



**GATEWAY TO THE GARDENS**

**Year One Project Report**

**Feb 2020 – Jan 2021**



## Introduction

2020 has been a rollercoaster in many ways. At the time of writing this report (January 2021) the UK is in 'lockdown 3' – with Nottingham entering lockdown 3 from its earlier position in Tier 4 during December 2020. This has understandably had a huge impact on our project delivery.

However, we have continued delivery to a much greater extent than other agencies and many of our partners. Outdoor spaces like ours have offered safe havens and have been a sanctuary from the stress, risk and isolation felt in the wider community. In many ways we have never felt more appreciated and valued by local community members. Never has the availability of outdoor community provision like ours been recognised as so important to individual, family and community wellbeing.

We are immensely proud of the way we have responded this year, and this has given us much confidence in our ability to respond to the challenges ahead. We recognise our role in helping to (re)build a more resilient community over the months and years to come. We will continue offering a safe- haven and respite, supporting people to develop skills and confidence and providing a place where people can connect with others and not feel so lonely and isolated.

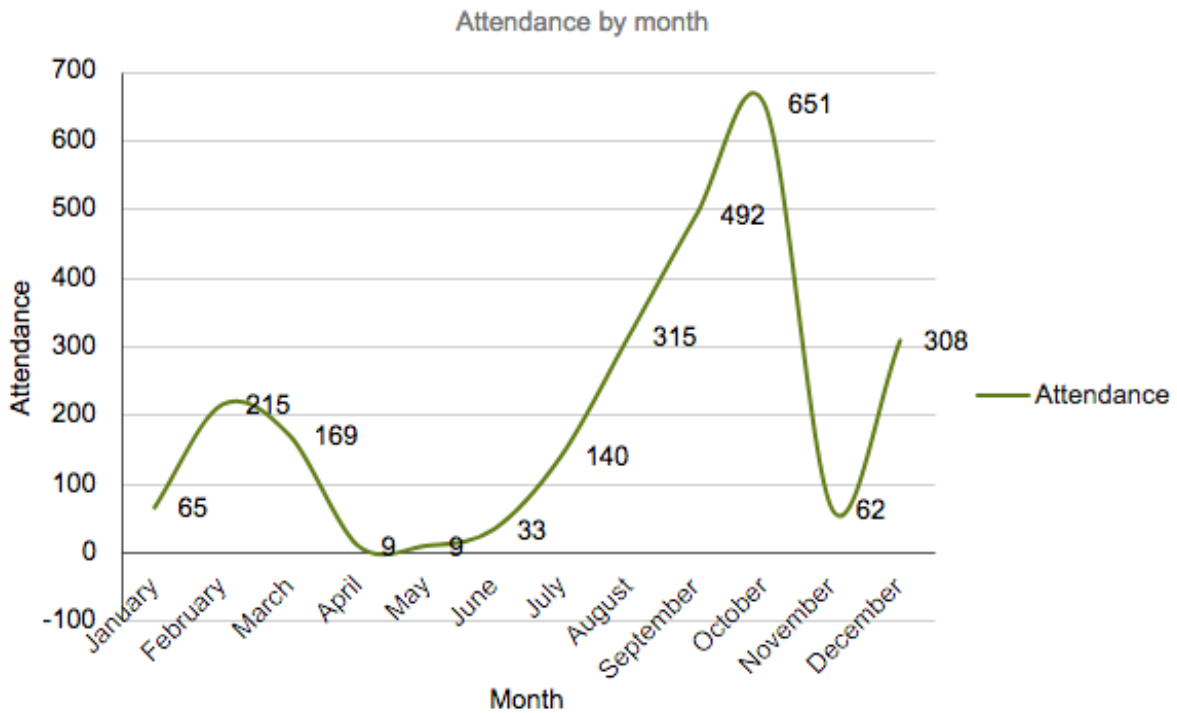
We responded quickly to support local organisations, including The SFiCE Foundation, by coordinating and diverting food grown on our project sites to supply produce for local emergency food provision. We were also able to welcome The Princes Trust teams onto site to support them in undertaking their team challenges when they had few other opportunities available to them. Other organisations were offered opportunities to use our spaces, but such was the impact of the pandemic on frontline organisations that many understandably retracted behind their doors. However, we are confident that over the next 2 years we will continue to develop local partnerships and welcome many more partner organisations and beneficiaries through our gates.

## Our Delivery

Over the course of 2020, Gateway to the Gardens was still able to support 2400 recorded attendances.

The graph on the next page represents our Gateway to the Gardens attendances by month in our first year of delivery. Whilst the impact of lockdowns and Covid restrictions are striking, the pattern clearly demonstrates our ability to pick up delivery quickly when circumstances allow.

The Community Orchard - Activity	Attendance	Growing to Grow and Volunteering - Activity	Attendance
Activity days	397	Community group	107
Adventure play	349	Oliver's	102
After school	124	The Nursery	184
New shoots	407	Urban Nature	50
Steering group	26		
Schools	644		
<b>Orchard Total</b>	<b>1947</b>	<b>Growing to Grow &amp; Volunteering Total</b>	<b>443</b>



## Our Highlights

### Steering Group

In February 2020, we brought together a fledgling steering group consisting of 26 members of the local community. Adults and children were invited and play activities were put on for the children. However, the children were equally keen to contribute to the discussions and share their thoughts and ideas. Whilst some contributions were very specific (particular games, favourite foods, best ways to publicise), others addressed some of the wider issues within the community: safety, inclusion, affordability, educational achievement, the environment. A few weeks later we were in lockdown.

Whilst navigating our way to reopening, we were able to actively involve the steering group again. This time, the group provided input and support with testing our Covid measures and ensuring our site felt Covid-secure prior to re-opening to the wider community. Once open, many of the group supported us by volunteering on Activity Days, bringing in new visitors, contributing to our digital resources/website and continuing to share their thoughts and ideas.

### Volunteering

Volunteering has blossomed during 2020, with regular volunteers increasing from 13 to 29 over the course of the year. 12 one-off / semi-regular/ toe-dipping volunteers are also engaged and we hope many will continue to become regular volunteers over the coming months.

During 'lockdown 1' we established, what has become known, as 'site safari', a 'socially distanced' coming together of staff members, management committee and a small number of regular core volunteers collectively maintaining our project areas so we were ready to go as soon as restrictions lifted.

As restrictions began to ease, we worked with volunteers on Covid risk assessments (individual and project sites) and developing covid safe measures that were secure, practical and grounded in our values and principles. There were no plastic signs for us! [Instead, we painted, printed, crafted and sewed.](#)

Covid risk assessments opened-up many conversations about the personal circumstances of our volunteers. Many of our volunteers live alone. They have told us:

*"I'm here for my mental health"*

*"This is one thing I'm still able to do, apart from work I don't do anything else"*

*"We're well prepared for it here, and there's plenty of space for social distancing [...] if I didn't come out, I'm by myself"*

The value and impact of our volunteering opportunities has never been so clear and we have done everything possible within Government guidelines to sustain regular, consistent

volunteering opportunities across our plots. As a result, in a break from tradition we opened our projects for volunteers between Christmas and New Year.

### Takeaway Volunteering

Throughout this year, we have looked for innovative ways to keep our beneficiaries, supporters and volunteers engaged - especially those who were more vulnerable and shielding. In October we began trialling 'takeaway volunteering', providing activity kits for volunteers to take home – making plant labels, sowing winter seeds etc. We continue to develop this concept with [activity box takeaways](#) for community members currently unable to access activities on site. January's box includes everything you need to make a bird feeder.

### Community Outreach & Engagement

During lockdown restrictions, our Community Outreach & Engagement Worker maintained regular contact with local community members and partner organisations. She sought to understand how people were coping and listened to growing anxieties about isolation and impact on mental health across all ages.

One woman described how she "felt people were judging her for walking outside" She shared how lockdown was affecting her mental health, she was going stir crazy and felt like she had no space. We were conscious that our green spaces, especially the Community Orchard, could provide a safe, therapeutic space for so many. We contacted schools, and partner agencies, offering use of our space.

"It would be fantastic, just what they desperately needed," but went on to describe how overwhelmed they, the teachers, were by the magnitude of the situation and the social and safeguarding needs of their pupils and families. As a result, they were unable to leave the school grounds until September term.

Nottingham City Council's Early Help Team were thrilled to have a space to enable them to work with vulnerable families and used the site throughout the Summer and Autumn right until the second lockdown in November. We provided opportunities for family bubbles without private gardens to book in to use the Orchard space from June and watched as children let off steam and the tension began to release.

Strong partnerships were also forged with Nottingham City Homes who are keen to support opportunities for their residents. Staff members have supported our volunteer sessions and helped with the infrastructure work on the Nursery site. They offered support promoting our activities and [provided funding for additional hand tools](#) to support Covid-safe working.

### Managing Demand whilst Social Distancing

When we were able to open our gates more widely in July, we started with low numbers and made sure that we moved slowly and carefully offering the appropriate level of care. Booking systems were established to manage the demand for previously open access sessions. We trialled various ways of ensuring that local people had priority of access. WhatsApp proved a

most useful addition to our outreach and engagement as were local school online systems and virtual noticeboards.

To meet demand, whilst maintaining social distancing, we doubled and sometimes tripled the number of activity sessions we ran with smaller numbers. We recruited a small pool of sessional workers to help us respond to the surge in demand and the increased number of sessions we were putting on. Implementing Covid Measures, track and trace recording, heightened cleaning arrangements required an increase in staff numbers in each session.

### “Growing to Grow” on the old Nursery site

Perhaps the most visible impact that Gateway to the Gardens has provided this year is in supporting the development of the old Nursery site into an accessible growing space. The project has continued to harness the skills and enthusiasm of local volunteers old and young to transform the site from a derelict space into a fantastic growing space that produced a great harvest in its very first year.

We talked to lots of people [especially those with mobility problems](#) about how to go about designing the space. This brought about many design changes and reprioritising of the development areas of the site. The need for warmth and shelter was highlighted as a key priority in making our space accessible. Warmth and shelter, whilst maintaining social distancing measures, continues to be a challenge.

STAA has used both its own funds, and funds raised from the Wheatcroft Fund to bring in professional help from Green River Garden Revival and the materials to create a physically accessible space on the front plot. Gabions were installed to assist the creation of levels and paths dug out and laid to tackle the gradient issues. Highly productive raised beds were built and filled with vast amounts of topsoil and organic compost. The project site, whilst almost unrecognisable, is still work in progress, but it provides a welcoming space for volunteer activity as well as a learning and growing space for the local community and community groups.

Volunteers have cleared, cleaned and painted the [large glasshouse](#) and this has supported vast amounts of tomatoes and other edibles as well as ornamentals. The derelict classroom on the top plot has been transformed. A local carpenter repaired and replaced the rotting and rotten wood and used recycled windows to replace the broken glass and frames to the front elevation. Other volunteers have replaced worktops and created a safe surface and surround for a small gas stove. The St Anns 2 Princes Trust Team raised money to buy paint and have [transformed the classroom](#) into a gleaming hub for volunteers and a learning space for the local community. Local allotment gardeners have observed and offered support with the development and are keen to get involved in the future.

### Community Harvest

The Gateway to the Gardens project always intended to passively divert surplus produce from our site back out into the local community. 2020 brought the need for emergency food provision to the fore of our attention. Without so many local people using our space for periods of time – we needed to find additional resources to harvest our fruit and produce and to coordinate and deliver this out to local community organisations and emergency food

providers. We secured additional funding through Thomas Farr and DEFRA Emergency funding to ramp up our offer and employ a Harvest Coordinator to the end of March 2021.

Local partner The SFiCE Foundation had cancelled their Fareshare membership in April when they were unable to run their community café. When they re-opened in September, we were delighted to be able to [supply them with fresh produce](#). We also provided produce to a local care home and the Hindu Temple helping to support a further 8 Community Groups and organisations.

This year we intend to grow produce specifically for this purpose and engage other gardeners on site to join a coordinated effort to supply community organisations and food providers with the food they want and need. We have consulted local groups and have a clear plan as to what produce is most useful and culturally appropriate to best support St Ann's diverse communities.

### Looking forward to Year 2

Whilst we are all uncertain what 2021 will bring in terms of the Coronavirus pandemic, we are confident that when circumstances and restrictions allow, we will welcome many more community members through our gates. We know how important access to our project and spaces is to the local community, especially those who have limited access to green space. We will continue to work with the local community and partner organisations to identify local need and to respond positively and flexibly.

Our plan to launch the Growing to Grow project in year 1, will (hopefully) be possible in the coming year. We also have the Community Orchard's 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday to celebrate later this year. Both events will provide a wonderful opportunity to showcase the difference that the National Lottery Funding is making within our local community. We are incredibly grateful for the National Lottery's support with the Gateway to the Gardens Project.