



Redcatch Community Garden

A thriving community garden on a disused bowling green



Sector: **Horticultural**
Location: **Knowle, Bristol**
Grant awarded : **£10,000 through Trade Up**

Grant date: **June 2019**
Ownership: **Community Benefit Society with Charitable Status**

Grant purpose

To support leaders from Redcatch Community Garden to attend the Community Business Trade Up learning programme and put their learning into practice at work, whilst it is flexible how the grant is used

Accountable to the local community

Redcatch is democratically managed by its board and members. Their crowdfunding campaign raised £9,000 and attracted the interest and financial commitment of over 1,000 people

Trading for local benefit

There's an onsite café and shop selling plants, fresh produce, chutneys, apple juice and honey. Site hire from birthday parties and events brings income and street food evenings in the summer are open to all

Broad community impact

Activities bring together people from all walks of life, and courses and volunteering help people develop new skills. Access to fresh produce and the gentle exercise from gardening promote health

Redcatch Community Garden (RCG) has a vision for a connected, healthy and communal space that is welcoming to all. This beautiful community facility offers opportunities for people to learn, socialise, share skills and experiences, relax and improve their overall health and happiness.

A huge range of activities take place, centred around gardening, food production and crafts

sessions plus social activities. RCG grows and sells home produce through their on-site shop and in their café Roots, which sources on a sustainable, affordable, ethical basis.

Knowle is a diverse neighbourhood in Bristol, with some areas experiencing deprivation and other areas being more affluent. Redcatch Park is located between two such contrasting areas, and so the garden is well placed to bring together people from different backgrounds. However, regardless of where people come from, often their needs are the same, for example, escaping isolation, healthy

nse of purpose.



Photos courtesy of RCG

There are regular children's activities including messy play, storytelling, and crafting workshops, delivered by the Redcatch team themselves and by partner organisations who hire the site. Connecting the generations is important and a local pre-school, a primary school and play group are now using the space for learning sessions. RCG has also run a range of adult educational workshops in topics such as 'Happiness and Aspirations' and 'Everyday Healthy Options'.

Volunteering opportunities such as gardening, building and café work, enable people to try out something new and grow their confidence. Around 60 volunteers are registered on the books and between 20 and 25 of those contribute regularly, with more getting involved for special events.

The shining strength of this project is community building, connecting people with different interests and helping them to reach their full potential.



How did they do it?

In April 2017, a passionate group of volunteers came together to turn disused bowling green, empty for 7 years, into this vibrant community project. Co-founders Kate Swain and Mike Cardwell between them have skills in gardening, events and project management and sustainability. They recruited a management committee with equally impressive skills and then took advice from [The Hive](#), before becoming a registered Community Benefit Society (CBS).

RCG began to grow vegetables in just one polytunnel in October 2017. They also received many donations including a number of market canopies – in the beginning founders even contributed



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some of their own money towards a catering trailer. They then ran a crowdfunding campaign in conjunction with Bristol Green Capital which raised £9,000. This paid for a second polytunnel, growing materials and tools, café equipment and a second-hand marquee. The Crowdfunder caught the attention of over 1,000 local people, giving them the opportunity to support the project financially.

It took a big push to get the growing side of the project up and running with an initial outlay for the polytunnel and raised beds. In the first year the project didn't have much of a growing plan, but at the end of the second year (Jan 2020), a second polytunnel and a professional grower employed for two days a week have made a huge difference to the productivity of the site. The project now sells 20 different varieties of salad, and at the end of 2019 sales of fresh produce covered its costs for the first time. The on-site shop now stocks fresh fruit and vegetables as well as homemade sauces and chutneys, apple juice, honey from their own hives, and even homegrown loafahs.

These social opportunities build a sense of purpose, community and belonging. A community garden is so much more than the sum of its parts and becoming involved can be a transformative experience

Mike Cardwell

Co-founder

An important milestone was the purchase of the marquee which opened up more opportunities for site hire. Events are a significant income stream with over 100 birthday parties a year, pop-up street food events, puppet shows and 'Library rhyme time' for tots. The onsite café generates the largest turnover, it is run efficiently, but profitability is low due to the need to employ staff rather than volunteers.

At the time of writing in early 2020, Redcatch Community Garden employs three people part-time.

Making a difference to real people

Getting involved in food growing in an urban area is regenerative for both the local people and the environment. Volunteers benefit from the gentle exercise of gardening, easy-going socialising and the restorative effect of simply being outside and working with nature. The education and volunteering aspects to the garden means people can build their skills at the same time.

Meanwhile, the gardening methods used are environmentally sensitive, enriching the soil with homemade compost rather than artificial fertilisers. Producing and selling food locally bypasses many of the negative environmental impacts often associated with commercial production such as soil degradation and heavy use of chemical inputs (which in turn pollute waterways), energy intensive processing, plastic packaging and the pollution associated with long-distance food haulage. The commercial food system as a whole accounts for 20-30% of global carbon emissions ([Foodsource](#))– in this respect locally run, small-scale and community-led schemes have many advantages.



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The future:

Redcatch are planning to get four more beehives and launch a vegetable box scheme for 20 households. They have recently acquired a second-hand catering container which they plan to fit out using funding from the M&S Community Business Challenge. This will enable the café to start making their own soups, sausage rolls and healthy meals to improve profitability.

RCG aim to support volunteers with additional needs, and are looking for funding for a volunteer coordinator before going ahead with this.

They hope to work more closely with organisations and retailers to divert surplus food from landfill to tummies as part of their 'Abundance' project.

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