



UGAIN

Urban **G**Ardens for the social
INtegration of migrants

Garden:

Growing Together Levenshulme



Internet links

✓ <https://www.facebook.com/GrowingTogetherLevenshulme/>

1. Introduction

Growing Together Levenshulme is a small garden developed by a group of friends on an allotment site in Manchester, in the North of England. The garden is not open to the public and they run a weekly therapeutic horticulture session for refugees and asylum seekers. The garden is run based on organic, vegan, permaculture principles and is led by a group of volunteers who manage the space, apply for funding and organise activities. Due to the very low incomes that most refugees and asylum seekers has, the group provides bus fares to enable participants to reach the garden and attend sessions.

As part of each session the volunteers and participants prepare a large communal lunch, often using produce from the garden, and all share this meal together.



“Go for it! Build positive relationships with the allotment committee and other local groups as this can be a really fruitful and beneficial relationship. Always value the wider community integration.

Don't ever give legal advice. Always be aware of your own privilege and how power dynamics can affect the group. Remember that people are living very stressful lives and have been through very traumatic experiences. Don't treat people like children.

In order to even get to where they are, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have to be incredibly resilient, so always value this. Don't look down on or pity people and make sure you always treat everyone with respect and dignity.

Recognise that sometimes people just need some space, so give them it.”

2. Garden data



Location - coordinates:

Levenshulme Allotments
Highfield Road
Levenshulme
Manchester
M193JX

<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/>

Garden description: The garden is approximately 100m² and is located within a larger community allotment site in the Levenshulme area of Manchester. It has 2 polytunnels, a small timber building, a small shed, a shipping container for secure storage and a number of fruit and vegetable beds, all of which are worked communally. The plot is rented from the local authority on a rolling 1 year lease.

The garden began working with refugees and asylum seekers in 2011 following a grant of £10,000 GBP, and now has around 100 participants in total (not all at one time). There are around 10 people on their management group and they also have a steering group made up of both volunteers and participants who help make key decisions for the charity and make plans for activities to happen in the garden. This group was set up to help meet the organisers' desire for a flat hierarchy, but also the participants' desire for structure and a clear decision making process with accountable people.

The garden costs around £10k per year to run and maintain, with 75% of this being spent on bus fares and food for participants.

3. Social integration and empowerment of migrants



Details of the Initiative: The garden was set up as a space where people can create community and support each other, and to provide a space where people could garden and access the many benefits that this activity provides.

Chances/Opportunities: The group has had lots of feedback from participants that describes the positive impact that the group activities have had on their mental health, including giving people a reason to leave the house, overcoming isolation, anxiety and depression and finding supportive people who can relate to and share their problems.

The group has seen participants become more confident and "lighter in their being", sometimes over the course of a session but also over a period of years. They feel that having a break from "being an asylum seeker" and just being able to be a person and a gardener for a while is a really positive and therapeutic break.

Maintaining a positive and caring atmosphere and making sure that people feel a sense of ownership and feel that they are part of something together means that it is easier to bring people together and reconcile disagreements, which can occur especially when people are living very stressful lives.

The participants themselves have brought a very strong work ethic to the group, and are very keen that people work hard when they are at the garden rather than just using it as a place to socialise.

Challenges/Threats: Most of the challenges that the group face come from the fact that their participants are living very challenging and stressful lives as a result of their refugee or asylum seeker status. Sometimes conflicts arise as a result of this, and sometimes the participants want the volunteers to manage the project in a manner that is different to what they intended initially. They have overcome these challenges by being open and flexible.

A potential future threat is the short tenure of their 1 year rolling allotment lease, so they are starting to discuss the possibility of a longer lease with the local authority.



General Considerations: The hardship and trauma that participants may have experienced, either in their home country or in the UK (or both), can have a profound effect on individuals and group dynamics in both obvious and subtle ways, as can the constant strain and uncertainty that being part of the UK asylum system entails. Evaluation shows that the garden is a very significant part in participants' week and their feeling supported in their lives in Manchester.

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