

## Prudential Grass Roots

Supporting communities to improve their local environment



*"The Roots of Discovery programme in Paramus New Jersey gave me an opportunity to see a different part of the world and understand how different cultures deal with conservation issues in urban green space. It was an interesting adventure and the school we were working with were very helpful."*

KATIE LOWRY, BTCV VOLUNTEER

Prudential Grass Roots was launched in 2001. It is run by BTCV, the UK's leading practical conservation charity, and funded by Prudential plc.

The programme is helping to drive regeneration for people and wildlife in communities around shopping centres and business parks throughout the UK, invested in by Prudential plc and managed by PRUPIIM.

### CASE STUDY

## Roots of Discovery Community Environmental Project, Paramus, New Jersey

Prudential, seeking a suitable environmental project to reflect the increasingly international composition of its property portfolio, approached Westfield Shoppingtowns, joint owners of Garden State Plaza, situated in Paramus, New Jersey. Westfield suggested working with Paramus School District on this, the first international Prudential Grass Roots project.

A one-acre unused tract of land next to Paramus High School was chosen, and Westfield Shoppingtowns and Prudential plc partnered to fund a Grass Roots environmental project to revitalise the area.

Crucial in this venture was the expertise of a group of four BTCV volunteers who were selected through an application process

*...continued overleaf*



**PRUDENTIAL**

# Creating sustainable relationships...

Roots of Discovery Community Environmental Project  
Paramus, New Jersey



that sought to choose people with specialist conservation skills, creative flair and the ability to take on the international challenge. Prudential plc supported travel bursaries for the four successful applicants, all of whom had previous experience of working on Grass Roots projects in the UK.

The project presented an opportunity to strengthen community relations by opening an educational area that would be used by the school and local residents; it also took advantage of BTCV and Prudential's experience in delivering community-led environmental improvements.

*"This project is particularly exciting as it combines environmental improvement with a positive educational contribution."*

STEVE ROCHE, GENERAL MANAGER OF WESTFIELD GARDEN STATE PLAZA

# ...and sharing skills

## Roots of Discovery Community Environmental Project Paramus, New Jersey



In March 2005, agreement to the project was secured from Prudential, Westfield, Paramus School District, and other local stakeholders, and work started on site at Paramus High School four months later. News of the innovative project spread quickly, and in August 2005, a group of officials from HM Treasury and the Home Office visited the site to find out more. Catherine Worsley, of the Home Office, said: "We are looking to encourage more businesses to inject funds into their local communities and the ways in which we in the Government can help that."

An integral part of the project was bursaries supplied by Prudential plc to support four volunteers, who had previously taken part in UK-based Grass Roots projects. Working with BTCV, Prudential selected the four whose flights and accommodation would be paid for a month while they volunteered on the project.

In February 2006, Paul Goggins, the then Minister for Volunteering, met with the four Grass Roots volunteers to find out more about their experiences and what they hoped to gain from their New Jersey experience. Mr Goggins said "Volunteers can transform local communities, and the Prudential Grass

Roots scheme is an impressive and effective way for people to become actively involved in improving their local environment. This visit is a great opportunity for Grass Roots volunteers to share their experiences from the UK and encourage Paramus students to take up the challenge."

In April 2006, the four volunteers from BTCV arrived in Paramus and began work. The one acre site lies around the boundary of Paramus High School, making it an ideal location for an 'outdoor classroom'. The project sought to transform the wooded space into an area full of indigenous flora that could be accessed and appreciated by the whole community. The work done by the school in the outdoor classroom would create a way of sharing information about Paramus' wildlife, some of the area's history as well as a quiet space for local people to spend time.

With continuous involvement from several departments and young people within the school, the site gained new pathways, many trees and shrubs were planted, and a dry-stone wall was created – the showcase for the skills of the volunteers and a lasting example of environmentally sustainable construction.

# transforming unused land...

Roots of Discovery Community Environmental Project  
Paramus, New Jersey



*"I am proud to present to Paramus this incredible natural environment for all to enjoy for years to come. This project is an outstanding example of how a public-private partnership can work together to enhance our community."*

PARAMUS MAYOR JAMES TEDESCO III

During the project, evidence of a homestead dating back to the early 1900s was discovered on land previously owned by the Ackerman family, and the steering group made sure that this part of Paramus's past was preserved and not paved over. William Weiss, president of the Paramus Rotary Club and the landscape architect for the project, traced the history of the parcel of land and the Ackerman family as far back as 1662.

The steering group were keen to ensure that the project was sustainable by planning for its maintenance in the long term, once the immediate transformation was complete.

Additionally, four hundred metres of paths were created, rendering the site fully accessible and safe. Clearing undergrowth from the area created better visibility for staff when supervising students doing outdoor project work. The level of involvement from Paramus High School set a new precedent for how young people can become involved in improving their local green spaces by using elements of the site to bring the project into the classroom. For example

- In History classes, students learnt about the discovery of the homestead.

# ...into an outdoor classroom

## Roots of Discovery Community Environmental Project Paramus, New Jersey



- Computer Assisted Drafting class students measured the land and found out what type of levelling would be needed.
- Business, Marketing and Arts developed the name Paramus Roots of Discovery and the logo for the project.
- Science classes identified and labelled many varieties of flora and fauna throughout the site
- Art and Music classes used the site for inspiration

William Weiss, who also donated time every week for several months teaching Paramus High School students how to design the park said: "We started out as a class that had little concept of how their built environment got that way and we ended up with a class that knows how environmentally sustainable design, preservation and preserving the past fit together, creating a special place for learning".

Paramus High School students enjoyed their experiences of creating Paramus Roots of Discovery. John Criscione, a student in the Computer Aided Drafting class, said: "I can't wait to tell my kids 'I built that with my class'".

The Paramus Roots of Discovery park was also selected as the location for the high-profile New Jersey State Arbor Day celebrations in April 2006, where New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine, State Senator Joseph Coniglio, the Bergen County Executive Dennis McNerney, Paramus Mayor James Tedesco, Council members and over 200 volunteers participated in the festivities by planting 425 trees and shrubs throughout the park.

As the transformation drew to a close, a celebration of all the hard work took place in October 2007. Artwork, created by Paramus High School students, was displayed throughout the site, outdoor classrooms were occupied by science classes, and students provided tours of the site for guests and VIPs alike. The High School-based Judy Wilkes String Ensemble provided musical accompaniment for the afternoon's celebrations.

# Leaving a lasting legacy

## Roots of Discovery Community Environmental Project Paramus, New Jersey

### Project costs

The Prudential Grass Roots funding contributed £25,000 to the Paramus Roots of Discovery Park, and a further £11,000 to support the UK volunteers.

Westfield Garden State Plaza contributed a further \$40,000

Donations in kind of labour and equipment were received from various sources to the value of approximately \$21,000

Cho Dae Church loaned its van to the volunteers throughout the project – equivalent to £1,600



### Project partners

Prudential plc • Westfield Shoppingtown at Garden State Plaza • Paramus High School • BTCV • Paramus Board of Education • Borough of Paramus • Borough of Paramus Shade Tree and Parks Commission • Greenland Associates • Cho Dae Church • Hertz, Paramus • Ramada Inn, Rochelle Park • Crowne Plaza, Paramus

### Achievements

- Fully workable project that all school departments could get involved with
- 85 volunteer days worked, and over 200 volunteers assisted on Arbor day, equating to more than £20,000 worth of volunteer time being contributed
- The Paramus Roots of Discovery Park was selected as the location for the NJ State Arbor Day celebration in 2006
- 400 metres of pathway laid
- 80 large shade trees planted
- 300 shrubs and perennials planted
- Construction of a section of dry stone wall
- 8 benches installed
- Extensive press coverage including 26 minutes of television air time, equivalent to over \$123,000 in advertising value
- Officials from HM Treasury and the Home Office visited project
- Tree Pruning event took place with VIPs
- Dedication event in October 2007

### Contact us

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**Westfield**  
Garden State Plaza