

EVALUATION  
TRUST



A Collaborative Evaluation of the  
Gardening project at  
St. Mary Magdalen's Centre for  
Asylum seekers, Islington 2006-7

***Collaborative Research to Establish the Value of the  
Environment in Improving Social Justice-  
BTCV in partnership with Black Environmental  
network and the Evaluation Trust funded by  
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# CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
1. Background.....	1
2. The Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation.....	2
3. The Findings .....	4
4. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	11
5. Appendices.....	13

**Many thanks to all the volunteers and staff of the Centre who became involved at different stages and willingly gave their time and views, especially Helen Wallis, the BTCV gardening project volunteer who wrote much of the report and facilitated the evaluation work.**

**PHOTOGRAHS TO BE PLACED IN REPORT ALONG WITH OTHER MATERIALS  
IN APPENDICES**

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## 1. Background

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### 1.1 Introduction- The St. Mary Magdalen Centre for Asylum Seekers

The Centre, run under the auspices of the Anglican church, operates from the basement of St. Mary Magdalene church premises on the Holloway Road N7. It operates:

- a drop-in service providing basic advice and information for asylum seekers
- Basic ESOL classes Monday - Friday 10am - 2.30pm but have no creche as it is too expensive
- Meals Monday and Friday 11am - 3pm.
- Clothes store and food parcels.
- Work placements
- Interpreting and translation services for refugees and asylum seekers
- Reading club,
- Art classes;
- Befriending.

They have at any one time some 80 learners (all over 19 years and at entry levels 1-3) who move onto mainstream or other community provision or occasionally into work after 2 years. Some users withdraw because of health reasons, and occasionally experience deportation or dispersal. They have a good retention rate - 70% over the two courses each year. They had a very positive Ofsted report.

Their learners are mainly Albanians, Kosovans, Turkish Kurds ( 50-60% ) , and some Congolese and Eritrean users; 80% are women; 20% are men and many of the learners experience significant mental health issues.

There is a local team of 25 volunteers and staff. The volunteers are mostly white local residents, recruited mainly through word of mouth and open volunteer days, and not particularly from church membership. Some were learners with them and have been with them for up to five years- for example the caretaker. The Centre does not advertise its existence for fear of provoking a hostile reaction.

The Centre was funded until recently by the City Parochial Fund, and with a small church rent but this funding has recently ended and the Centre is seeking new funding. The ESOL work comes through the Waltham College franchise which means that only 56% of the funding comes to the Centre to fund the work. Recently there is news that the government will be withdrawing much of the funding for this work and require charging of learners which is not possible for these groupings.

The building is based in a local authority park and the Park Ranger and until December 2006, the BTCV Islington Community Engagement Officer, Sheena Gladding, helped a group from the Centre cultivate a bed in the park in Summer 2005. During 2005-6, the local authority was starting to consult the park users about its future development. They used a variety of ways to consult local people especially the dog walkers, the young people, the Church, the Centre users and the 'drinkers'.

### 1.2 Recruiting a volunteer for the Gardening group

BTCV identified this project and the BTCV worker as appropriate for this collaborative evaluation work. The Evaluation Trust worker, spoke with the BTCV worker about the possible evaluation work and it was agreed to explore the idea with the Centre. She set up a meeting in December 2005 for both of them with Andrew Ruiz Palma, the Education Co-

ordinator. During the meeting it became clear that there was no existing group, but some people who had been part of the Summer project, some of whom had already moved on, and that given the lack of staff, there was a need for a volunteer to support and develop this work. Possibly at that point the Evaluation Trust should have withdrawn, but there seemed real interest.

The BTCV and Evaluation Trust workers developed a BTCV Volunteer Officer job description and with the help of the Volunteer co-ordinator for BTCV, Helen Wallis was interviewed and recruited in March 2006. Helen has a background in teaching ESOL to refugees and asylum seekers and is therefore really familiar with the work of the centre. She is a keen gardener and wanted to carry on working part time but use this opportunity to break into the environmental field. She made good use of the free training BTCV offers its volunteers. The timing of this work was really good as the Centre had just appointed a new Co-ordinator, Collette Joyce, who wanted to build up the Centre's work beyond the ESOL work, and in particular the social and environmental aspects.

The aim of the Gardening project was to help empower and support the asylum seekers to cultivate a park bed next to the Centre as an enjoyable experience that could also relate to their ESOL work.

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## **2. The Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

### **2.1 The scope and purpose of the Collaborative Evaluation work**

The scope of the collaborative evaluation was to engage gardening project participants, the Centre staff including ESOL staff, Helen as the gardening project volunteer, the BTCV worker (now withdrawn) and others (e.g. park users, the consultant involved in park redesign) in a process of reflective evaluation. This process would assess the value of the work done through the gardening project work for the participants, the centre and in small ways the wider community, and possibly identify a way forward. The purpose of the evaluation was to identify the soft outcomes of the project if any for users and to highlight the difficulties of running an activity with this specific user group, or others like them.

### **2.2 The Questions the evaluation work needed to answer:**

The evaluation questions identified by key stakeholders included:

- What difference has taking part in the gardening project made for participants? Enjoyment? Improved physical and or mental health? New skills, confidence and quality of life? New friends?
- What difference has having the gardening project made for the Centre and the ESOL programme?
- What's worked well in the gardening project? What has not been so good about the gardening project? What, other than the time issues, stopped people getting involved? How could the project be improved? Is it the project of sufficient value to warrant seeking funding for a part time worker?
- What benefits have there been for the wider community? Has it helped the local community become aware of the issues faced by asylum seekers/ refugees or changed perceptions of the Centre?

## 2.3 Methods and Participation

Critical to the evaluation work was the involvement of Helen and a core of group members in undertaking interviewing of other participants in order to develop their skills as community researchers. We had ambitious plans about the kinds of evaluation the learners could do if they wanted to, including video and computer work. Some of these skills would be useful as ESOL extensions; some would add to CVs; and some would really appeal to some of the young people who were not interested in gardening. Also training to interview park users for their reactions and trying to see whether it challenged their views of refugees- maybe linked to an 'open day' of the 'beds'.

In the end we did not have a strong enough group to undertake this work as planned but the Centre, the BTCV worker and Helen would really like a collaborate evaluation undertaken involving Helen working with one of two of the group members.

### **The methods used by the evaluators were:**

1. Worked with Centre staff and volunteer to identify gardening project members and ex members who might get involved in the evaluation.
2. Helen met a number of key learners and ex learners to explore with them whether they were willing to:
  - o be interviewed themselves
  - o interview others- often in mother tongue but then transcribed in EnglishHelen and the Evaluation Trust worker developed the topic guides. The learners were given £10 voucher for the five completed interviews, with extra monies for the learner volunteer who completed the interviews with other learners.
3. Helen wrote up her notes, thoughts and experiences of the project, and the Evaluation Trust worker explored these in detail with her.
4. Evaluation Trust worker interviewed Centre staff, the ex BTCV worker now working for the local authority in the Green Space programme, and the park consultant.
5. Helen informally interviewed park users and the park Keeper.

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### **3. The Findings- the volunteer's story of the Garden project**

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#### **3.1 Starting work**

Helen Wallis, the gardening project volunteer, tells the story<sup>1</sup>:

I am an ESOL teacher with a keen interest in gardening and I wanted to gain experience in the environmental sector with a view to changing my career. I started volunteering as the BTCV Education Officer in late March 2007. My remit was to start up a garden project among ESOL learners at the centre. In 2005, some learners had planted up a trial bed in the park, growing flowers and vegetables. The Centre in conjunction with BTCV advertised for a volunteer to continue and extend this work. Two main garden sites were offered – the initial “student bed” to the South of the park and the area directly outside the Centre entrance. In addition we had the option of planting next to the hedge behind the South bed.

I felt that growing vegetables would be particularly rewarding for the garden volunteers as they could literally eat the “fruits of their labours” and share the food with those who had not been actively involved in the project. This would encourage others to get involved and could be linked with teaching around healthy eating and environmental sustainability. It would also give people, who are on very limited budgets, access to free fresh food. Some of the learners are from rural backgrounds with substantial experience of agriculture and not only would they bring vital knowledge to the project, they would also gain confidence at being the expert rather than the student.

Unfortunately, hygiene and security issues meant that growing vegetables in a public park was not viable. The option of using space at the nearby City Farm was discussed. However, I felt that this could only start once the main church project was up and running, as I did not have time to devote to both at once, and it was not clear if we had a viable number of learners. Instead, I decided to concentrate on growing flowers with an emphasis on environmental sustainability – perennials and hardy annuals which would self seed rather than bedding plants, avoidance of pesticides and herbicides, and increasing soil fertility through organic means.

#### **3.2 Making contact and consultation with all the stakeholders March - April 2006**

The first stage of the project was consultation with key figures and interest groups in the project. This included:

- Asylum Centre staff including the Centre Manager, the ESOL manager and tutors
- Church workers
- The park consultation team who managed the arts/theatre event
- The Islington Park Ranger
- Glendales Staff – Park workers
- Friends of St Magdalene's – local residents, church and park users, alcohol and drugs outreach workers

The first stage also involved meeting other volunteers and tutors to see if we could work together on any aspects of the project (e.g. the art volunteer regarding wall displays to promote the garden club). The tutors told me that garden volunteers could do the gardening in class time if they wanted to, but it was clear that learners prioritised learning English.

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<sup>1</sup> This section is based on her notes and discussions

Initially, I found the sheer number of people and interest groups involved in the park quite hard to deal with and I did not fully realise what the park consultation was about. There seemed to be different projects linked with the garden project, like a music event, but I did not really see how they were connected and did not want to get too caught up in them.

One small tension which impacted on me was between the consultation team and the tutors. Prior to my joining the project, the park consultant had done some imaginative consultation work with the ESOL learners about their feelings regarding the park (e.g. getting them to colour in "mood maps" of the park to assess their feelings about different areas, making paper sculptures and videoing interviews with them). While the tutors thought this had been valuable and fun, they questioned how much the learners understood about the consultation and thought the activities should have been more structured. Francis felt that the tutors needed a freer approach. As a result, I felt that the tutors were a bit suspicious of me as they initially saw me as another consultation team member. They seemed very relieved when they realised that I had an ESOL background and they were very supportive of the garden project.

The next step was to consult the student target group. I prepared some ESOL learning and promotional materials to explain the project to the centre learners. One example was a consultation "lesson" whereby learners browsed some lavishly illustrated garden books and noted which pages featured the types of plants and garden they preferred. Learners also completed a short questionnaire about how they would like to be involved in the project (if at all)- see appendix 2. At this stage, I envisaged learners who were not interested in gardening might want to get involved in photography, writing or even filming the garden as it evolved.

Looking at the results of the student consultation, it seemed that the majority preferred traditional, fairly formal gardens. This seemed to fit in well with the church-users' demand that the garden should be "in keeping" with the church building. Most learners seemed to be interested in getting involved though several said that they did not have much time. Some said that they wanted to grow plants from cuttings and seeds rather than just buying ready grown plants like before.

I also attempted to analyse the results of the park consultant's consultation to get an idea of how the learners felt about the park. As the mood maps were based on pictures rather than language, they were a good way of accessing ESOL learners' opinions and to some extent successful. However, they were quite abstract and I felt that personally I would find it quite difficult to do a similar exercise. Looking at the results it seemed that some learners had "got" the idea but that a lot had not.

A student who is a keen gardener and I met with the Friends of St Magdalene's group to put forward plans for the garden project. Discussion centred on a music event which was part of the park consultation. It was suggested that the garden club could be part of this. The student pointed out that the proposed dates were in the summer holidays and that if they wanted the Centre learners to be involved it would have to be during term time.

In conclusion, there were conflicting demands and opinions and different ideas about how the student garden should be developed. Ideas included the following:

- The learners indicated that they liked bedding plants, formality and roses.
- The church users wanted the garden outside the centre entrance be "in keeping" with the church and park, and that the plants outside the Centre were to be less than 1m tall and not adhere to the church walls.

- A key volunteer wanted formally planted beds in squares, circles and triangles planted with bedding and palms along the entire wall of the centre. The park consultant suggested following his suggestion, but planting the beds with meadow flowers mix rather than bedding. She also suggested growing plants from the learners' countries including vegetables.
- The volunteer wanted sustainability and multi-function plants to build in sensory elements (e.g. plants with attractive and scented foliage and flowers) which required minimum effort and attracted wildlife.
- Some asylum centre staff felt that the garden should be fairly low key to avoid drawing unwanted attention to the centre; the BTCV worker felt that the project should be "loud and proud" to promote the centre and its users.

The ideas were hard to reconcile and consultation took a lot of time.

### **3.3 Start of garden activity - April 2006**

The BTCV worker suggested that the garden project should be integrated into the ESOL lessons, but as not all learners were interested and all had a five day a week exam curriculum to follow, this was not practical. Although tutors were supportive and said that learners could do the garden in lesson time, the learners did not want to miss their classes. There was little interest in gardening before or after classes as some learners have to travel to pick up children and most learners only want to get involved if their friends are doing it. Consequently we decided to do the gardening in the lunch hour on Mondays and the half hour lunch break on Wednesdays. This was obviously a very short time and necessitated a very short instruction on health and safety and tools usage.

The first gardening session attracted three learners. I showed them the proposed garden sites and asked for their suggestions about design, colour and plants, linking it with the consultation lesson. They said that they did not know much about gardening and wanted me to show them. In this first session, I wanted to gauge how many people were interested, find out more about their ideas and did not have information about the budget, so I did not start with the main garden sites. However, I thought it was important to get some "instant" gardening done so bought in some shade loving perennials from my own garden to plant behind the hedge. In half an hour the area was transformed and we had an interesting discussion about plant names and their meanings (insert photos). Another student joined in at the end and was to become the most regular gardener in the future.

The key volunteer who wanted formally planted beds in squares, circles and triangles was a keen gardener with horticultural experience in his own country and wanted to get experience and references for a similar job here. He had very definite ideas about how the garden should be designed and drew up a plan which unfortunately encompassed parts of park which were not the agreed areas. I felt that his ambition and experience would be invaluable, but he was not keen to work with the other learners in the group. Sometimes this was difficult to manage.

I met the Park Ranger and asked about gardening materials (e.g. compost). She said that a huge amount of compost, made from kitchen waste (from the council's "brown box" scheme), was coming. I thought this would be great for getting the recycling/sustainability message across – the learners who live locally would be familiar with the brown boxes and would see the results first hand, whilst those who were new to gardening would learn about a positive use for waste.

I asked about growing some seeds in the centre, but being in a basement there was a shortage of light. I decided that hardy annuals grown directly in the soil and some ready grown perennials were the best option.

### **3.4 The challenges of keeping the group involved May 2006**

The next few garden club sessions were well attended. We planted annuals in the South bed and the learners took photos. Some of the park drinkers showed a friendly interest in our activities and one of them asked if we could take his photo too. When the Centre organiser gave him the printed out photo he was really pleased with it. Some of the learners seemed rather disapproving of the drinkers' interest, but most of them were unfazed.

It became clear that the soil in the bed was poor - hard clay and next to a privet hedge which is a greedy plant that strips nutrients and water from the soil. The bed was also infested with bindweed, a weed which is very difficult to eradicate. The brown box compost had not materialised but we dug in a few sacks of commercial compost to improve the soil before planting. It really needed more compost and some grit, but I was shy of demanding too much from the Glendales staff. Later the park consultant told me that Glendales should be happy to help as we were doing work that they would otherwise have to do. I wished that I had realised this earlier.

After the initial enthusiasm of planting, the number of volunteers decreased. Three key volunteers and I weeded and watered relentlessly, but the seedlings were slow to get established and many died through a combination of hot weekends and dog trampling. Some learners were quite disappointed, even though I explained that gardening is a trial and error process and that they had done really well considering the short time they had to spend in working in the garden.

The new IT suite opened and computer classes started. I wanted to use this as an opportunity to engage new learners with the garden project and to provide a rainy day activity for the gardeners. For example, using Google image search to find pictures of suggested plants for the garden. Unfortunately the IT class had the opposite effect, with several of the gardeners preferring to brush up their computer skills and do online practice for citizenship tests in the lunch hour rather than gardening.

### **3.5 Linking the gardening project to ESOL work June 2006**

I grew some morning glory seedlings at home and bought them into the centre and two of the regular volunteers helped me to plant them and agreed to be responsible for daily watering and training them up the fence.

I did an ESOL lesson about plant instructions with the E1 class when their tutor was on leave. I hoped to integrate it with a gardening session, but it did not really work out. The materials I prepared were at too high a level and there was not much interest from the learners. Most of the gardening club volunteers are from the E3 class.

From June to August 2006 I did several BTCV training courses including risk assessment, leading conservation projects, mammal monitoring, marketing and fundraising and First Aid. All of the training was excellent. However it seemed that my role at the centre was different from that of other conservation project leaders, and it bothered me that I never had time to do proper tools talks or assign responsibilities to learners more effectively. In the short time we had, everyone had to "muck in" as rapidly as possible.

### **3.6 The Challenges of the summer July- August 2006**

I wanted to get started on the site next to the centre and buy some ready grown plants to improve the look of the beds and boost the learners' confidence. The Centre organiser and I tried to plan a trip to Coblands Nursery (Glendale's supplier) but it turned out that it would take too long to get there. Eventually we decided on a trip to the local garden centre instead.

The trip to Camden Garden Centre was quite successful and the learners' enjoyed it. We planted all of the plants in the South bed, with the intention of moving some of them into the entrance bed later. This improved the appearance of the bed considerably and we had lots of volunteers helping with the planting.

Some of the annuals had flowered, but the results were rather weedy; some of the garden centre plants were flowering nicely but some had died and been pulled up by park staff. I ended up doing a lot of watering and weeding over the hot summer with only sporadic help from the volunteers and began to feel a bit frustrated by the project.

The Centre organiser asked me to make a display about the garden club with some of the garden volunteers for an event. Unfortunately, no one had taken a camera to Kew and we did not have pictures. However we did have photos from earlier in the project, so one of the most active volunteers and I prepared a display. I made a poster about the role of insects in the garden. One of the church users told me that she had been squashing ladybird larvae as she had not known what they were until she saw it.

I visited the centre before the start of term and was amazed by the morning glory, which had become a lush vine smothered in blooms. One of the park drinkers came to congratulate me on it, saying:

*"It's an amazing thing. One day there was nothing and the next it was there. It's beautiful."*

Two volunteers dug the borders of the entrance garden, in preparation for Autumn. Unfortunately some parts have shallow soil with hardcore underneath. I decided to order thyme which I hoped would cope with this. I dug a triangular bed in the centre based on the original triangular design and the student who had drawn up the design ideas bought in some plants that he had grown from cuttings and planted them in the borders.

### **3.7 Revival- September 2006**

The morning glory was still going strong and continued to do so until late October. It continued to draw lots of positive comments from park users. Two of the regular dog walkers loved it and asked for seeds and information. Unfortunately their dogs kept jumping on the centre learners, many of whom are scared of dogs or come from cultures where dogs are seen as unclean animals. The dog walkers did not really appreciate this and I had to explain that some people have had bad experiences of dogs in the past. One of the learners was surprised to learn that one of the dog walkers was Turkish; they talked and new understanding was reached. The other dog walker is Basque and she, I and some of the Kurdish learners had an interesting discussion about governments suppressing languages. I think it was the first time the learners had ever spoken to the dog-walkers so it was something of an historic moment - a little building of bridges.

Some of the annuals we had planted in the South bed were still flowering, while others were looking worse for wear and I was eager to get some Autumn planting underway before my departure in December. A worker from Islington Greenspace advised me to wait until October. Two new volunteers planted some seeds in the Entrance bed, but some failed to germinate and the rest died.

Using some of the BTCV funding, the Centre organiser set up a whole centre visit to Kew Gardens in August. It was a great success and the learners really enjoyed it. There were information stands in the Palm House about how plants are used in everyday household objects and substances. The learners found this interesting, and recognised plants from their own countries.

I started some new teaching work which meant that I could only come in on Wednesday lunchtimes. I prepared myself for winding down and handing over the project if any learners were interested in taking it on and/or another volunteer was available. What I had not realised was that many of the learners who had been involved last term had moved on, and that I had to present the project to the new intake of learners. I did this in a low key way without the consultation lessons that we had done previously as plants had already been ordered. In retrospect, I think a more positive, whole class approach may have resulted in a new rush of interested garden volunteers.

### **3.8 Does the gardening project have a future? October 2006 – March 2007**

I met with the BTCV worker to discuss winding down the project. She had a new job with the local authority, so she could no longer manage me and was not to be replaced by BTCV because of the loss of funding. The Greenspace worker took responsibility for advising me and ordering plants for the project. After discussion with the Centre organiser, I decided to stay on until the plants I had ordered arrived and were planted. Meanwhile she would advertise for another garden education volunteer and I would induct them into the project.

A new student joined the project. We removed the paving slabs from the entrance garden and sowed grass-seeds. The brown bin compost finally arrived (though not in the huge quantity we expected) and we dug it into both beds. This was heavy work and some of the other male learners helped out. I talked to the two key volunteers about taking over the project when I leave; one is too busy to take full responsibility, but the other seemed willing.

By March, two key volunteers still want to participate in the garden club, but do not want to take full responsibility for it, but unfortunately, a key learner has left the centre- moved out of the area by the government agency involved in dispersal. A new student joined the group who is a Turkish speaker with extensive horticultural knowledge and may be interested in leading the project. Most of the learners involved with the gardening project are Turkish speakers. Whilst this means that there is a nucleus of people who can communicate between themselves easily and involve other Turkish/Kurdish learners it may alienate centre users who speak different languages.

The plants ordered in November finally arrived and were planted by two volunteers and me. I plan to get the volunteers to grow some half-hardy annuals (including the famous morning glory as it did so well last year) on the one slightly sunny window sill of the centre (revealed after a shelf was moved). I will leave the project in April, but come in occasionally if needed. I want to concentrate on getting a job in the environmental sector, even if this does necessitate going back to college/university.'

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## **4. The Findings- the experience of the participants**

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### **The learners who took part in the gardening project**

Five of the learners most regularly involved in the project gave feedback on the project- almost all had been involved since the beginning. They had all joined the garden club because they liked flowers and gardening, and '*wanted to make the garden look nice*' and learn about gardening and English plants. One wanted to use it to improve their English and

two others identified either having a garden or that gardening was their hobby. When asked what they did in the gardening club, they mentioned learning about choosing plants and planning; about learning how to plant seeds and plants; taking rose cuttings; growing plants at home and bringing them in; and removing weeds and tidying up.

When asked what they liked about the garden club, the participants noted both learning about gardening, the enjoyment of achievement and happiness at working with plants, and being with friends:

*Knowing about English plants and gardening vocabulary*  
*I like all plants and being with flowers*  
*For the garden to look nice is important*  
*Working with the soil and plants*  
*Working with friends is enjoyable*  
*I liked flowers*

When asked what they had achieved from the garden club, the participants identified the satisfaction of learning and seeing things grow:

*Watching seeds grow into plants*  
*I learnt a lot of things; helped with my exam; made an English friend*  
*After digging I plant and sow the flowers*  
*Conversations with others about plants*

Everyone had new friends or met new people in the gardening club.

When asked how working in the garden makes them feel, the participants mention happiness, enjoyment and feeling relaxed:

*I am really happy and enjoying it*  
*Happy, nice to learn something, interesting*  
*Happy- I feel relaxed*  
*I liked and I enjoyed*  
*I feel very good if I work ( in the garden)*

When asked to choose from a list of positive and negative words that described how they felt about working in the garden:

- o 3 participants chose *relaxed*
- o 3 participants chose *good*
- o 3 participants chose *funny/ amused*
- o 2 participants chose *better about myself*
- o 1 participant chose *more confident*
- o 1 participant chose *surprised* because they were surprised by small animals because they learnt about insects and how they can help in the garden

One negative word was indicated saying dogs made them feel unsafe. The words sad, anxious and proud were not chosen at all.

All except one participant indicated they had learnt new skills with the garden club identifying:

Preparing the soil for planting ( removing stones)  
Planting plants and seeds  
Learning new flower names  
Digging and planning  
learning about insects  
Learning about which seasons in which plants flower better

The participants were asked how the garden club could be improved or developed. A number of suggestions were made about the need to get more learners involved and the need to have one or two students to supervise the project- *'someone needs to take responsibility and to be paid a little money'*. The participants need to control a small budget. Whilst some participants wanted to grow both vegetables and flowers, most recognised that because of the dogs vegetable growing would need to be done on a nearby allotment.

When asked what stops students joining the garden club, they identified a lack of interest, illness, the amount of hard work involved and *laziness*. Most wanted the garden club to continue after Helen left but one participant felt that the park staff should be responsible. All felt the club needed another volunteer or to pay a student a small sum.

### **The Centre staff, BTCV worker and Park consultant- TO BE COMPLETED**

When interviewed in 2006, the staff were pleased that the Centre had started to feel that a little part of the park was theirs and they could feel the Centre had grown out of the premises. Having an outside area was so important in their view and connects people with their previous lives. Helen was seen by the staff as having brilliant cross over skills and was much valued by the ESOL staff. (e.g. preparing a mini pack of plant pictures and descriptions; and some learners used talking about planting in their exams.) The learners particularly enjoyed the two trips (to Kew and Coblands nursery ) which along with some seeds and plants have been funded through the grant. There are many photographs which are displayed on the Garden club board in the Church.

Now in 2007, the staff have seen definite gains for the learners who have taken part, many of which are linked to Helen herself and the way in which she got involved with people and in their lives. Her contribution enlarged last year's programme and she still continues to meet individuals socially. The handing on of gardening skills was not substantial, and because the plots involved were in public spaces the participants did not feel they owned them. They clearly enjoyed being outside and taking part but they did not control the space in the way they might have with an allotment. Because of the day structure at the Centre their engagement times were when they were tired and taken up with learning.

The staff feel they have learnt a lot about the gardening work and how complicated the relationships are with the various organisations involved in the park, especially since they would not wish to advertise the beds as belonging to the Centre. They may want to hand the beds back to the park staff and look for an allotment. They recognise what a lot of work was involved and the display board of photographs was a strong communication tool with the church members. They mentioned how valued the two outings were- these are the kind of events they and the learners just cannot fund.

Though the Centre values the project- *'We will miss the project when we don't have it'*- they are fighting to keep their current programme going, and do not feel they could recruit and manage another volunteer who would be very unlikely to have the same wide skill set. In terms of paying a user, again funding priorities are elsewhere.

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## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **TO BE COMPLETED**

#### **Conclusions**

#### **Positive aspects**

- Many learners got involved in the project, though many only sporadically.

- Learners say that they enjoyed being involved in the project and/or some of the results (e.g. the morning glory plant, the visits).
- One learner used some of the English she learnt in the garden in her exam and passed.
- The volunteer prepared some learning materials to be used in the classroom to integrate the project with ESOL lessons.
- The perception of learners, park drinkers and dog-walkers towards each other has improved.
- The volunteer formed good relationships with centre staff, Glendales workers, the consultation team, learners and some park users and the project.
- The Centre organiser and BTCV worker were supportive and offered regular meetings

#### **Areas for Improvement/issues**

- Learners study between 10 and 2.30 Mon – Fri and that many have childcare responsibilities, so there is little time for gardening.
- Some learners who were keen to be involved were limited by their health problems.
- The volunteer had limited time for the project; a more regular input is needed to support and build up a group
- The project was not really 'owned' by the Centre; Centre volunteers were not involved in supporting the gardening project
- The volunteer's role was not very clearly demarcated at the beginning and they spent more time than anticipated on consultation. This meant that the start of the actual gardening was delayed.
- The learners did not really own the project. The volunteer feels she probably contributed to this by going round lessons and asking for "help" and doing the gardening herself hoping that learners would see her and get involved. She was eager to get going on the practical aspects of the garden rather than setting up meetings with the learners to assign areas of responsibility.
- In a public space, there was a tension between getting the plots looking reasonable and having something to show, and the need to really engage the Centre learners - between '*doing for and doing with*'. Visiting the classrooms to drum up support was a negative experience. The learners did not 'own' their plots in the way they would have done if they had been allotment plots
- The volunteer would have liked to be clear about the BTCV budget at the beginning of the project and worked out how to spend it with the garden volunteers and Centre staff
- The photography, IT and video aspects of the project did not happen. The Centre identified a video course at a nearby centre which could have been linked in, but for various reasons it was not practical to do this. If the volunteer had more time, they would have pursued the Park Consultant about this and planned some IT sessions. In future, it would be good to have access to a camera and someone to be responsible for photographing the project (the art volunteer or a student maybe).
- The Evaluation Trust worker found the whole experience time consuming in a way that the funding proposal did not envisage- we have been involved in supporting the project off the ground rather than helping an existing project undertake evaluation work.
- There is important learning about the fragility of these groups that are working in the social justice field of the environmental movement, and the difficulties of supporting these groups.

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## **5. Appendices**

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### **Forms**