

# 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](mailto:info@thecomfreyproject.org.uk)  
[www.thecomfreyproject.org.uk](http://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



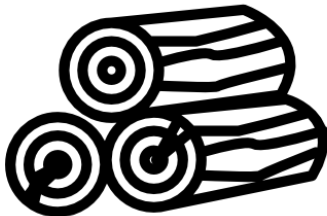
**2,273**  
**VISITS**  
FROM PEOPLE WHO WANT  
TO KNOW MORE ABOUT OUR PROJECT



**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.*

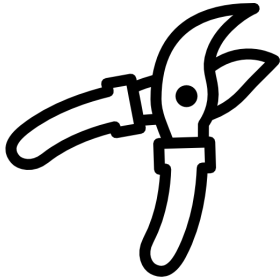
*He is now attending ESOL classes*



# AT A GLANCE

**2,392**  
**HOURS SPENT GARDENING**

ACROSS TWO ALLOTMENTS  
AND AT WINDMILL HILLS



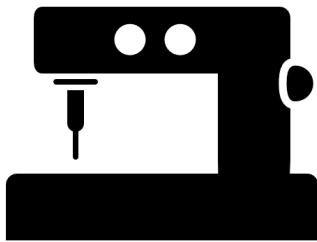
**1,776**  
**HOURS SPENT COOKING**

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

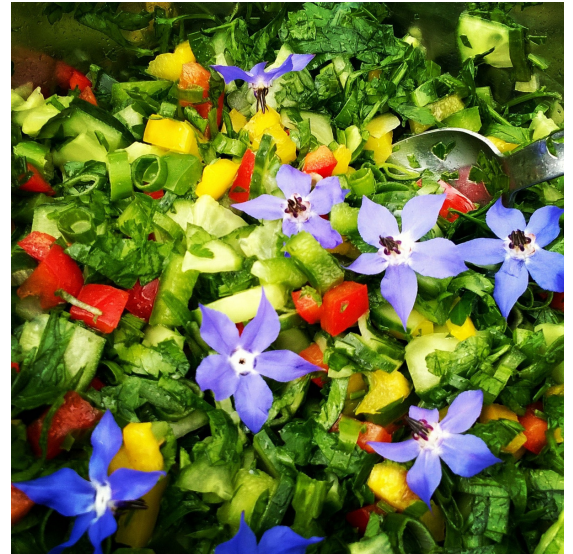
This year we're working hard to support and facilitate the involvement of Comfrey Project participants in the creation of our community garden – supporting health activity for both them and well-being for the wider local community and wildlife.

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

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#### 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 £
<b>Restricted Funds</b>				
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	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>18,666</b>	<b>70,800</b>	<b>( 77,586 )</b>	<b>11,880</b>
<b>Unrestricted Funds</b>				
General unrestricted	25,657	11,373	( 16,487 )	20,543
<b>Totals</b>	<b>25,657</b>	<b>11,373</b>	<b>( 16,487 )</b>	<b>20,543</b>

## THE COMFREY PROJECT

### Receipts and Payments

For the Year Ended 31 March 2016

	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total 2016	Total 2015
	£	£	£	£
<b>Receipts</b>				
<b>Grants</b>				
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	-
<b>Individual Donations</b>	8,294	-	8,294	4,728
<b>Rental income</b>	1,470	-	1,470	-
<b>Other income</b>	1,609	-	1,609	2,212
<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>11,373</b>	<b>70,800</b>	<b>82,173</b>	<b>73,433</b>
<b>Payments</b>				
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
<b>Total Payments</b>	<b>16,487</b>	<b>77,586</b>	<b>94,073</b>	<b>105,127</b>
<b>Net of Receipts / - Payments</b>	<b>( 5,114 )</b>	<b>( 6,786 )</b>	<b>( 11,900 )</b>	<b>( 31,695 )</b>
<b>Fund balances brought forward</b>	<b>25,657</b>	<b>18,666</b>	<b>44,323</b>	<b>76,018</b>
<b>Cash funds this year end</b>	<b>20,543</b>	<b>11,880</b>	<b>32,423</b>	<b>44,323</b>

## THE COMFREY PROJECT

### Statement of Assets and Liabilities At 31 March 2016

	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2016 £	Total 2015 £
<b><u>Cash at Bank and in Hand</u></b>				
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>
<b><u>Assets Retained for Charity's own use:</u></b>				
			Office Furniture and IT equipment	
<b><u>Debtors</u></b>				
	-	38,949	38,949	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>38,949</u>	<u>38,949</u>	<u>-</u>
<b><u>Liabilities</u></b>				
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

