

PROVIDENCE GROW URBAN GARDENING PROGRAMME

January - December 2024

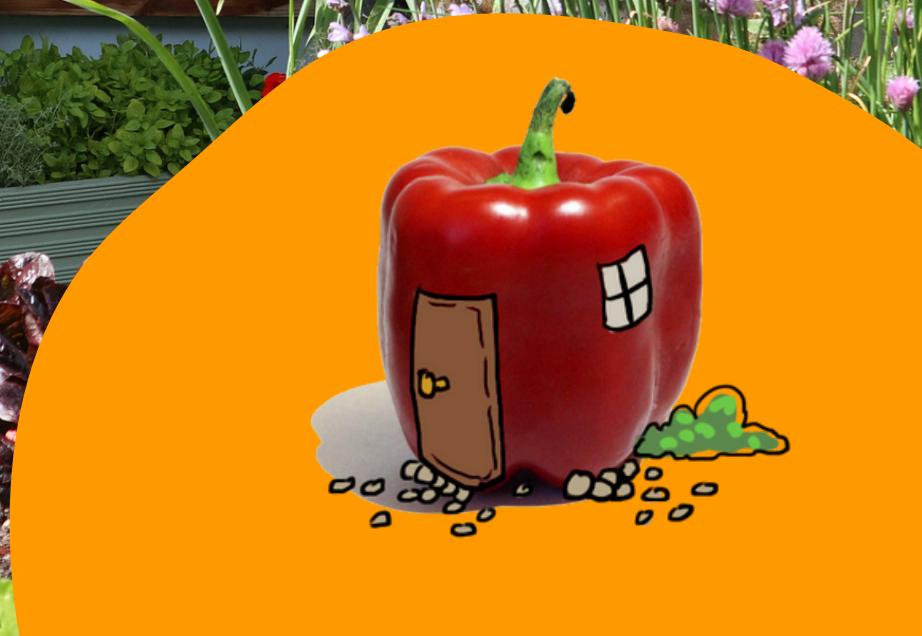


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ABOUT PROVIDENCE ROW

Founded in 1860 in East London, we support some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in society. Every year we help around 1,400 people affected by homelessness in Tower Hamlets, City of London, Hackney and those from neighbouring boroughs to overcome severe disadvantage and exclusion (financial and social), so they can get off, and stay off, the streets and begin their journey to recovery and a stable, secure life.

PROVIDENCE GROW URBAN GARDENING PROGRAMME

Led by a professional gardener, our award-winning (RHS and Tower Hamlets/London in Bloom), rooftop garden project has the aim of:

- engaging homeless people alongside local volunteers to create a sustainable way of producing food for other homeless people
- increasing biodiversity in a built-up densely, deprived and densely populated area of Central London
- improving community cohesion
- reducing carbon emissions and waste



WHAT WE DID

Our rooftop garden was used to sow, nurture, grow and harvest produce (fruit, vegetables and herbs) for use in our homeless day centre kitchen to help produce food for our homeless clients.

17 homeless clients accessed our 10-week Garden Trainee Scheme. They developed skills and knowledge around sowing and growing and gained an OCN Horticulture award.

Activities included:

- Food growing: sowing seeds, planting shoots, harvesting, taking produce to our kitchen and making newspaper seed pots.
- Adding to and turning our compost, using food waste and waste from across the rest of our organisation.
- Building a bug hotel and plants that we grew especially to attract pollinators.
- Using water collected from the Water Butts on our roof.
- Helping repair raised beds and cleaning the greenhouse.
- Preserving seeds from plants grown over the last year to use in a subsequent growing season.



GREEN CHERRY
TOMATOES
(They stay green
when ripe)
From Northern Italy.

seed saved

PR Rooftop

Sept 124

We also partnered with hundreds of local community volunteers (6 local residents and 90 from local businesses).

IMPACT

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

17 homeless clients gained new knowledge and skills for a OCN Horticulture award, completed roughly 510 hours of work experience, boosting their confidence and employability.

Our community and corporate volunteers learnt a lot too. Community volunteers most recently learnt how to build wooden planters, and one of them learned how to use a drill for the first time ever. One of our corporate volunteers helped propagate stem cuttings and was going to take some of the techniques home to try herself.

THERAPEUTIC AND MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

The benefits can be hugely valuable from a mental point of view as clients are working towards positive goals in a safe environment with likeminded people. Also, the endorphins released when people garden and see the fruits of their labour can be incredibly valuable. One of our clients was still using substances (outside of the sessions) and he said that coming to the sessions was really helping them not to 'use'. By the end of the course they moved into a sheltered accommodation for people in recovery and they had cut down significantly on their substance use.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND REDUCING ISOLATION

Corporate and local resident volunteers worked alongside each other and alongside our homeless clients who participate in our Garden Trainee Scheme. This helps break down prejudices and stereotypes of homeless people and it also helps our clients develop friendships and networks while also helping to boost their confidence by engaging and spending time with people they might not normally meet.



"I learned how to harvest, about names and identifying methods of the plants and to which family they belong to based on their characteristics."

IMPACT CONT...

INCREASED ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD

We produced 92kg of food which helped produce around 1,000 meals for our clients through our day centre kitchen.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

- Biodiversity and natural habitats: As well as attracting pollinators, we also had some nesting gold finches and also a robin that reared three chicks.
- Carbon saving: We used Capital Growth to help estimate the carbon saving from our garden produce, reduced food miles and use of homemade compost. Overall we estimate that our programme had a carbon saving of around 85,000grams.
- We used around 1m³ (roughly 500kg) of homemade compost on our garden, and produced a further 1m³ (around 500kg) of new compost that will gradually rot down. We also produced around 50L of super nutritious worm casting compost to use as a soil conditioner/fertiliser.
- Reducing chemicals in the food chain: We used organic growing methods (no dig, natural fertilisers, and lots of home-made compost), promoting good soil health.
- Reducing packaging: We created 300 homemade plant labels using cut up old milk containers, and 50 seed pots from newspaper.
- We gathered around 20,000L of water through our Water Butts.

The seeds preserved to use again include: Green Cherry Tomatoes (a very unusual variety from Northern Italy), Anise Hyssop, St John's Wort, Sunflower 'Yellow Pygmy', Marigolds 'Boy Spry', Pale Yellow and Orange Calendula, Magenta Poppies and Nasturtium.



KEVIN'S STORY 'NEVER STOP GROWING'

Kevin proves it is never too late to learn skills that change your life. At 57 years old, Kevin is one of the many people who came to Providence Row to have their potential unlocked. Kevin worked with our Employability and Progression team to find him a pathway to more skills and a life of independence



"All the learning has been an education for me and extended my knowledge...It gives me the path now to go from the beginning point and use my skills."

Through 10 weeks of regular work with our garden training coordinator, Ellie, and with Rob in our Employability and Progression team, Kevin unlocked knowledge and skills which not only got him certified with a horticulture qualification but allowed him to fuel his own passion and interests too.

Homelessness, housing insecurity and mental health challenges take their toll on anyone, and for Kevin it was no different. Luckily, this course allowed him to spend time in the calm and green oasis of our rooftop Garden at Providence Row, reflecting and learning in a safe space.



The balance and stability that Kevin found with Providence Row was what he needed - completing his course and receiving his certification to the applause of Providence Row staff and volunteers at our graduation ceremony. His employment prospects have widened, his skillset grown and his confidence in himself is greater than ever before.

"This course through Providence Row and my time around the people here has been eye opening, it's opened up a doorway for me and these are skills that I'll keep forever." - Kevin, now a qualified horticulturist and gardener