


## Case Study

### REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Southwark Day Centre  
for Asylum Seekers







**Space number:** 1297  
**Lead organisation:** Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers  
**Borough:** Southwark  
**Postcode:** SE5 8LR  
**Size:** 100 sqm  
**Target group:** Asylum seekers  
**Land type:** Allotment site  
**Land owner:** Local authority  
**Set up cost:** Donations and recycled materials

## Background

Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS), in collaboration with Camberwell Gardens Guild, runs the Community Allotment Project which supports clients of SDCAS to enjoy growing food at the Grove Park Allotment site. The project is coordinated by a volunteer from SDCAS with support from the Camberwell Gardens Guild Allotment Secretary. Clients attend gardening drop-in sessions led by these volunteers at the allotment once a week.

## How was the growing space created?

The project started in 2009 after some of their clients lost the use of a small growing plot in a local play area. It was suggested that SDCAS take over a derelict corner of the allotment run by Camberwell Gardens Guilds. The project has been successful in securing a number of small funding awards for materials and workshops. There has been limited funding for staff so the project has been run mainly on a voluntary basis.

The project was started with no funding. SDCAS paid the annual allotment subscription and Camberwell Gardens Guild membership (£32 pa) and materials were donated through volunteers. Southwark Council then provided funding for raised beds, pathways and fencing. Since then the project has been successful in securing funding from a number of sources with an interest in the environment, communities and refugees, for example:

- Lush Charitypot - £4,070 for beekeeping, trips, workshops and materials.
- Truemark Trust - £3,000 for trips, workshops, materials.
- Cooperative Community Fund - £2,000 towards project coordinator, trips, workshops, materials.
- AB Charitable Trust - £5,000 for project coordinator costs.



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

Any reservations from the Allotment Committee were overcome by focusing on building strong relationships, maintaining a productive plot and helping other allotment holders. *"We have added a lot to the site and people recognise that. People are very pleased, positive and supportive"* said a client.

It is difficult for some clients to attend sessions regularly and on time due to appointments or health issues. There is a core group and then others come more in-frequently so the group has adopted a flexible approach to running sessions.

The main volunteer did not have any gardening expertise at the start but the group just worked it out together. This has created a strong sense of ownership for clients from the start and helped to establish a strong group.



## What are the benefits?

The food growing project has improved the well-being of clients by providing a sense of purpose, a structure to their day and overcoming isolation. Sessions help them relax, escape their situation and enjoy the nurturing element of gardening. *"There is dignity in doing"* explained Nicky Bashall the Project Co-ordinator.

The asylum seekers and refugees involved are building a track record of being in a work-like situation, gaining confidence in their abilities and developing new skills such as horticulture and hard landscaping.

## Testimony from Joseph, a client

*"When I was an asylum seeker I was not allowed to work. It makes you feel very low, depressed, hopeless. The length of time to wait for papers, it makes you feel ill. You have nowhere to go, its very lonely. To come to the garden project, it's a good thing to do, you get more relaxation, more purpose. You give something to the community and being involved in the community is good. You meet new people and learn things. I have my papers now but still no work, but its very satisfying in the garden, planting something and then it's a nice feeling when you see it at the end... Its like my family, it gives you confidence again, socialising with other people is good for you, I have fun. I am sleeping better too."*







## Top tips and lessons learnt

Involve the clients from the start - they are the biggest asset for the project in terms of labour, skills and ideas and can be the driving force for what can be achieved.

Be flexible - find a core group of enthusiastic clients but recognise others will come and go.

Bring consistency - find a volunteer or member of staff that can coordinate the project and bring consistency in what can be an inconsistent world for clients.

Be part of a bigger organisation - this can help the financial sustainability of the project by providing help for long term fundraising, and showing the project is part of a bigger project, which gives funders confidence.

Look for an easily accessible site - finding a place to grow that is close to services already being used by clients will make it easier for them to attend the sessions. Allotment sites are ideal as they are well managed and provide safety and stability to clients.

## How Capital growth can help your organisation establish a food growing space?

We advise our members how to set up food growing space, secure land and access funding. We also provide food-growing training, advise on grow to sell, corporate volunteering, host networking events and London wide events.

Membership is free. To find out more and join Capital Growth visit our website [www.capitalgrowth.org](http://www.capitalgrowth.org)