

Growing Enterprise

What is the project?

Gardening and growing your own food has proven to be therapeutic and can provide physical, mental, emotional and social benefits for a wide range of individuals. Horticultural therapy can promote healthy lifestyles by helping people keep active, encourage healthy eating, provide social opportunities, build confidence, link communities, support the development of new skills and work behaviours, and allow for relaxation and recovery from stress or illness. The Growing Enterprise project was established by Garden Organic at Ryton Organic Gardens in September 2013. All activities are facilitated by a fully trained horticultural therapist, supported by school or college staff. The project was initially funded for 2 years by The Daylesford Foundation and The Sheldon Trust.

Target audience

The project provides opportunities for young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and/or challenging behaviour to learn about organic gardening and making horticultural related products for sale within a small enterprise. On the projects, students work in small groups of up to eight, but often less, which ensures that individual needs can be addressed and barriers to learning broken down. Sessions last for about 2 hours and groups usually take part in weekly sessions over a school term. This enables them to experience a variety of horticultural tasks linked to the growing season; seed sowing, crop planning, organic crop maintenance, harvesting, processing and tasting products ready for sale



Outcomes

As well as gaining knowledge and skills in organic horticulture, students develop social skills, build self-esteem and learn about running a small business while enjoying the gardens and learning about organic food growing. The young people are learning entrepreneurial skills in a real life context; growing and making products to sell to real customers, often in a public setting, designing products, marketing and handling money. The work that students complete during the sessions can also help to support them in achieving a range of qualifications which they are working on with their school or college, such as OCN, City and Guilds and ASDAN courses.



A typical session

As much as possible sessions are held outside in the project's dedicated space at Ryton Organic Gardens. Students take part in a practical horticultural activities suited to their ability and mobility needs. The growing area utilises raised beds at various levels, crops in large tubs and a greenhouse with tasks being chosen specifically to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all. During the 2 hour session students will have a 15 minute break and often enjoy a walk in the wider gardens to enjoy seeing the gardens change through the season.



Case study

One student has severe visual and hearing impairment and mobility difficulties. Unsure to begin with, he learned to enjoy exploring the gardens through his senses and became much more confident in the unfamiliar surroundings. When he started the sessions he did not enjoy touching soil and found it difficult to concentrate on the tasks. Towards the end of the term however he was able to help sow seeds in compost and was open to feeling new textures and sensations. School staff who supported the sessions remarked at how calm and engaged he was while he was with the project and were delighted by what he had been able to achieve.

For more information

<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/growing-enterprises-ryton-organic-gardens>

Related projects and organisations

Thrive- www.thrive.org.uk. Thrive uses gardening to bring about positive changes in the lives of people living with disabilities or ill health, or who are isolated, disadvantaged or vulnerable.

Martineau Gardens- www.martineau-gardens.org.uk. Martineau Gardens is a garden and wildlife oasis in the centre of Birmingham, maintained mainly by volunteers with mental health conditions and learning difficulties.

Bridewell Organic Gardens- www.bridewellorganicgardens.co.uk. Bridewell Organic Gardens is committed to offering worthwhile work opportunities in a therapeutic setting to people recovering from mental illness. The overall aim is that this will contribute toward re-establishing a sense of stability and greater wellbeing in Gardeners who attend.



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