

Come Outside! Case study

The value of community gardening to residents of a women's refuge

Area

Rhondda Cynon Taf

The group

Women's Refuge

Supported by

Women's Aid and
Federation of City Farms
and Gardens

Start date

May 2015

Total participants

67

Number of sessions

17

Session types

Gardening

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Women's Aid Refuge in Rhondda Cynon Taf supports women and children suffering from domestic abuse. The group got in touch with Come Outside! following one of their one-off events held in February 2015 and were keen to set up a community garden in one of their refuges. The Come Outside! Coordinator with support from the Federation of City Farms and Gardens has helped the group create the garden from scratch and they run weekly gardening sessions with residents.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

Each week the residents get involved in different gardening activities – they started by building the raised beds and planting fruit and vegetables, then maintained the garden over the summer, finally harvesting the produce.

They keep a scrapbook of what they do each week which helps to build ownership of the garden – as many residents are only at the refuge for a short period of time the turnover of participants is quite high, so ensuring that people feel that the garden is 'theirs' was a challenge. But getting the children to help with the scrapbook and make posters about the garden has helped encourage more residents to take part.

The gardening is a social activity, as well as helping the children (and, often, the mothers too) learn about different types of fruit and vegetables. The kids learn the names and can get involved in watering, weeding and picking the produce. The women are then encouraged to take the produce inside to eat. Support workers are also using the garden produce in healthy eating and cooking sessions; helping the women learn about healthy eating.



What the support organisations said

“It get them out and gives the kids something to do”

“I love being outside and enjoy the gardening. I’d like to get a lot more involved.” (support worker)

“It helps them to socialise more – they are often very quiet and reserved when they arrive and this helps – something like this they don’t have to talk but they can get involved”

“The kids absolutely love it – especially when the weather is lovely”

“Women don’t stay for very long, but the ones that are here for a long time will come out, do a bit of weeding and then pick something for their tea”

“I think it helps with their confidence – they can talk to each other and it’s good to get your hands dirty!”

“We will carry on 100% once Come Outside finishes – we are looking to find a volunteer to take over the running of it”

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

Living at a refuge is extremely disruptive for the women and children, and when they first move in they can be quiet and not want to socialise. The garden is helping residents to socialise in an informal way. It also provides residents who are reluctant to talk to others to get involved; when we visited, one lady had just moved in – she was older than the other women and wasn’t really interested in talking or socialising. But she was a keen gardener and so was enjoying helping out in the garden. It provided her with a bit of normality in what was otherwise a pretty distressing experience.

The garden is helping the residents to socialise more, be more active and have opportunities to engage and play with their children. The support workers explained to us that many women who suffer from domestic abuse often don’t play with their children, and the garden was giving them this opportunity.

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The support workers at the refuge feel that the garden has been a real boost to them. The gardening project is also sustainable – with the refuge committed to continuing the project once the support from Come Outside! finishes.

The Manager told us:

“The garden has changed massively – when we first started we had nothing apart from soil and hope! Over the last few months it’s been lovely to see the women and children involved in the gardening. They’ve burnt a lot of energy filling water buckets, carrying things around and pulling up things (even things they shouldn’t!). They don’t get a lot of opportunity to run around – the rooms are sufficient, but it’s not like being at home. Life here is quite restrictive, so if we can get a family being more active and engage with the local community then that’s great. It can be quite isolating for the mums and children and it’s nice for them to get out and have an activity with the children. They have an activity they can do together and a bit of normality.

What the participants said

“Look, look! I found a giant courgette!! I really like the garden.”
(child)

“It’s a nice way of settling in”

“I feel kind of a bit important now”

“I thought I killed the damn thing. But look, it’s growing! Yayy!!”

“I’m leaving the refuge this week and going into my own home. Now that I know how to grow all these things, I’m going to get some raised beds in my new house, and I’m going to grow potatoes, onions, tomatoes, and I’d really like some mint. Oh and strawberries--the kids have loved the strawberries and I don’t think anybody else got to eat any. I’ve learned loads about gardening and can’t wait to have my own”

Any type of activity where women aren’t forced to open up is good – they have a task to do and while they are doing that the conversation starts and it’s a lot more natural. They learn things about each other that they wouldn’t know and it’s a nice way of reducing the isolation that the women do feel.

It’s a different type of community garden as the women are only here for a short amount of time – but the garden is a constant – it’s here when people want to use it.

We often arrive and people have weeded the beds, or watered the plants – this is happening in between the sessions.

One woman did her first session last week, and we learnt about the edible flowers and herbs in the garden. Today she’s been sharing this knowledge with another woman who has just moved here.”

March 2016

