

Urban Roots

Glasgow



Gardens of Sanctuary Case Study

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

Urban Roots at a Glance

Established in:	2009
Location:	Glasgow
Website:	https://www.urbanroots.org.uk/
Structure:	Charity
Staff:	10 part time
Volunteers:	100+

Project History

Urban Roots is a community-led charity working across the Southside of Glasgow. They manage a community garden, a community woodland and a community allotment, as well as working with local residents to transform numerous green spaces.

Current Services

In addition to their main activities, Urban Roots have partnered with local organisations to engage with refugees and asylum seekers living locally. They were funded by Southside Housing to work with the Govan Community Project, a local organisation who support refugees and asylum seekers, to run a weekly gardening session for attendees of a women's group who meet at a community flat in a nearby tower block. The sessions are really well attended, and women often travel from all across Glasgow to attend them, in part thanks to the fact that their travel costs are subsidised by the charity.

Urban Roots have also recently begun to work with Freedom from Torture, a charity who provide specialist therapy and support for survivors of torture. Freedom from Torture have their own growing space nearby, but were finding that their staff did not have the gardening experience to ensure that it flourished. Through funding from the health service, secured by Urban Roots to offer therapeutic horticulture, they have been able to send a member of staff to work with the

group there, and also participate in their very popular outdoor cooking sessions.

Outcomes

The sessions run with the women's group have proved really popular. Women very often bring their children, share their skills and stories, and talk about things they learnt when children themselves. The women enjoy being able to cook together, and also take produce home, and they have also been very keen to learn about keeping houseplants and window boxes as most of them do not live somewhere with a garden, and some have experienced racism when visiting other green spaces so do not go outside often.

There has been lots of peer support happening within the group, with many women making friends and then helping each other with things like letter writing and filling out forms.

The provision of a travel subsidy seems to have been key in enabling many of the women to attend. A family session that took place in the same venue and advertised to the same group, but without the ability to pay for travel costs, was attended by very few sanctuary seekers.

Problems and Barriers

There have been no major problems within the women's group. Language barriers can sometimes be challenging but are often overcome collectively, where one participant will help translate for another, or through using non-verbal communication.

Occasionally there are tensions within the group, but these are dealt with by staff from the partner organisation rather than by Urban Roots, who do not have the same level of ongoing relationship with the participants.

In some sessions where there have been a mixture of sanctuary seekers and other local people there have been some incidences of racism, both from participants and also sometimes from their children. This has been very difficult to confront and resolve, and they have sometimes had people react very badly when their own words, or those of their children, have been questioned. The group feel that having some training in how to respond to racism, or how to have difficult conversations, would be really beneficial for their staff and volunteers.

A barrier to people attending sessions has often been travel costs, and even when there has been a subsidy to reimburse this, people cannot always afford to pay for it up front in the first place. Urban Roots has found a

solution to this issue by purchasing books of day pass tickets from the local bus tickets, and distributing them in advance for their participants to use.

Future Plans

The work with the women's group in Govan is continuing, although now monthly rather than weekly due to funding restrictions. The Freedom from Torture gardening sessions are also continuing, and Urban Roots have been assisting the charity in finding a more permanent base for their therapeutic horticulture. In addition to this, they are now piloting a psychotherapy programme in partnership with the British Red Cross, and have also had success running introductory volunteering sessions through Volunteer Glasgow. These taster sessions have brought several sanctuary seekers to the project who may otherwise not have felt comfortable joining one of the main projects straight away.

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](#).