



PERMACULTURE
ASSOCIATION

CASE STUDY

Creating Thriving Communities

A Permaculture Approach

Permaculture is an ethical framework used to design regenerative systems at all scales – from home and garden to community, farm and bioregions.

We live in a time of great uncertainty and unfolding crises with the social, environmental and economic failures of the current system being cruelly exposed by rising inequality, social division, increasingly precarious and insecure employment, loss of biodiversity, accelerating climate change and the inability of an increasing number of people to meet their basic needs for good food and housing.

In this project we are exploring how people across Britain are working to create thriving communities!

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**NATIONAL
LOTTERY FUNDED**

Growing Links CIC

Penzance, Cornwall

Community: Adults experiencing mental health issues, adults in rehab and detox, local mental health day care facility (adults and some young people), women's aid from refuge, recovering alcoholics, addicts, long term unemployed, young people, families experiencing food poverty, kids with mental health difficulties in youth group. Teenage mums.

facebook.com/GrowingLinksCIC

Overview

The community group was formed as there was a genuine concern for people accessing food in the community. The church was overrun and unable to keep up with demand. Cuts to funding and support for people living on benefits was reduced. The research campaign to end child poverty campaign over the last 10 years showed that there has been a 41% rise every year for last couple of years in child poverty. There is a lack of provision for adoptive kids, people living with mental health difficulties and people living in the care system.

With further cuts in welfare support people were not getting the right help. Food poverty is a serious issue with children not having enough to eat. We were based at an accessible space in the heart of town to develop a food growing culture and we had a long term vision. We could see the need for a food resilience strategy in this town, with parents skipping food, breakfast clubs inundated with kids. There were thousands in this position, just in our community. With declining services and an increase in need, we took on food as an issue to empower people to grow their own.

We became a food activist organisation, empowering people of all ages to combat food poverty and work to help people improve their mental health and wellbeing. We do this in a natural environment using therapeutic and educational tools. It is effectively an outdoor community centre.

Permaculture

Permaculture is part of what we teach. We offer introductory courses for people who come to the site. We teach people how to design using the

principles of permaculture and we use it in the gardens. The youth group practice permaculture through growing food in the gardens and they were also involved in creating a design for the space.

We are planning to start offering a Permaculture Design Course. Whoever comes, learns about permaculture through gardening. We have recently made an application for some funding to run free permaculture courses at the garden and run a whole Permaculture Design Course.

Earth care

We have taken a field and made it into a fully productive food garden, by enhancing biodiversity, cleaning the water, building the soil, and creating and protecting spaces for wildlife. We have improved the ecology of the area. We have empowered people to be earth stewards. We have developed wildlife areas and a pond and attracted wildlife. We have improved the area by planting fruit trees and flowers. We have encouraged people to learn to respect food through growing it and helped to connect people to the earth.

We also campaign for other things in our locality to be more environmentally friendly e.g. reducing plastics in Cornwall, creating a hub for the localised movement for environmentalism and environmental protection. We are part of broader networks and connect people to those.

People care

We offer supervision to all of our volunteers. We evaluate the needs of volunteers, we take them through a reflection process by meeting them and going through their experience with them. We are unable to do so much evaluation with people who are living on the streets or homeless but keep track of what's going on in their lives.

We empower people to grow food to take home. We offer therapeutic support, counselling, and other courses. We run a horticultural course at the garden. The space is a therapeutic sanctuary as an inclusive and safe space. It is a dry house with no drinking or smoking and is a



sanctuary for safety and recovery. We do lots of expressive and reflective work based on the work of Jon Young, such as using exercises to boost self-esteem discreetly. We are conscious of people's mental health needs and not wanting to label people. We have fully trained support workers and those people who have knowledge of growing and what we teach there. People can come and get involved on an equal level. It's a very equal environment.

Fair shares

We campaign on rights to land, rights to food, we offer people food to take home, negotiate with the council for green spaces. We are looking for more spaces we can develop for food. We try to make a safety net for food and collect food surplus from the supermarkets. There are loads of people living in B&Bs who don't have a fridge/kitchen. We collect food from restaurants, volunteers cook it and serve it or redistribute it to people who need it. In the community there is a huge need for there to be a fair share. There is massive inequality. People experience deep poverty related problems.

Outcomes & monitoring

Overall outcomes for the project include productivity; as a board of Directors we look at the sustainability of the project and the financial stability. When people come to us we do an assessment of their mental health. We keep track of them every couple of months and we always do supervision with volunteers too. We share information with directors where and we consider safeguarding. After their initial assessments, we signpost people to the right help. We support people to do paperwork to access services. Sometimes, we invite people to have housing meetings in the garden as they feel more comfortable there.

After the assessment and signposting, we support people to take practical actions. Our outcomes are to support people, offer a safe place to rebuild their lives and build confidence. With young people, for example there is a great desire to talk and so we host opening and closing circles as part of our monitoring.

Many of their outcomes are very well documented as they enjoy making videos, for example. We take photographs and we write up testimonials from young people and adults. We use action learning guilds so that people can learn together.

Case study

Young Food Activists – young person mentorship and social action programme



A Mum we'd previously engaged was concerned about her daughter and asked if she could join the project. The young person's mental health was in serious decline. There were issues of depression, anxiety, ongoing self-harm by cutting, manic episodes and psychosis. The family were struggling to cope with these complex needs and the Mum especially was feeling totally lost and estranged from her child, and herself struggling to put food on the table at home.

We spoke with the young person and parent about the deep issues surrounding her child, stemming from social media culture, lack of connection with friends and incredibly low self esteem. We introduced the young person to The Young Food Activists. Although initially not keen to commit to a youth group, thinking issues that surrounded her at school would follow her to this other social group, she did join. She didn't like to talk

in group, eat any of the food the group prepared, join in much. It was clear she had little confidence.

We started slowly, using therapeutic and expressive tools such as the unplug box, journals, creative sessions, getting the young person working with her peers and the community doing physical work such as digging, planting and carpentry. She had never been in a garden before and slowly became more confident. She started to really enjoy the hard work, engaging with others, helping others and eventually didn't even mind not having her phone!

Like the rest of the group we encouraged her to get her hands dirty, talk about issues she cared about, campaign about these issues, visit other organisations, meet different people in her community and finally design and deliver her group social actions to benefit others. We also provided signposting to other youth services and regular one to one time with staff and supervisions

We have worked closely with Mum, keeping communication open and offering support to her when and where we can, and she often joined our sessions. The improvement in the 7 weeks this young person attended the Young Food Activist project has seen an amazing turn around in her life.

She no longer self harms, goes to therapy, and volunteers cooking for the homeless. Her school has noticed an improvement in her confidence and attendance and her family say her ability to cope with stress in all areas of life is much improved.