

# Kushinga Community Garden

Birmingham



## Gardens of Sanctuary Case Study

Community growing spaces welcoming, supporting and working alongside refugees and asylum seekers

## Kushinga Community Garden at a Glance

<b>Established in:</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Location:</b>	Birmingham
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="https://kushingablog.wordpress.com/">https://kushingablog.wordpress.com/</a>
<b>Structure:</b>	Unincorporated Group
<b>Staff:</b>	Occasional sessional workers
<b>Volunteers:</b>	8-10

### Project History

Kushinga Community Garden is located about 3 miles from Birmingham city centre, in a residential area that was originally part of the Barrow Cadbury estate. The small garden was set aside for community use by the estate and has been managed by local volunteers since 2011, in partnership with a neighbouring housing project.

The garden is open to all, but specifically promotes its activities to refugees and asylum seekers, and as such the majority of their volunteers are sanctuary seekers.

### Current Services

During the growing season the garden is open 1-2 days per week, and over the winter sessions run once every few weeks to keep the space tidy and well maintained.

The garden has a group of about 5 core volunteers, and sessions usually attract around 8-10 participants, although this can be up to 15 on a busy day.

The garden has recently installed a compost toilet, and hopes to fundraise to build a shelter and outdoor cooking space.

### Outcomes

Coming to Kushinga Community Garden helps volunteers feel more connected to their community, giving them opportunities to socialise and avoid becoming isolated and lonely.

Volunteers find out about events happening in the wider community by coming to the garden and meet local people, helping to increase integration across the community.

Organisers have also observed improvements in volunteers English, as well as the new practical skills they have learnt in horticulture and food growing.

For many volunteers, the community garden is the only green space they visit. Spending time outside, coupled with the opportunities to socialise has meant that several participants have seen their mental health improve.

For volunteers living on very low incomes, having access to free, organic fruit and vegetables has been another benefit.

### Community Impact

When the garden first opened there were some initial negative reactions to the project locally, resulting in a fear that the garden might even be vandalised. Through regular open days many local people have now visited the garden and this fear has dissipated and the reaction is almost always positive.

Local people who have attended the open days have also participated in plant swaps, taking away and planting plants that Kushinga volunteers have grown.

Organisers feel that the garden has helped change people's opinions locally about refugees and asylum seekers, and dispel some of the negative views they may have held.

## Problems and Barriers

Almost all of the volunteers at Kushinga are sanctuary seekers, and as such experience huge amounts of stress and hardship in their personal lives as a result of the difficulties of living within the UK asylum system. It can take quite some time to earn people's trust, and equally it is very important that participants feel that they are trusted within the garden.

As a result of the pressure of being a sanctuary seeker, tensions, disharmonies and occasional conflicts can develop. These have occurred most often around questions of power or hierarchy, which can be especially challenging when working with a group of people who have very little.

These tensions have usually been able to be within the group through talking and discussions, although the organisers do feel that having training in conflict resolution would be of benefit, and building in more time for discussion and contemplation into

sessions would help keep disagreements to a minimum.

When issues arise it is also helpful for the garden to be part of a wider network of organisations who support refugees and asylum seekers, as they can get specialist advice and support if it is ever required.

## Future Plans

The garden has recently partnered with a local charity, who has agreed to assist them with financial management and funding applications, and in 2019 the group hopes to apply for funding to enable them to develop a shelter and outdoor kitchen for the garden. They have also recently seen, after several very busy years, a reduction in participation due to volunteers moving away or experiencing changes in their lives in some way, so will be recruiting new volunteers ready for the next growing season.

Compiled by Sophie Antonelli and Ben Margolis

For more information about Gardens of Sanctuary go to <https://gardens.cityofsanctuary.org/>

Gardens of Sanctuary is a partnership between *Social Farms & Gardens*, *City of Sanctuary* and the *Permaculture Association*. We have a shared vision of 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.

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

Our case studies and report are intended as useful resources for any community growing space who is working with refugees and asylum seekers, or who would like to welcome them in the future. Find all our resources on our website [here](#).