

## Chair of the Board

### Job Pack

Thank you for your interest in working with The Comfrey Project. This job pack should give you everything you need to know to apply for this role.

In this pack you will find:

- Letter from the outgoing Chair
- Our Mission and Values
- Our Theory of Change
- Our Strategic Aims
- Role Specification
- How to apply

Dear Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in becoming the Chair of the Trustee Board of The Comfrey Project.

The Comfrey Board has the capacity for 10 Trustees, and we currently have 7. We have prioritised developing a diverse board and particularly welcome applications from those with lived experience. We are also enhancing our Membership Scheme to encourage and support Trustee applications from people who use the service.

During my time as Chair, the charity has faced numerous challenges, including the pandemic, an increasingly hostile environment for refugees and asylum seekers, the cost-of-living crisis, and recent riots targeting these groups. Our staff under the leadership of our Director, have risen on every occasion with innovative and appropriate solutions ensuring that the needs of service users are always prioritised. Responding to these challenges has inevitably resulted in changes, for example, having to vacate two allotments we held in Newcastle since the launch of the charity. However this has allowed us to grow stronger and effective partnerships within Gateshead. One of our current priorities is the transfer of our garden and building from Gateshead Council via a Community Asset Transfer. This will ultimately lead to new opportunities and widen the scope of our fundraising.

The Comfrey Project is a wonderful space, always warm and welcoming. I have been the Chair for 6 years. It is now time for someone new who can provide the innovation and drive to help lead the charity into the future.

Looking forward to meeting you,

Penny Schofield

Chair of the Board of Trustees

## OUR MISSION AND VALUES

The Comfrey Project provides people seeking asylum and refugees across Tyneside with a safe, welcoming environment, which promotes personal wellbeing through a sense of place and belonging. This is achieved by various shared creative activities including allotment gardening and crafts. We have a down to earth approach to social integration and community health. Listening, sharing and inclusion are fundamental to everything we do.

The **Objects** of The Comfrey Project are to provide facilities and services for the recreation or other leisure-time occupation of the general public, in particular, but not exclusively, for people who are refugees and seeking asylum, in the north of England, with the object of improving their conditions of life and general well-being, primarily through the provision of horticultural and nature based activities.

Our **Vision** is to create a society where refugees and people seeking asylum are included and respected as equals.

Our **Mission** is to:

- Use our gardens as a basis for creative activities which improve physical & mental wellbeing;
  - Provide a safe, welcoming and empowering environment;
  - Empower people to fulfil their true potential and contribute to society;
  - Build skills, resilience, confidence, self-esteem and purpose;
  - Provide learning opportunities, information and signposting to other resources;
  - Highlight the experience of living through the asylum process in the north of England;
- Build relationships, partnerships and networks that enable collaborative working.

Our **Values** are to:

- Regard each person as unique and treat them with dignity;
- Respect everyone regardless of background, and also age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion and race;
- Place participants at the heart of all planning and delivery;
- Be informed, constructive and robust in our work;
- Protect, care for and enhance the environment.

## Core Principles

1. Participants' '**voice**' is at the heart of all planning and delivery.
2. Every participant is regarded as an **individual**, who has their own **unique choices, preferences and aspirations**.
3. **Respect** regardless of participant's background, which includes **age disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and race**.
4. The emotional and physical **safety** of everyone is ensured.
5. A 'place to be' for participants is always present.
6. Every activity will aim to enable each participant to take the next step to achieve their potential.
7. TCP's ethos and culture underpins the delivery of all activities.

TCP's impact, outputs and outcomes are evaluated on an ongoing basis.

## THE COMFREY PROJECT'S THEORY OF CHANGE

WHY	Refugees and people seeking asylum face multiple disadvantage including in relation to health and wellbeing
	Integration happens with concentrated effort at multiple levels and addressing multiple barriers
	Contact with nature and gardening play a significant role in promoting wellbeing and skills
	Participatory, adult learning opportunities support improved opportunities, mental health and inclusion
	There is a lack of appropriate support to address social and wellbeing needs of refugees locally and in general
WHO	Refugees and people seeking asylum who live in and around Tyne & Wear
	Local community of Gateshead
	Adults, primarily, as well as their families
	People needing support to improve their skills, confidence, wellbeing and integrate in the community
HOW	Regular and ad hoc group activities
	Focus on nature and growing, particularly food growing
	Creative, participatory opportunities, framed as 'volunteering'
	Learning and skill/knowledge sharing opportunities
	A focus on personal growth and development, at an individual's pace
	Wrap-around, holistic support
	In partnership with other organisations/services
	By listening, and providing opportunities to participate/feedback at all functions and decisions as much as possible
WHAT (benefit)	
short term	Finding a safe space
	Meeting people
	Regularity/routine
	Fun/enjoyment
	Being active, creative
	Support with immediate, practical matters
medium term	understand own strengths and barriers
	break barriers around mental health
	Increase feelings of safety and belonging
	Build skills & confidence
	Know local community and local services
	Increase understanding and acceptance of refugees by local community and services
long term	People are more self-sustainable & resilient
	Mental and physical health improves
	Improved employment/education/financial opportunities
	Increased cohesion in the community
	Refugees & people seeking asylum are seen as agents of positive change and contribution in the society

## **THE COMFREY PROJECT'S STRATEGIC AIMS FOR 2025 - 28**

### **1. Enhance the Health and Wellbeing of those involved with TCP.**

Objectives:

- Provide a welcoming, safe environment
- Create an empowering user-led environment
- Promote the benefits of nature to health and wellbeing
- Offer a programme of diverse activities and wrap-around support, responding to need

### **2. Create opportunities for integration and cohesion between refugees, people seeking asylum and the wider community.**

Objectives:

- Encourage community participation
- Support refugee communities to retain their cultural identity
- Promote cultural understanding and dialogue between different communities
- Support refugees and people seeking asylum to have equal access to local services

### **3. Support the personal and social development of those accessing TCP.**

Objectives:

- Offer progression opportunities
- Encourage skill and knowledge sharing within our communities
- Facilitate appropriate access to and use of external services and facilities

### **4. Continue to build resilience and thrive as a sustainable organisation.**

Objectives:

- Successfully generate income
- Develop and support and encourage a thriving team
- Foster a positive, inclusive and empowering culture throughout
- Maintain efficient and effective operational systems
- Ensure our assets are well-managed and maintained
- Be recognised as a leading organisation, sharing our expertise with other communities
- Be a socially and environmentally responsible organisation and lead by example
- Be a great partner - develop strong mutually beneficial relationships with like-minded partners

## ROLE SPECIFICATION

### Background

Penny Schofield, our current Chair, is stepping down after six years in the role. We are excited to be looking for a new Chair to provide governance and leadership to The Comfrey Project and to the board, in partnership with The Comfrey Project's Director, Eleni Venaki and our two Vice Chairs, Melisa Maida and Sally Young.

The Comfrey Project is a small charity based in Gateshead committed to providing a safe and welcoming place for displaced people living in North East England. We primarily support adults by providing volunteering and learning activities focused on nature and gardening with the aim of improving wellbeing and community integration. Activities include growing food, garden maintenance, cooking, nature crafts, bee keeping and more. A key part of our operation is engaging with our service users as volunteers to encourage confidence and skills and to nurture ownership, motivation, and pride.

We have a small and dynamic staff team which currently consists of four core members, and three who are hosted on behalf of partnerships with which we are involved. Five of our staff have lived experience of seeking asylum in the UK. The Comfrey Project is, at its core, committed to bringing together people with diverse life and professional experiences and skills. Although we have a small staff team, our strong ethos of sharing responsibility between staff and volunteers enables us to provide support for approximately 600 individuals a year.

### Role Summary

- Provide leadership and direction to the board of Trustees.
- Support the board in accomplishing their responsibilities regarding the overall governance and strategic direction of The Comfrey Project (TCP).
- Ensure that TCP complies with and pursues its objectives as defined in the governing document and any other relevant legislation (including charity law and company law).
- Work in partnership with the boards, staff, and volunteers to facilitate the smooth operation of TCP.
- At this time, help us to fully utilise the opportunities arising from the potential Community Asset Transfer of our premises and gardens from Gateshead Council.

## **Main Responsibilities of the Chair:**

The Chair is a Trustee, elected or appointed to the role, who in addition to the general responsibilities of a Trustee also has additional specific responsibilities:

- Leading the Trustee board in setting both strategy/direction and the policies of TCP.
- Ensuring effective financial scrutiny by the trustee board.
- Convening and chairing board meetings and general meetings as agreed, ensuring that the business of these meetings is conducted efficiently and effectively.
- Planning the annual cycle of board meetings and other general meetings as required.
- Meeting with the Director to prepare the agenda and papers for board meetings.
- Ensuring that decisions taken at board meetings are implemented.
- Working with the Vice Chairs and Director to develop the board including induction, training, appraisal and succession planning.
- Line Management of the Director including regular supervision and appraisal.
- Representing TCP at events and meetings and acting as a spokesperson, as appropriate.
- Sitting on internal HR panels, as necessary.
- Working closely with the Director to ensure smooth functioning of TCP operations and services.
- Addressing any issues that might arise within the board or the organisation.

## **Time Commitment:**

The role requires a meaningful time commitment across the year, dedicating up to 20 hours per month. The time is flexible and includes over the financial year: 4 Business and 2 Development Strategy Board Meetings held in the early evenings; occasional development sessions; regular supervision meetings with the Director, which take place during the working day; and support for urgent matters between meetings, as required. The Chair of the Board presides over the Annual General Meeting of the charity and delivers the Annual Report. Our meetings are held at a day and time to accommodate those involved.

## **Profile of the Chair:**

We are looking for an innovative and visionary person committed to our mission and values who will lead our board as Chair.

The Chair will be required to demonstrate the following qualities, skills and experiences:

- Commitment to the aims and objectives of TCP and a commitment to the values and principles of good governance.
- Experience with or understanding of the refugee and asylum system in the UK and the needs of displaced people.
- Have an interest in, or knowledge of, wellbeing and the benefits of nature, gardening and community.
- Commitment to promoting cohesion and trusting professional relationships.
- Capable of chairing and managing meetings effectively, ensuring decisions are made and acted upon.
- Confidence being in a position of authority, able to be decisive and/or assertive as required.
- Have a good grasp of business and strategic planning.
- Good financial literacy.
- Commitment to the promotion of equality and diversity.
- Commitment to environmental sustainability.
- Have excellent communication skills for diverse audiences.
- The ability to give presentations and speak to and liaise with the media and any external-sector meetings as required.
- Able to communicate effectively in a public relations/ambassadorial role.
- Able to share views openly whilst also listening to the views of others.
- Capable of using tact and diplomacy.
- Able to inspire confidence and engagement within TCP.

## HOW TO APPLY

Please send your **CV and a covering letter** to [trustee@thecomfreyproject.org.uk](mailto:trustee@thecomfreyproject.org.uk), outlining why you are interested in this position and providing evidence of your suitability for the role. Please include the details of **two suitable referees** that we can contact.

The closing date for applications is **30 September 2025**.

The current Chair will stand down once an appropriate new Chair is appointed, but will offer support, induction and advice as necessary.

We encourage all prospective candidates to contact the current Chair, Penny Schofield ([trustee@thecomfreyproject.org.uk](mailto:trustee@thecomfreyproject.org.uk)) for an informal chat. Penny can give you more information about The Comfrey Project, its history and its future direction, and answer your questions about the chair role.

Prospective candidates who are not already familiar with The Comfrey Project should arrange a visit to see the work of the charity and meet staff and volunteers. Contact the Director, Eleni Venaki ([eleni@thecomfreyproject.org.uk](mailto:eleni@thecomfreyproject.org.uk)) to organise.

All applications received by the closing date will be considered by a panel of 3 trustees.

Short-listed candidates will be invited to an informal meeting with the Director, and a formal interview held by a panel drawn from the board of Trustees.

Interviews are expected to take place in the second half of October.