



Key facts

Keighley Urban Meadows: Foster Garden project

Keighley, Bradford

£32,754

of People's Health Trust funding, through Health Lottery Yorkshire and Humber

Main activities

Maintaining outdoor allotments; Running workshops; Provide skills training; Hold regular activities

Key outcomes

- Improved social links and ties
- Individual and collective action and control
- Increased confidence, knowledge, skills and assets
- Improved individual wellbeing

People's Health Trust: Active Communities Case Study Keighley Urban Meadows: Foster Garden project

People's Health Trust believes in a world without health inequalities. The Trust funds small and local projects in neighbourhoods that are most affected by health inequalities with funding generated through The Health Lottery. Active Communities is one of its funding programmes and grants aim to support people to create or shape local projects that will help their community or neighbourhood to become even better, and require local people to design and run these projects. Typically lasting up to two years, the grants are between £5,000 and £50,000 for each project. The programme's main intended outcomes are:

- **Collective control:** Ideas designed and led by local people. Regular participation of residents, who are empowered to lead and take ownership of the project design, delivery and development.
- **Social links and ties:** Stronger connections between people. Decreased social isolation and loneliness, and improved connection, friendships and collective support networks among participants.

Drawing on interviews with project leads and participants across two visits in spring and summer 2019, this case study explains how individuals have come together to shape and lead the [Foster Garden](#) project. It also shares the learning and achievements as part of the 2018-19 Active Communities evaluation.

About the project

Keighley Urban Meadows is a community group promoting the shared ownership of the local environment and community development through their work in allotments, local public spaces and within their community centre hub. The group grew from a previous outdoor programme, The Cabbage Club, also funded by People's Health Trust, which became self-sustaining following the three-year funding term. People's Health Trust funded Keighley Urban Meadows again in 2018 for its Foster Garden project, through the Active Communities programme.

The community group aims to create social links within the neighbourhood, promote ownership of the place they live, teach new skills and save a local community centre from closure. As part of this, the Foster Garden project sought to regenerate the local community centre (Foster Garden Centre) which was at threat of closure, turning it into an indoor hub to complement the Keighley Urban Meadows programme.

The Foster Garden group maintained an area of outdoor space at the allotments, where they ran workshops such as foraging, bush craft skills and regenerating public spaces, e.g. planting wildflowers. They provided skills teaching at the allotments for Scout groups and college students, and also ran a number of indoor workshops and activities at the Foster Garden Centre such as bingo, crafts and lunch clubs. The group was open to everyone within the local community.

How did local people shape and lead the project?

Co-design and co-production were central to the project from the start. Early on, the team consulted with other established groups (e.g. The Cabbage Club) and reached out to the wider community to identify the needs of local people and to prevent duplication in their offer. The group took on an informal structure for ongoing consultation with participants, with no formal steering group; instead, all participants were encouraged to drive the direction of the group.

"Everyone is involved... No one is in the dark, left out." (Participant)

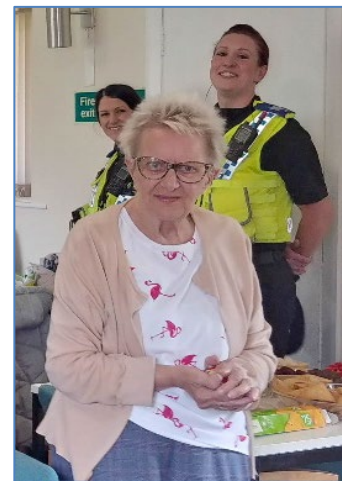
During the Thursday lunchtime 'Pick and Mix' sessions, project participants often shared their thoughts on and made decisions about upcoming activities. In this way, the group collectively designed activities to meet their needs and with the wider community in mind. By acting on the feedback of participants, the project was able to keep them engaged and interested, to be flexible and adapt to the changing requirements of the local community.

"If you don't involve people in shaping their own futures, then all you're doing is taking the mick. We are part of the team... We are not here as social workers, mentors or leaders. I don't think people want to be led, they want to be included." (Project lead)

For example, participants led a one-off session they termed the 'night in'. Based at the Foster Garden Centre, participants enjoyed being a part of the evening of food and entertainment, particularly those who volunteered their entertainment skills including a magician and concert pianist. Due to the success and positive feedback from the event, the group then subsequently organised more evening events at the Foster Garden Centre.

"Absolutely everyone is welcome here. If you live here, you are welcome."

(Project staff)



"We almost use that almost like a weekly management committee meeting where members are directly involved in deciding on the many exciting things that happen out in the local communities"

(Project staff)

What has the project achieved?

The Foster Garden project achieved a range of outcomes for its participants, including: increased confidence, skill development, peer support, social connections and collective control. Interviewees observed benefits both for project participants and for the wider community.

Improved social links and ties

By bringing people together to take part in activities at the allotments, at the community centre or out in the community, the group enabled participants to develop their social networks. Some of the project participants faced barriers to feeling social connection because of autism, social anxiety or mental health issues. The Foster Garden project enabled local people to create new friendships, broaden the diversity of their social networks and to strengthen their connection to the local community.

“We are all just a bunch of misfits together.” (Participant)

Many participants also met up outside of the group to take part in additional activities, indicating that the project has helped some people to develop new friendships and increase their social connectedness. For example, two participants said the project had helped them form an “unlikely friendship” and reduced their feelings of social isolation. These people then introduced one another to new networks outside of the group including a walking club, increasing each other’s access to local resources and assets.

“It has helped with networking outside of the group, like I say the walking group.” (Participant)

Some of the project participants had experienced social anxiety in their lives. One participant noted that attending the group had helped him to feel more comfortable in social situations: helping him improve social skills through a shared hobby. This increased his confidence and lowered his feelings of social anxiety in new situations.

Many participants experienced social isolation prior to becoming involved in the Foster Garden project. Before the project began, one participant had been worried that the Centre was to close, as the weekly bingo group there was her way to “get out of the house”. Once the building had been established as a hub through the funded project, this participant was able to attend all sessions and workshops on offer (including bingo).

“These people are not just clients, they are humans. They have all had lives and they know stuff. It is a case of bringing that out in people and giving them a chance to express themselves without having to conform.” (Project lead)

The group aimed to reflect the demographics of the local community, so the activities on offer were wide ranging to ensure accessibility. Stronger social connections between different groups developed because of the project, as the group recruited participants of all ages, genders, races and religions.

Food was a main theme for what they did as a group, and inclusivity came through in the food too. In addition to growing food within the allotments, the group was cooking healthy home-made meals each week at the centre. There were always options for those who required Halal meat, vegetarian options or pork-free food, to show that everyone was considered in the meal preparation and to promote an environment that was welcoming to all.

“It is not just the community spirit - it is bridging that loneliness and social isolation. Being out of that isolation is so important for these people, and that is what is happening here”

(Town councillor)



“There isn’t much around here in this town, we have lost all the pubs and everything now. So this, like having this here is just great.”

(Participant)

Individual and collective action and control

Throughout the course of the project, participants continued to put forward their views and discuss options for activities the group should do.

Reinvigorating the local community centre was seen by the project staff almost as a catalyst to enable local people to (re)gain control, providing them with a hub and showing that through collective action they can make changes. Equally, local people coming together was felt to have given this building a new purpose.

“The group realise what an inspiration they are and how they can inspire the wider community.” (Project lead)

On a day-to-day basis, local people were said to be driving the direction that the project took. For example, at the time of the second visit, the group were in the process of organising the upcoming open day with stalls around the local area and a live cooking demonstration resulting in a healthy, home-cooked takeaway for the community.

Participants took an active role in promoting the group to others in the local community in a few ways. The group targeted places that people experiencing social isolation may visit such as GP surgeries and they put up posters and left leaflets there. Participants said they believed that the main barrier for potential new group members was their initial confidence to “step through the door”.

“Once they come once they tend to stay, everyone is so welcoming.” (Participant)

Participants also experienced a sense of control through a strong connection to local decision-makers. Councillors, PCSOs and other officials would often drop by the community space: for example, during the second case study visit, the town mayor and two councillors were present for the evening event and sharing conversation with participants, volunteers and leaders of the project as well as the wider community.

Increased confidence, knowledge, skills and assets

Central to the knowledge and skill building outcomes of the project were the community-owned allotments. Participants brought varying experience as allotment holders and together maintained their outdoor space, delivering workshops such as foraging, bush craft skills and regenerating public spaces i.e. planting wildflowers. They also ran several indoor workshops and activities based at the Foster Garden Centre such as crafts and ‘cook and eat’ sessions.

“What we are doing here is we are planting perennials. We are planting things that will grow, flower, seed and spread elsewhere.” (Project lead)

The project also delivered workshops at the allotments for local children, including school groups and Scout groups. The children learned about keeping allotments, growing produce and keeping livestock. These workshops benefited the younger generation, but also increased the confidence of group participants, bringing a sense of pride. Project staff noted that through engaging young people, they could see the group participants delivering the workshops “beam” as they shared their passion.

Food has been a way for the project to bring local people together, whether through learning to grow produce in the allotment together or cooking a meal as a group. Participants regularly prepared meals together – often feeding up to 20 people – and with each person taking a role in the preparation. One participant who was living alone mentioned that he had now learned how to cook healthy meals at home.

“I like to see the expression on their face when we have helped them to meet something that they have wanted to do. It could be to help wash up, something as small as that.”

(Project lead)



Participant case study

One male participant had always had a keen interest in allotments, keeping his own for some time. The individual experienced some difficulties with relationships at his previous allotment and had a very small social network. Over the past few years, the Keighley Urban Meadows group saw him grow in confidence, increasing his social connections and becoming a key group member.

He became the allotment caretaker and lead some of the school visits, showing children around and teaching them about keeping livestock and growing produce: something he and the children enjoyed. But perhaps most importantly, he was supplying eggs each week to all the project participants from the chickens and geese he was keeping at the allotment!

“This is the kind of thing that we want to be promoting in our town, real grassroots.”

(Town Mayor)

Longer-term outcomes

While outcomes such as a sense of accomplishment, self-confidence and increased social connectedness tend to occur in the shorter term, for some participants these outcomes had had a direct impact on their longer-term opportunities. Participants' increased confidence brought benefit to themselves, to the group, and to the wider local community. Some group participants were inspired to try new things, joining other community-based groups such as walking clubs and volunteering.

“Self-confidence, self-esteem, all the usual cliché stuff. But we aren't just saying that, we are actually demonstrating it... We have [a member] who is actually now running another community centre up the road, a youth club for special needs youngsters... a year ago she wouldn't come out of the house.” (Project lead)

The group wanted to continue to build their local influence, and to be involved in more of the environmental improvement initiatives in the local area, such as restoring derelict laybys, making planters and planting wildflowers. This desire was attributed to their greater sense of ownership of their own community and adds support to the evidence of the project's lasting impact on the local people and their environment.

Participant case study

A male member of the group with autism and had struggled with his anxiety. Prior to being a part of the project there were periods of time when he was unable to leave the house, which had been a great source of concern for his family. He was referred to the Foster Garden project by his doctor. This person regularly attended activities and was always on hand to help, often offering up his skills on the piano.

“Things have been going well, really well. I have been coming here once a week and then once a week down at the cabbage patch - it is good. We have done some big events for the community too.” (Participant)

Since becoming a part of the project, the participant had ‘changed entirely’. Importantly, being part of this varied group provided him with a real sense of acceptance, which in turn built his self-esteem and confidence. In the past he had been placed in a box due to his autism, attending only groups for “people like him”. The project lead noted that through his engagement, the participant also provided a positive benefit to the whole group.

“What you have to realise is the huge input that [he] has put back into the project. That lad is a star! He cooks dinner, he plays piano, he joins in the karaoke.” (Project lead)



What has worked well?

- **Inclusivity.** One of the striking observations of the Foster Garden project is of the inclusive and welcoming environment. The project participants see their community as being everyone within the local area and tried to represent this in the group's membership. The group often ran open days to include the whole community.
- **Person-centred outcomes.** At the Foster Garden project, individual needs were emphasised, so the impact that it had has been different for all participants. Outcomes included links to the local community, increased social connections, learning new skills, 'getting out of the house' and greater self-confidence.



What are the lessons?

- **Reaching the most vulnerable.** The Foster Garden project successfully reached a diverse range of people within the local community through active membership, workshops and open days. The staff and group members had clear strategies to encourage participation. However, those most socially isolated and experiencing loneliness are harder to reach. Both participants and staff members noted the difficulty in the initial reach and engagement of some isolated people within the local community.
- **Assurance of the support for grassroots organisations in application processes.** Whilst the project lead and supporting staff member within the organisation were highly experienced in bid writing and grant applications, and were generally comfortable with the politics of funding bodies and local councils, there was some concern that for grassroots organisations without experienced leadership, the funding application process could be daunting.

The future

The time-limited funding meant that long-term sustainability was a consideration right from the initial project design. Group leaders secured the future use of the Foster Garden Centre as the hub for Keighley Urban Meadows for £250 per annum: an amount that should be sustainable for the future of the group.

"That is the sustainability because if you have that reputation, we are being recognised. We are in terms of environmental stuff, we are one of Keighley Town Councils preferred providers. That is generating funding that can support other projects and initiatives later down the line." (Project lead)

In addition to the financial sustainability of the project, the positive impact that the group has had on the local community through education, creating networks and providing local people with ownership over their own community spaces will continue long after the funding end date.

"We are talking about people who a year ago you wouldn't even get them out of their houses. Now they are doing all of these events."

(Project lead)