

Case Study

HEALTH

**Grow Time
– Poverest
Allotments**



Space number: 120
Lead organisation: London Borough of Bromley
Borough: Bromley
Postcode: BR6 0HP
Size: 420 sqm
Target group: Older people and marginalised groups
Land type: Allotments
Land owner: Local Authority
Cost: £1,000



Background

An initiative called Greening the Grey began in 2010 and aimed to set up new growing areas across Bromley. Due to the large number of people learning to grow, a training area at Poverest Allotments was created. Having seen the health benefits from Greening the Grey, the council met the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to discuss links. The PCT were delighted to work in partnership and set criteria for including people in the project. This included the over 60s, those with mental health problems or learning disabilities, and the Gypsy Traveller community. This wider group of participants led to the change of name to Grow Time.

How was the growing space created?

- Participants were recruited in a variety of ways including flyers, posters, and contact with other local projects, such as MIND.
- The group met at the site and took immediate ownership by designing and building the garden together.
- A neglected piece of allotment land needed to be reclaimed and the process of working together on this plot helped to integrate the group with other allotment holders.
- The group received a grant from Capital Growth plus support from staff within the council. They also acquired some free materials, including wood from a local wood yard and a garden shed from the council's transport department.



What has been achieved so far?

A regular course has been provided at the site to teach people how to set up and run growing areas. Due to the diverse make-up of the group it was important to build a bond between them to ensure group members supported each other and built friendships. This has been an overwhelming success. The stories of new hope and enjoyment for individuals who are depressed, ill, or isolated, make moving reading.



One example is Tony, who left the armed forces with Gulf War Syndrome, after years of service. A downward spiral resulted in homelessness for three years. After getting help from a group called the Warrior Project, Tony tackled his demons and joined Grow Time. He has now found his true self by working with nature and the land. He learns new things every week and is making gardening his life, already winning a Best Front Garden prize. Neighbours now ask him to help design their front gardens. Tony still has bad days but instead of hiding away like he used to do, he now makes every possible effort to get to the course. He says that Grow Time has changed his life.

Another group member is Maxine, who has a mild learning disability and had chosen to leave her day service. It resulted in her staying at home and becoming very depressed. A chance meeting encouraged her to join Grow Time and she has since lost eight pounds and never stops talking about it! She has a new set of friends, new skills and has developed the confidence to join the local gym. She is working hard on improving her diet and is not shy to tell the group what they are doing wrong with theirs!

The project is run with one structured teaching session during the day, which focuses on jobs that need doing at that time of year. The group learn about propagation, soil preparation, composting, building raised beds, crop rotation, identifying weeds, creating insect habitats and much more.



Top tips and lessons learnt



- Select the right leader. They must have knowledge of horticulture to earn respect and be able to give advice. They must also be able to deal sensitively with the more timid group members.
- Find a pathway for people to move on. This could mean giving them their own plot or setting up a more formal, constituted group to enable them to apply for their own funding.
- Finally, go for it! As a result of starting the project the group is now planning another separate project on a new space.

What were the main challenges, and how have they been overcome?

The project coordinator was keen to recruit not just from society's mainstream, but to work with those who are 'outside the system' and therefore most at risk. Group members were found by, for example, visiting local churches and placing leaflets in people's prescription bags at chemists. Advertising in charity shops proved successful and people were also asked to think whether their neighbours could benefit.

Group dynamics can be a challenge, so participants were encouraged to share experiences so that everyone could celebrate their achievements and understand if someone may want to be on their own. As a result the group felt more like a family!





How has Capital Growth supported the project?

The project received a Capital Growth Grant of £1000, and has also benefited from networking events and discounts.

What next?

With or without more funding the group will carry on. However, because they pay for a horticultural expert, some finance is needed in the future. There are plans to set up a big horticultural site on a large unused allotment site where a lot more training can be given, but this will need to be set up as a charity or social enterprise.

What is Capital Growth?

Capital Growth is a partnership initiative between London Food Link, the Mayor of London Boris Johnson, and the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund. It is championed by the Chair of the London Food Board Rosie Boycott and aims to create 2012 new community food growing spaces across London by the end of 2012.

Capital Growth offers practical help, grants, training and support to groups in London wanting to establish community food-growing projects as well as advice to landowners.

This is part of a series of Capital Growth case studies.

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