



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!

www.permaculture.org.uk



**NATIONAL
LOTTERY FUNDED**

Horton Community Farm

Cecil Avenue allotments, Bradford City Centre, BD7 3BW

Community: Students, asylum seekers and refugees, adults with mental health difficulties, adults and young people with learning difficulties, those who are unemployed or underemployed, children and their families (home schooled children from a wide variety of communities), local community & those interested in permaculture.

www.hcf.org.uk

Overview

Horton Community Farm (HCF) was started in 2009 as a volunteer project, by members of Transition Bradford. It was designed as a permaculture project on a Permaculture Design Course in Hebden Bridge. It was quickly started by a group from Transition Bradford wanting to take action on the state of the food system and local environment.

The farm is in the heart of Bradford's City Centre, started on an area of statutory allotment which was near derelict. Volunteers cleared 100 tonnes of rubbish from the site and transformed the area through funding the creation of different areas, to follow 5 strands of work; education, wildlife, volunteering, therapy and food growing.

Incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee, a social enterprise and worker's coop HCF was given a farm tenancy agreement in 2011 with the council's allotment office. With volunteer labour, the site has been transformed to provide food growing outdoors and under cover: in 2 commercial polytunnels, a therapy garden to support adults with mental health difficulties, a microplot area to encourage people to start learning how to grow and a forest garden where forest schools and outdoor education is run. The site includes a purpose built therapy garden and a horticultural therapy program working with adults with mental health difficulties and they have trialled a pilot project offering horticultural therapy to asylum seekers and refugees. They also run twice weekly volunteer sessions open to anyone and regular sessions for children and their families.

Permaculture

Horton Community Farm is a permaculture LAND centre. The initial design for the whole space was designed as part of a Permaculture Design Course (PDC) in 2009. Subsequent designs for different parts of the site were developed on a PDC at the University of Bradford. These further designs included designs for the Community hub area, forest garden area. An additional design for the Horticultural Therapy garden was completed by a staff member as part of her Diploma in Horticultural Therapy.

The garden and the program were both designed with the ethics and principles of permaculture in mind. All aspects of the permaculture design have been implemented, although much has been changed due to circumstances and the outdoor area under cultivation being reduced. Since piloting the horticultural therapy program and starting to run outdoor education sessions a design was produced for phase 2 of the project, getting input from staff and volunteers using the [Design Web](#). This phase of the project which includes perennializing more of the site and working towards getting the horticultural therapy program commissioned is currently being fundraised for.

Earth care

The project has been designed in order to protect an overgrown allotment from the risk of being seen as disposable. The farm is bringing a valuable green space in the heart of inner city Bradford back into use for food production, whilst simultaneously increasing habitats for wildlife. We have significantly increased the species present on site across different types of insects and birds, through the use of different wildflowers and creation of new habitats. We also still have foxes on site, despite our development of it.

People care

Through all strands of work, education, health & wellbeing are at the heart. Through horticultural therapy, which works with some of society's most vulnerable people, such as the destitute asylum seekers and refugees and homeless people we work with or through encouraging homeschooling parents to use our site to educate their children and themselves in nature observation and connection. We aim to create a space which has something to offer to all sectors of society.

Fair Shares

When people work on site they are offered refreshments and light lunch, making the process of working together sociable. Similarly, produce grown on site is given away to asylum seekers and refugees who attend through referrals as well as any volunteers. HCF is always thinking about reciprocal pathways and offers work-trade solutions to people wanting to attend courses, making free places for those who attend sessions on the site either through referral or as volunteers.

Outcomes & Monitoring

The horticultural therapy program has a very structured way of monitoring progress with asylum seekers and refugees who are referred to the program and the initial pilot made use of the wellbeing star, but it was found that it was quite tricky for people attending the first time without much English. A very simple smiley face system was developed. Similarly, the project introduced vocabulary to attendees in the first weeks to encourage them to practise their spoken English and reading. For this reason, it is also important that local people attend the project to encourage real opportunities for conversation as well as connecting to and finding out about opportunities in the local community.

Since the start of the funded project HCF has used the NEF storyboard monitoring and evaluation system to encourage participants to share their views of the project, its progress and what might get in the way of the project achieving its goals. This has been a useful way to get feedback from volunteers and participants on how they see the project and forms the basis of what HCF calls their storyboard and tour guide to the site.

Recover and Grow

Recover and Grow is HCF's horticultural therapy program which was successfully piloted in 2014-15 and has been running informally since. The initial pilot program worked closely with a variety of organisations to take referrals for people to attend the site as gardeners. Initially working closely with a housing association and then with an NHS specialist mental health team working with homeless people and new arrivals to the area. The project then started receiving referrals for individuals to attend the site via numerous projects working with asylum seekers and refugees, in particular those who are part of the City of Sanctuary network and Bevan Healthcare specialist GP service for asylum seekers, refugees and those who are homeless or in precarious housing circumstances.

Case Study

Abdul came to Horton Community Farm in 2016. He had been referred via Bradford's NHS Homeless and New Arrivals team, one of the referral partners. They refer people in order to garden and gain therapeutic benefit from being outdoors, growing food and meeting other people, eating and chatting together.

Having been in the UK for 15 years, as a Kurdish asylum seeker originally from Iraq, he had still not been granted asylum, despite the dangers if he were to return to his homeland. Abdul came to us at a time when his health was suffering and he had revisited the doctor due to his mental health. A quiet soul at home in the mountains of his home country, looking after sheep, Abdul brought a sense of peace with him, as well as a huge range of outdoor and growing skills which he wanted to share with people, along with his beautiful singing voice.

Abdul enjoyed coming to our regular gardening sessions, in particular he enjoyed making fires, over which he regularly cooked the soup for the group, singing all the while. Abdul had the following to say about the project: "This is my favourite job. When I come to gardening I am very happy because I am at home in nature and understand her well. I like being outside and in a quiet place."

He spent more than a year gardening with us, has been in the UK 17 years and still doesn't have asylum. He moved to Sheffield to live with friends and continues to garden with Oasis Gardening, a project supported by Sheffield Flourish, and he has returned to visit us.

