



About the project

The Gardens of Sanctuary partnership received funding in 2017 to carry out research to contribute towards a report into the evidence for, and challenges of, growing spaces becoming places of sanctuary and opportunity for refugees and asylum seekers.

The report will be released in summer 2018 and is aimed at policy makers, growing groups, funders and others with an interest in this area. The research is being carried out by Sophie Antonelli and Ben Margolis on behalf of the partnership.

Our research has already identified an increasing number of growing spaces around the UK which are welcoming, and/or being led by, asylum seekers and refugees. There is a small body of literature providing evidence for the benefits these spaces can provide particularly with regards to mental health and social integration.

We are now developing the second phase of the project which will include training materials, events and an award scheme to recognize community growing spaces which are also places of sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers.

To find out more, or to see how you could support the project, please contact:

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Around the world, more people than ever in history are being forced to flee conflict and persecution to find safety and sanctuary elsewhere.

For the small number who arrive to seek asylum in the UK, community gardens, city farms and other growing spaces can offer vital and unique opportunities to find community, improve mental and physical health and to learn and share skills.

Gardens of Sanctuary is a partnership between Social Farms and Gardens, the Permaculture Association and City of Sanctuary. Our vision is a network of green spaces with a culture of welcome, in which asylum seekers and refugees feel safe and appreciated as valued contributors and co-creators of community gardens and environmental projects across the UK.

Why Gardens of Sanctuary?

Every year around 30,000 people claim asylum in the UK. Many of these people have been forced to flee their homes to escape war, persecution and sometimes torture. Growing spaces offer unique opportunities for therapy, integration and the learning and sharing of skills from different cultures.

The Gardens of Sanctuary project has carried out a survey, literature review and case studies to develop training and support to ensure that growing groups are prepared for some of the challenges that can come when working with a potentially vulnerable population. This is being compiled in a report which will be released in the summer of 2018.

Case Studies (12 have been carried out for the report)

Growing Together Levenshulme

Growing Together was set up by a group of friends on an allotment site in 2006. They are now a CIO and welcome 10-30 refugees and asylum seekers every Tuesday for gardening activities and a shared lunch. The group is still led by volunteers and has had a huge effect on the lives of everyone involved. In the words of one participant, the main thing people get is 'a supportive community and time away from difficult and chaotic lives in the UK asylum system.'



The Grange, West Norfolk

The Grange is an old vicarage with 10 acres of land in a small village in West Norfolk. Since 2012, asylum seekers have been welcomed on residential breaks and volunteer days and get involved with activities including gardening, working with animals, pottery, weaving and woodwork. Participants have reported significant improvements in their mental health and the local community has become very engaged and supportive of the project. Over 400 asylum seekers have been involved with The Grange over the last 6 years.



Online survey

We carried out two online surveys in late 2017 and received 136 responses from community gardens, and over 30 responses from refugee and asylum organisations.

Some of the key outcomes from the survey include:

- ✦ An overwhelming desire from community gardens to welcome refugees and asylum seekers with every group either already doing so, or saying they wished to do so in the future
- ✦ Some common challenges including language barriers, a lack of staff and volunteers, mental health issues and a lack of knowledge
- ✦ Clear benefits for everyone when asylum seekers and refugees are supported in the right way to access growing spaces
- ✦ The importance of partnerships between refugee organisations and growing spaces to ensure appropriate referrals, training and activities