

ComfreyProject
a space to grow



Annual Report

1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014



THE COMFREY PROJECT TEAM

TRUSTEES

Pippa Kendall - Chair
Gail Young - Secretary
Ruth Cunningham - Treasurer
Richard Adams OBE
Mick Dixon
Jo Price

STAFF

Yvonne Hartnett - Manager
Craig Puranen Wilson - Communications
and Finance Manager
Sanja Ratkusic - Horticulturalist
Susan Adamson - Trainer
Zoe Garner - Volunteer Coordinator
Colette Harrison - Referrals Officer
Yvette Hawkins - Volunteer Coordinator
Ian Hendry - Joiner

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Hawi Kussa
Jamal Tassisa
John Mills
John Smerdon
Krista Puranen Wilson
Mitra Nabavipour
Montse Ferres
Mussei Abrha
Nadheera Reeza
Penny Gibbons
Pippa Kendall
Safia Aman
Sandra Rolston
Shanthini Varnakulasingham
Shirin Ali
Shuhana Jalaldeen
Sultan Kayani
Yves Ndongala
Yvonne Grant-Mills

We would also like to thank all Comfrey Project participants who have an equal role in the organisation, but in the interests of confidentiality we have not named.



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STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE, AND MANAGEMENT

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.

The Trustees would like to thank the staff and volunteers for all their continued hard work and dedication to the Project.



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.

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.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Participation and involvement

Each of our activities offers different levels of involvement and participation and this year has seen an increased sense of ownership in the Project, especially with the development of our Walkergate Allotment, and with the introduction of the Cooking Club.

Work started at Walkergate in the spring. We cleared the site and made it look its best – it represents the hard work and contribution of asylum seekers and refugees.

As part of our winter programme we included trips to other gardens to get new ideas. At Dilston Physic Garden the group were given a presentation by medical herbalist Ross Menzies, and picked spring greens from the garden for a fortifying soup, including dandelions and nettles. Now we have a reason to leave those weeds growing at the edges of our plots.

Bede's World has a museum on site, as well as a medieval herb garden and Tudor buildings. Our visit was an opportunity to learn more about different kinds of planting and share knowledge of planting and growing in our own homes. The open fire in the Tudor House was reminiscent of home for one person, bringing back memories of family cooking.

Garden-based joinery has been increasingly popular, with the construction of a fence and arbour. Everyone was keen to have a tidy, welcoming entrance for visitors. We are now just waiting for the roses and honeysuckle to grow. The group are keen to improve their joinery and practical skills and we aim to develop garden-based joinery as a part of our regular activities.

Twenty people have progressed from being volunteer gardeners and/or cooks and they will be more involved in the direction of the Comfrey Project, making sure that our activities are relevant and support asylum seekers and refugees. We will continue to develop Cooking Club as a new year-round activity – linking it to Food Newcastle and other initiatives in the area. This will ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are able to participate and contribute to local policies which affect them.

We have made greater use of our branding (thanks to Mick Dixon for their design), and they have helped us create an identity around each activity: we were all excited at being able to use our own aprons and the Cookbook looked fantastic.

“When we share our food ... we feel we are something in this country ... we feel we have a place in English society. That is the important thing for me”



Our allotments also have different characters. Moorside is developing into a family space and we built quick raised beds using old tyres so that there was space for children to run around. This both protected the plants and avoided any sharp edges. For those of us with bad backs it also saved on the heavy digging. There are lots of flowers and herbs, things to smell and touch, and brighten up the salads.

At Felling in Gateshead, there was lots of work, particularly shifting manure. Growing wise, it was not such a success, as the ground is heavy clay, but we worked with what we had and the kovo and leafy vegetables thrived. As with our other allotments, however, it is the social space that is important and it was a great year for meeting up, sharing the harvest and supporting each other.

Walker Allotment saw the biggest changes. An additional capital grant from Big Lottery Local Food meant we were able to continue to build the infrastructure – sheds, raised beds and a polytunnel. It provided a chance for everyone to get involved – from building paths to planting, to cooking lovely food. This will be great for extending our gardening activities throughout the winter and as a year-round place to meet.



The Cooking Club and peer cooking programme went from strength to strength. The cooks successfully passed food hygiene training, catered a number of community events, and planned the year's activities, including teaching others to cook foods from different cultures. At the end of February we had our very successful cookbook launch, and celebrated the cultures of our cooks through the food they shared with family and friends. It was an opportunity to launch the recipe cards, celebrate the achievements of the Cooking Club, and sample the dishes we'd carefully created. It was lovely event enjoyed by all and you could see diversity of our Project through the dishes. Although popular, it was very tiring for the cooks; having dedicated a full day to preparing and serving the food. The cooks displayed amazing commitment and showed how important it was to have the opportunity to share and engage with others.

The Winter programme has also continued to evolve, it is an opportunity for participants and volunteers to be involved and pass on their skills to others and is a mix of art and creative activities with the opportunity to learn new practical skills -- this year included cheese making, foraging, making lanterns with recycled tin cans, jam making, knitting and card making. A highlight was Krista's styling workshop for women and men. Using second-hand clothes, she showed how to put an outfit together and make minor alterations. Our thanks to all of our friends and supporters who donated good quality warm winter clothing.





“I used to go to the doctor every other day, but now I come here”



Effect of Outside Influences – Challenges

Asylum seekers and refugees experience constant uncertainty and changes to the asylum process, and increasingly negative publicity in the national press. A report in 2006 stated that refugees and asylum seekers “are being systematically excluded from mainstream society by UK restrictionist policies”. Linked with increasing cuts in public services, this can mean that the most vulnerable in society are less able to access and navigate essential services.

Our allotments sites provide a safe and welcoming place, and can be “buffer” to the wider community. Participants interact with other allotment holders and people with a common interest, building relationships and providing an opportunity for cultural diversity - a shared lunch and opportunity to socialise build respect and sense of belonging. The Comfrey Project is one part of a network of organisations which support asylum seekers and refugees, and it is important that we continue to do so that we can make sure that they not only receive essential services, but that their quality of life is enhanced.

Celebration and Evaluation

Celebration and a chance to look back at where we have come from is very important – not only to the group but to each individual. We have taken lots of photos and whilst some changes are easier to see, others are more personal. Sharing these moments with others is important and we have loved cooking for friends and partner organisations during Refugee Week and at our book launch. A ceilidh in October gives us the chance to look back over the gardening year and plan ahead for winter, and as always the allotment shows give us a chance to celebrate a shared love of gardening with other allotment holders and groups.





Organisational and strategic work

We revised the Mission Statement and Principles, and recognised that these are not just words, but require active steps to implement at all stages of planning and delivery. Using the Charities Evaluation Service model, we identified what we did and how we would measure a change. We all enjoy a day at the allotment, but understanding the small things that make a difference mean constantly being aware of the changes in the individual and in the group.

Sustainability

In uncertain times we are always thinking of ways in which we can be more sustainable; from building our capacity and becoming more efficient at what we do, to looking at different ways of doing things. We have designed and delivered seven garden modules to teach people the basics of gardening and growing in your own space. These were 'trialled' on our own allotments before being offered to other community organisations. Evaluation from the Cooking Club has also given us some new ideas to develop and explore.

In addition to looking at ways we could bring in income, we have also built stronger partnerships with other organisations, and gained a better understanding of what services are being offered, and where we could contribute to shared working.

Again asylum seekers and refugees are at the core of what we do and at our strategy days and planning days they have identified areas of work we will develop in the future.





“We have found our confidence”

The Future

Our core principles are the ‘golden thread’ that connects everything. Over the next year we will examine what this means and introduce new ways of evaluating this. We have already started using the Charities Evaluation Service templates to identify specific outcomes.

We have reviewed our aims for the next three years, which puts the participant at the core of all aspects of our work and ensures that we increase participant involvement and/or influence at all levels in the organisation. The first advisory group meeting took place in April 2014.

We have developed three-year development plan, which follows the cycle of gardening and growing, creating a rhythm and reassurance in its constancy, but it also allows for change and flexibility as new people come into the Project or when the support needs of asylum seekers change due to changes in legislation and Home Office support.

We will continue to develop partnerships which support our aims and enable asylum seekers and refugees to be more involved with their local community, and have their voice at the heart of policy and decision making.

We will set up information gathering and reporting systems to share with other organisations that will identify best practise and gaps in service.

We will continue to work with partner organisations sharing gardening knowledge and our experiences of engaging and supporting asylum seekers and refugees. We will do this by inviting representatives from a range of organisations to visit and share lunch with us, and to experience a day on the allotment. We will also be participating in local allotment shows, sharing our knowledge of gardening and raising awareness about asylum seeker and refugees issues.

We will continue to develop the allotments as a safe emotional space – a place to be for asylum seekers and refugees where they are respected.

A Helping Hand

As a small charity, we rely on the generosity and support of others. This starts during our group activities, where everyone works together to make the Comfrey Project a safe and welcoming place to be – this year we have seen an increase in participants developing and leading different activities. Without their support our winter programme would not be as interesting or exciting.

In particular we'd like to thank Simon Canaway for ongoing support to the website, Sandra Rolston for human resources advice, Krista Puranen Wilson for styling both our winter creative classes and our cookbook, Bill Radford - our man with a van, Toby Lloyd for graphic design and Chris Parry for taking us foraging.

Thanks also to the many friends and supporters who respond to our call for materials and equipment (having limited storage space, we are very appreciative of support when we ask for it); with winter clothes, supplies of art and craft materials, and help and support on the allotments.

Above all we would like to thank everyone for their friendship and support. This quote from Sara, "it is wonderful to know that there are good people in the world and to feel that human touch", demonstrates the positive impact donors and philanthropists have - at a very basic level of reaching out to another person.





Message from the Chair

This AGM and report winds up another joyful, energetic year at the Comfrey Project. It's our 13th year, and alongside lots of changes both in response to participants' ideas (and to the increasingly punishing context of asylum and refugee life), our core values and activities stay strong and ever present. Each year we get better at what we aim to do - we don't chase bigger numbers of participants or tick other peoples' targets or boxes, but we work hard to improve the quality of each participant's experience at the Project.

The photos and participants' words here eloquently tell you the story of 2013/14. We are grateful to many people - large and small organisations, individuals, and many people who we don't even know - who have made their contribution over the year. Thank you.

And please come to visit us at the gardens and share our harvest and a meal, or dance wildly at one of our seasonal celebrations - you would be very welcome!

Pippa Kendall - Chair





FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of the financial year we had £18,850 in unrestricted funds, which would provide about one 1.6 month's running costs in the case of financial difficulty.

The majority of our funding comes from charitable trusts and foundations, with 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:

Pippa Kendall
Chair
6th January 2015



THE COMFREY PROJECT

Receipts and Payments

For the Year Ended 31 March 2014

	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2014 £	Total 2013 £
Receipts				
Grants				
The Big Lottery Fund - local food	-	94,605	94,605	40,102
Esmee Fairbairn Trust	-	20,000	20,000	20,000
Tudor Trust	-	25,000	25,000	25,000
Community Foundation - Henry Smith	-	12,500	12,500	25,000
- Lily Matthews	-	-	-	2,500
Sir James Knott Trust	-	3,000	3,000	-
Community Food Initiative	-	1,080	1,080	-
Lloyds TSB Foundation	-	-	-	12,250
Gateshead MBC	-	-	-	3,280
Newcastle Fund	-	-	-	5,000
Other income	1,325	-	1,325	1,343
Total Receipts	1,325	156,185	157,510	134,475
Payments				
Salaries	-	91,828	91,828	55,547
Freelance workers	-	2,685	2,685	5,380
Staff training	-	2,283	2,283	356
Travel	-	1,519	1,519	596
Session costs and material costs	-	11,167	11,167	5,715
Garden equipment and materials	-	17,645	17,645	2,465
Participant and volunteer expenses	-	10,729	10,729	9,170
Rent	-	15,666	15,666	11,600
Insurance	-	943	943	742
Light heat and power	-	896	896	-
Printing postage and stationery	-	4,589	4,589	2,802
Telephone	-	1,157	1,157	1,041
Publicity	250	940	1,190	920
Subscriptions	-	84	84	-
Health and safety expenses	-	1,820	1,820	-
IT costs	-	2,403	2,403	373
Bank charges	-	61	61	-
Legal and professional	-	1,622	1,622	-
Accountancy	-	325	325	-
Payroll	-	418	418	-
Miscellaneous	-31	131	100	156
Total Payments	219	168,911	169,130	96,863
Net of Receipts / - Payments	1,106	(12,726)	(11,620)	37,612
Cash funds last year end restated	17,744	69,894	87,638	50,026
Cash funds this year end	18,850	57,168	76,018	87,638

THE COMFREY PROJECT

Statement of Assets and Liabilities At 31 March 2014

	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2014 £	Total 2013 £
<u>Cash at Bank and in Hand</u>				
Current Account	14,667	57,168	71,835	87,088
Petty cash	-	-	-	550
Ellison services	4,183	-	4,183	-
	<u>18,850</u>	<u>57,168</u>	<u>76,018</u>	<u>87,638</u>
<u>Assets Retained for Charity's own use:</u>				
Office Furniture and IT equipment				
<u>Debtors</u>				
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
<u>Liabilities</u>				
Accountancy	600	-	600	-
	<u>600</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>600</u>	<u>-</u>

Approved by the management committee on: 06/01/15

And signed on their behalf by:

Name and Position:

J. M. DIXON
TRUSTEE

J. M. PRICE
TRUSTEE

THE COMFREY PROJECT

Notes to the accounts

For the Year Ended 31 March 2014

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 2013 £	Incoming resources £	Outgoing resources £	Carried fwd 31 Mar 2014 £
Restricted Funds				
Lloyds TSB Foundation	7,578	-	7,578	-
Tudor Trust	22,612	25,000	16,376	31,236
Community Foundation				-
- Henry Smith	12,520	12,500	22,452	2,568
- Lily Matthews	2,500	-	2,500	-
The Big Lottery Fund - Local Food	9,070	94,605	109,775	(6,100)
Esmee Fairbairn	15,614	20,000	9,150	26,464
Sir James Knott Trust	-	3,000	-	3,000
Community Food Initiative	-	1,080	1,080	-
Totals	69,894	156,185	168,911	57,168

The Big Lottery Fund - Local Food Project is in deficit due to a timing difference in claiming funds. The Funds were received in May 2014.

Unrestricted Funds

General unrestricted	17,744	1,325	219	18,850
Totals	17,744	1,325	219	18,850



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Registered charity 1093365

In 2013/14 we were supported by

Lily Matthews Fund



the
Tudor trust



THE SIR JAMES KNOTT TRUST



Lloyds TSB | Foundation for England and Wales