

Green Spaces Project of the Month - June 2002 - Small Heath Park Community Garden

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The Small Heath Park Community Garden in Birmingham is part of the Concrete and Coriander project. As you enter the front gates of the Park you will find the entrance to the garden on your right. The women meet on Monday at 10am whatever the weather.

This is not a beautifully planted garden, but a well worked and loved piece of land. It is more of an allotment which the 25 members plant for their pleasure and their own consumption. The aim of the project is to enable members of the Bangladesh community to engage with the environment. If you look closer into the project you will discover the far reaching benefits not only to the women but also to the community. The project touches and changes the everyday life's of these women.



About the Garden

The Community garden is headed by the enthusiastic project worker Irene Iwegbe who works for CSV Environment. The women's group was established before they actually acquired the land. Before they had the garden, the women were so eager to do something that they would meet weekly and use plant pots to garden, when they did get the garden, putting them wherever they could. To begin with it was not a garden but an empty space within Small Heath Park which in the past had been used for a range of things over the years. With the help of Peter Short, the Head of Parks in East Birmingham the garden was developed. The garden was also expanded at the end of 2002. Irene said that Peter was of tremendous help and support throughout the project and continues to be.

The women plant vegetables and herbs on raised beds for their families' kitchen table. The women are very supportive of each other. Most of the ladies are from Bangladesh, and if members of the group are away for long periods of time, the remaining members look after their patch until their return.

The group has also got an allotment in the Yardley Leisure Centre, their main crop being garlic, potatoes and Coriander. Irene also supports two other gardens in local primary schools.

Aims of Small Heath Park Community Garden

CSV Environment is part of the national charity Community Service Volunteers. They specialise in working with members of the community who have little or no environmental experience. CSV tackle social exclusion and encourage active citizenship by providing opportunities for people of all ages and background to volunteer.

The Concrete and Coriander project works with residents, especially with Asian women from inner city Birmingham to bring derelict and unused gardens back into productive or recreational use. The project is there to support local people with tools, materials and practical advice. In the case of many Asian women, who come from a rural background, it is the emotional support rather than the gardening knowledge that is needed

The underlying hope is that in the future their skills and knowledge will filter down to other members of the community, giving these gardening projects ownership by the local community with the ability to enable participation independently, without the aid of charities like CSV Environment.

The group's aims have expanded in the directions of Health and Education. The NHS Primary Care Trust have taken an interest in the project with regard to healthy eating and cooking. The women's group goes walking and once a year they attend a garden show and organise events together around cooking traditional dishes.



Future Plans

The project is funded by a range of organisations the Community Fund, Shell Better Britain and Britain in Bloom. The project is looking for funding as they are coming to the end of their current support in November 2002.

Sustainability is very important for this group as CSV will not always be able to support them and Irene is constantly working towards nurturing a range of skill so that in the future, the women may manage the garden for themselves

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