

Redcatch Community Garden

Climate and Disability Commission: Insights Report



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Introduction



Redcatch Community Garden was commissioned by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership to deliver activities focused on food and nature, with and for Disabled people.



The commission, which ran for one year, championed the food and nature priorities set by Bristol's community of Disabled people in their Community Climate Action Plan. This plan supports Bristol's commitment to a just transition by ensuring that Disabled people are at the heart of local climate action. The commission was part of the Climate and Disability strand of the Community Climate Action Project coordinated by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership, funded by the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund.

This report is written by the team at Redcatch Community Garden, to share our experience of facilitating climate-based activities with and for Disabled people and to advise other organisations hoping to do something similar.

Redcatch Community Garden in Knowle, Bristol is a Charitable Community Benefit Society (CCBS). Our mission is to offer opportunities for engagement by bringing local people together to learn, socialise, share skills and experiences; and support their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

What we did



We began by considering our existing offer and exploring ways that we could develop these activities to fit the brief of the commission and involve more Disabled people. We then addressed areas where we didn't currently have provision, for example in regular food production sessions specifically for Disabled attendees.

As the project continued, we reviewed the activities and adapted them to consider the needs, skills and interests of our Disabled community members. For example, we had planned to produce boxed meals at the accessible cooking sessions, but this wasn't possible because first-time attendees needed time to acclimatise to being at the Garden and had varying levels of cooking experience. Instead, a group of Disabled attendees from one of our weekly gardening groups were interested in developing their cooking skills, so they began a weekly project (supported by our staff) where they planned, cooked and distributed fresh meals to other Disabled people.

The activities:

Gardening for Clean Air (Wellbeing in the Garden):

A weekly group, primarily for Disabled people, to enjoy wellbeing activities in the Garden, grow food and learn new gardening skills. Attendees told us that they had enjoyed the social aspect of the group, as well as the opportunity to grow food in a supportive, relaxed environment. The group was renamed 'Wellbeing in the Garden' because the community members' wanted to expand the range of activities offered in the group.

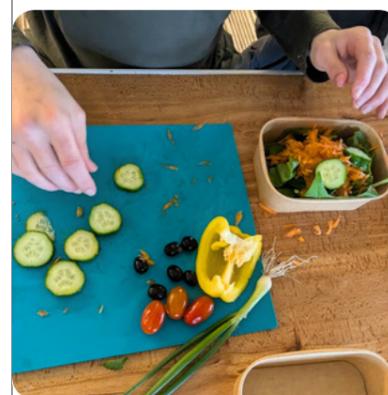


Art Together

Art therapy group for people with Dementia and their carers, creating nature-inspired artwork and facilitating climate conversations. Inspired by one of the group members, the attendees also produced a nature-inspired poetry and art book, Poetry as we Paint.

Community Lunch

A five-month partnership with our weekly lunch, during which we provided a free freshly prepared meal, opportunities for social interaction and access to signposting information and support from visiting service-providers.



Accessible Cooking Sessions

Cooking with Disabled adults and children with SEND (separate sessions). These one-off sessions also included a Garden tour, and participants harvested Garden produce to use in the recipes wherever possible. We offered most of these sessions to local schools and Disability organisations, allowing us to reach more people and partner with other organisations.

Food Production and Distribution

Weekly group of Disabled community members planning, cooking and distributing fresh and frozen meals to other Disabled people.



Overview of the outcomes



377 boxed meals
cooked by and for
Disabled people

122 people
attended one-off
cooking sessions

100% of Wellbeing in the Garden attendees
agreed or strongly agreed that the group helped
them to learn and practice new skills

88% of Wellbeing in the Garden attendees
agreed or strongly agreed that the group gave them an
opportunity to spend time in nature



1314 Community Lunches
were served between March and August 2025

3 members
of the Meal Preparation Team gained the confidence to begin
college courses

18 local schools and Disabled people's organisations
partnered with as part of the project

49% of Community Lunch attendees
said they had joined in with other activities at the Garden
since attending the lunch

98% of Community Lunch attendees
strongly agreed or agreed that attending gave them
opportunities for social interaction

Case study

Martin's Story

Martin initially joined the Gardening for Clean Air (Wellbeing in the Garden) group because he enjoyed gardening and felt that coming to the group would help with his mental health. When asked about the group's impact on his mental wellbeing, he was enthusiastic: **'Oh, without a doubt, yes**

definitely. It's been amazing. It's supportive, the group is friendly, helpful. You can do as much or as little as you want depending on how you're feeling on the day. You can have a cup of tea and sit down if you want or you can do as much as you want, which is great.'

This flexibility made it easier for Martin to show up during some of his hardest days. After the loss of his wife, the Garden has served as a place he can feel supported in his grief.

'I've suffered from depression in the past. With grief and mental health... You can go to the dark side; I call it the dark side. Loneliness can push you into that. So coming up here, for the meals on a Tuesday... I started with the Wellbeing in the Garden group, then the lunches, then I found out about the Tai Chi. I've now got structure in my life and I meet people. It's great.'

Gardening has always been a passion of Martin's. While his hip injury meant he had to give up his allotment, the Wellbeing in the Garden group allows him to enjoy the benefits of gardening without being overwhelmed.

'I enjoy gardening, I had an allotment years ago so that's one of the reasons I came for the gardening group. But an allotment is hard work on your own, but here, you've got lots of support, so you don't have to worry.'



'There's no stress, so if I'm away one week somebody else will do the watering or something, it's not going to get all overgrown. It's very relaxing; I find it relaxing.'

'Here I can grow food without it overwhelming me... Because when you get overwhelmed that can have a bad effect on your mental health, but here I can come and I'm not worried... The allotment was brilliant but it was a hell of a lot of work. And you find that now with people getting older and I am getting older, it's a bit harder.'

'Nature for me is a great healer. For wellbeing it's fantastic. This morning in the Garden we had the robin bobbing around, and around the side of the Garden you get the blackberries and things like that. Even though you're in the middle of a city, it's like being in the countryside.'

As his confidence grew, Martin began volunteering with the Wellbeing in the Garden group, helping others to garden and harvest food. For him, it's about both giving and receiving support, and for the other community members Martin's lived experience provides vital peer support.

'I get something back from helping other people. So as well as me helping them, they're helping me in a sense. I get something back out of it. For me, it's like giving back because this group has helped me when I needed help and I feel like I can help somebody else. It's like giving back. I've been there so I know what it's like.'



Photo credit: Mark Simmons

Lessons learned and tips for other organisations



What went well:

Offering new Disability-focused activities enabled us to **build new relationships, and strengthen existing ones, with local Disability organisations** by inviting them to take part in funded sessions. This resulted in Disabled people attending other sessions here, new partnerships being formed, the engagement of new volunteers and increased demand for programmes outside of the commission e.g. 1:1 therapeutic support.

Our Disabled community members felt empowered by participating in **meaningful activities** which supported others. Some of our younger chefs, who also attended our YHH holiday club, distributed the meals which they had prepared to other attendees and their families. Wellbeing in the Garden attendees began to bring in flowers and vegetables from their own gardens to share with the group.

Intertwining activities offered as part of the commission with our other activities helped to recruit participants, move participants onto other activities, and encourage more collaborations between staff, volunteers and attendees.

'It's really easy to connect with others in the group here. I don't feel different. There's always something new to learn and I like helping. It's great to have a mix of ages and good to make the community in the garden aware of the differences in people.'

-Wellbeing in the Garden attendee



Our **Disabled volunteers and staff have used their valuable lived experience** to improve our offer and support community members attending our groups.

We have continued to **offer volunteering opportunities** to our Disabled community members.

Being a community organisation (rather than an organisation specifically for Disabled people) has meant that Disabled people and non-Disabled people have attended the offer alongside one another, creating visibility, awareness and an opportunity for all to realise the importance of a just transition.

Relationships between attendees have flourished and the groups have encouraged friendships between people of different ages, disabilities etc.

Increasing accessibility has benefitted all our community members, not just those engaging directly with the Climate and Disability project.

Challenges and how we overcame them:

Making an outdoor space accessible on a low budget has been challenging! We made some positive changes (such as installing an accessible pathway, building accessible raised beds and incorporating a larger toilet) but we are constantly striving to make the Garden more accessible. Successful corporate engagement supported us with this, for example materials for our pathway were purchased using money from the Climate commission and it was built by Bray and Slaughter as in-kind support.

Embedding the Climate-based work into existing groups initially caused some **confusion and resistance**, for example within the Art Together group, although there was a willingness to try and engage because they were already engaged in the group and enjoying what was on offer. The Art Therapists overcame this by bringing nature into the group; literally by using natural items as inspiration, and figuratively by talking about people's memories of spending time in nature, and of the mental health benefits of this. This helped to bring an awareness of climate change and an appreciation of nature to a group who had largely not considered it to be overly relevant to their lives.

Attendance at groups could be inconsistent, often because of people's health issues or reliance on the availability of support workers.



'I feel they are a great team of people who work hard preparing all the lovely meals that we enjoy. They make us feel very welcome and it is a great atmosphere. I think it's very important to have this lovely luncheon group, especially for those living alone. It gives a sense of belonging.'

-Community Lunch attendee

As groups have grown, **our space has become more squeezed** and we have had to balance the need for community members to have ownership over certain spaces, with ensuring that there is space available to everyone who needs it.

As our groups expanded the **group dynamics and needs of attendees varied week-to-week** depending on who attended, which needed careful management. Recruiting more volunteers helped the groups to run smoothly and increased engagement from Disabled participants, some of whom identified more closely with volunteers than our staff.

Engaging new individuals via social media was challenging; we found it easier to attract individuals through other Disability-focused organisations, or by asking community members to share new activities with their existing networks.

Tips for other organisations running similar projects:



Build on your current offer and utilise the expertise you have in-house.



Engaged group members can go on to become invaluable volunteers; don't underestimate **the power of peer support**.



Consider travel to and from your venue, for example parking, bus routes and train times. Share this information with potential attendees and take this into account when choosing session dates and times.



The **more information** you can make available to attendees, the better! Our Disabled community members have told us that they benefit from having information about how to find the Garden, our toilet facilities, session plans and photos of group facilitators.



Offer drop-in activities; some of our Disabled community members were unable to commit to a regular time slot but appreciated the ability to attend as and when they could.



Sometimes it's best not to mention 'Climate Change'! Lots of people engaged initially because they were interested in food or nature, and the conversations about climate change came later when issues could be discussed in real-time e.g. this summer's drought impacted on food growing.



Be flexible! Talk to attendees about their interests, passions, skills and needs so these can be incorporated into your offer. Understand that your community members may need physical space and resources to take ownership of projects e.g. space to grow their own plants.

What next

We have learned that **accessibility is a journey, not a destination!** We will continue to make our space and all our activities more accessible and learn from our Disabled community members. We are awaiting outcomes of two accessibility audits (undertaken by and for Disabled people) and we look forward to implementing the recommended changes.



Many of the people who first visited the Garden for an activity that was funded by the commission have continued to come to the Garden and engage with the food and nature-based activities. We are aware that **more Disabled people are now attending other parts of our offering**, such as our Knitting and Crochet group.

Most of the **activities we ran as part of the commission are continuing**, either in their current form or with slight adaptations.

We are **building on the connections** made with other Disability-focused organisations.

Our baseline **knowledge and understanding of accessibility and Disability has increased** considerably. We will continue to use our new learning, understanding and relationships to ensure we fully consider accessibility in all aspects of our scoping, planning, actions and activities.

We will **build on individual and organisational understanding** and our confidence to openly and appropriately discuss Disability, and challenge inappropriate language and behaviour if it occurs when talking to or about Disabled people.

Useful Links :



- redcatchcommunitygarden.com
- redcatchcommunitygarden.com/climate-and-disability-project
- bristolclimatenature.org/projects/community-climate-action
- bristolclimatenature.org/news/creating-a-green-and-accessible-future

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