	0	Trans. James Knott	2,000	-2,000	0
4,365	20,041	24,406	Fund Balance to c/fwd 2009/2010	30,907	23,229	54,136

THE COMFREY PROJECT
Charity Regn. No: 1093365
BALANCE SHEET for year ended 31 MARCH 2010

2008/09				2009/2010		
£	£	£		£	£	£
5,121	19,516	24,637	Bank Balances as at 31 March 2010	31,066	22,704	53,770
-756		-756	Less Creditors <i>see Note 1</i>	-837		-837
			Debtors <i>see Note 2</i>	678		678
	525	525	Float PW's		525	525
4,365	20,041	24,406	Project funds as at 31 March 2010	30,907	23,229	54,136

The Financial Statement gives a true account of the state of the affairs of
The Comfrey Project as at 31 March 2010



Chairperson
for and on behalf of the Management Committee

Date: 6th July 2010

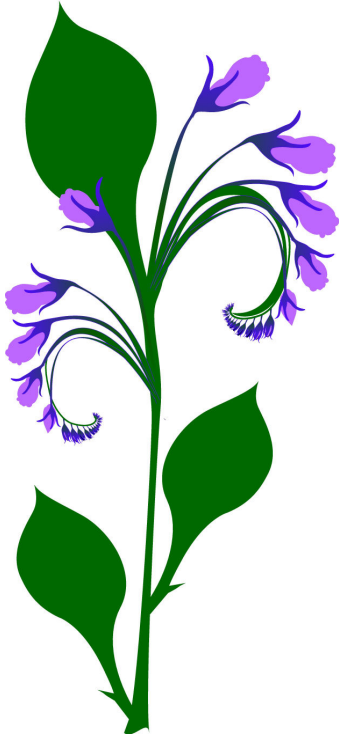
COMFREY PROJECT
Charity Regn. No: 1093365

Note 1	Creditors	£
	Cheque No: 301028	120.00
	301039	104.68
	301043	285.00
	301044	156.15
	301045	126.34
	301046	45.20
		<u><u>837.37</u></u>

Note 2	Debtors	£
	INC. Ellison	677.69

Summary of Specific Grants (Restricted Funds)

	Balance b/fwd 2008/09	Income	Expenditure	Balance 2009/10
	£	£	£	£
Allen Lane Foundation	558	0	-558	0
Your Homes Newcastle	-	1,802	-2,546	-744
Big Lottery Fund	915	0	-915	0
Community Foundation	-	0		0
eaga Community Fund		5,000	-5,000	0
Gateshead Council	-	4,000	-4,000	0
Hadrian Trust		1,000	-990	10
Sir James Knott Trust	2,000	0	-1,962	38
Northern Rock Foundation (1st)	2,831	0	-2,831	0
Northern Rock Foundation (2nd)	61	0	-61	0
Northern Rock Foundation (3rd)		40,000	-9,421	30,579
Henry Smith Charity	-	15,000	-13,975	1,025
Christ's Hospital in Sherburn	-	5,000	-5,000	0
Joicey Trust	-	1,000	-1,000	0
1989 Willan Charitable Trust		3,000	-3,000	0
Esmée Fairburn Foundation		5,000	-5,000	0
Restricted Funds	<u>6,365</u>	<u>80,802</u>	<u>-56,260</u>	<u>30,907</u>
Unrestricted				
B/fwd	20,041			20,041
Tudor Trust		20,000	-16,498	3,502
Other		1,771	-85	1,686
Trans. James Knott			-2,000	-2,000
	<u>20,041</u>	<u>21,771</u>	<u>-16,498</u>	<u>23,229</u>



The Comfrey Project
391 West Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE15 7PY

0191 274 5588

info@thecomfreyproject.org.uk

www.thecomfreyproject.org.uk

Registered charity 1093365

Supported by

The Henry Smith Charity

The Tudor Trust

The Joicey Trust

The Hadrian Trust

The Emerton Christie Charity

The Sir James Knott Trust

The 1989 Willan Charitable Trust

eaga Community Fund

