



# Gardens of Sanctuary

## Sydenham Garden

Lewisham, London



## Gardens of Sanctuary Case Study

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

## Sydenham Garden at a Glance

<b>Established in:</b>	2002
<b>Location:</b>	London
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="https://www.sydenhamgarden.org.uk">https://www.sydenhamgarden.org.uk</a>
<b>Structure:</b>	Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee
<b>Staff:</b>	10
<b>Volunteers:</b>	50+

### Project History

Sydenham Garden is a wellbeing centre that uses its gardens, nature reserve and activity rooms to help people recover from mental and physical ill-health in Lewisham. It was founded in 2002 by a small group of residents who began work to preserve and improve a neglected nature. The group was constituted as a charitable company limited by guarantee in 2004.

The garden is now used by a variety of groups from the local community and further afield, and offers particular groups for people with significant illness including mental-ill-health and dementia.

In 2015, the project opened a new site nearby which operates as a market garden and means Sydenham can offer more diverse activities to their users (identified as co-workers).

### Current Services

Sydenham Garden offers four main services:

- The Garden project helps people to recover from mental ill-health through 2.5 hour sessions for up to 12 co-workers.
- The Art & Craft project offers creative activities to help people with recovery through 2.5 hour session.
- Growing Lives is based on the market garden site and offers horticultural therapy sessions, drop-in opportunities and a chance to achieve Open College Network accreditation.

- Sow and Grow is focused on offering support to people in the early stages of dementia.

In addition to this, in 2016 Sydenham Garden began discussions with the South London and Maudsley NHS trust who had identified that a significant number of Sri Lankan Tamil men were being referred for mental health treatment. Most of these men, but not all, were also in the asylum system and showed signs of torture and trauma.

The NICE guidelines for the symptoms these men were displaying recommend Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing, but psychotherapists felt this was not appropriate or effective for this group. Instead they wanted to set up support groups and give people opportunities to integrate into their local community.

The South London and Maudsley Trust put funding in to enable a 3 hour weekly session for up to 8 men to come to the garden. The first hour is spent with a horticultural therapist and involves gardening and building projects on the market garden site. The following 2 hours involve a peer-to-peer support session facilitated by an NHS psychotherapist, usually with the support of a trained interpreter.

### Outcomes

The group use the CORE Outcome Measurement Tool before, during and at the end of people's engagement with the project. They also use the Impact of Events Scale

which is available in multiple languages (including in Tamil).

Critically for the project, the NHS does not require people using the service to show improvement in order for the group to receive continuation funding. It is recognised that this is a highly vulnerable group and for some people only having a minor worsening of symptoms can be a relative success.

## Ongoing Support

The group offer some flexibility to the length of referrals, but aim for around 20 sessions. During the time the men are involved with the group they are being supported and encouraged to also use the garden in other ways including to attend drop-in sessions.

When the psychotherapist feels that someone is ready they are referred on to one of the four key services provided by the garden noted earlier in the case study. Some of the men have gone on to build a long-term relationship with the project with fantastic outcomes for their mental health. Evaluations for Sydenham Garden's core projects are all available on their website.

## Future Plans

The charity plan to continue their current work projects, and are developing an ambitious three year plan to expand their services.

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### *Case Study: M.*

M has been attending the art & craft group at Sydenham Garden since August last year after being referred by his support worker. In the months prior to joining, M had experienced a very difficult time in relation to his mental health. He feels that taking part in the art & craft group has helped him to occupy himself, to concentrate, to feel inspired, and to take his mind off all other issues.

M enjoys all that is art & craft! He loves learning new mediums and skills and is currently working on a sphere structure woven with willow. He has also produced some fantastic pieces using printing techniques learnt in the group. He finds all the people here really helpful and kind. M believes that being part of the group has really improved the quality of his life in terms of allowing his passion for art to flourish, but also by building his confidence to socialise and to feel more relaxed with people.

M has recently started giving his time to the volunteer centre Lewisham, helping out with data entry each week which he is enjoying. He is also doing courses in pottery, drawing and painting, and is keen to learn more about IT and further his English skills.



## 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](#).