

Case Study: Building connections in the community

Location: YMCA North Tyneside England

YMCA North Tyneside is a supported accommodation centre for 20 young people. The staff and young residents joined the Fruit-full Communities Project with great plans and ideas for the new orchard that would be planted in the YMCA allotment. Some residents were most excited about growing organic fruit and vegetables whilst others were keen to show off their wood skills by building allotment furniture, bird tables and bird boxes. With all different ideas and aspirations they had one thing in common – they all wanted a piece of land of their own that they could look after.

Project activities

The project activities kicked off with a few very busy and successful clearing out days at the allotment, with residents working extremely hard on the 300 sqm. plot. They showed maturity and comradery working together and although very tired, admitted that they thoroughly enjoyed it! This was followed by fruit tasting, discussions about fruit varieties and a trip to a nearby community garden for inspiration which then helped residents draw up more defined plans for the orchard. It was clear that their passion for the project increased the more they explored available options. Once the final plan was agreed, the orchard was planted by residents



supported by YMCA staff in January with 25 fruit trees and a number of smaller plants marking the first stage of the allotment journey.

The Fruit-full Communities project provided residents with the opportunity to share their knowledge and utilise skills that no-one knew they had, ranging from bricklaying and woodwork to tree planting and care. The residents were engaged at every stage of the project, from planning the orchard, choosing and purchasing

trees and other orchard materials and tools to preparation of the ground and planting.

Throughout the project residents had the opportunity to experience what they could do in their allotment and how it makes them feel happy and proud. This kept them motivated and very keen to keep developing the space, look after planted

trees and share what they have learned with other residents. This is their space that they can visit and use on a regular basis for relaxation, exercise and fun. One YMCA resident said *'I'm looking forward to the celebration because I'm proud of what we've achieved'*.

One of the main reasons why YMCA centres got involved in this project was to influence community perception of the YMCA residents and this project at YMCA North Tyneside has definitely achieved that.

What makes YMCA North Tyneside's story special?

Through the hard work of both residents and staff, full commitment, mutual support and respect, the residents have shown the local allotment community how skilled they have become and how keen they are to improve their local environment for themselves and the neighbours. They received a lot of positive feedback from neighbouring allotment owners, some of who helped during the project activities and donated tools and materials.

'You have created an oasis amongst a housing estate, it's an amazing space'
Derec, Community member

'I didn't know this place existed! It's such a lovely spot. I look forward to watching it develop. Could I help in the future?'

Cheryl, Community member

The project finished with a successful celebration event attended by over 140 people, including YMCA residents, their families and friends, as well as other local community members of all ages. One resident's parent remarked: *'I'm so proud of him, he's worked so hard and proved he's got a good positive work ethic!'*

Visitors enjoyed a variety of activities, such as juicing, bird box making etc. and they had the opportunity to see and learn first hand about the amazing work of YMCA North Tyneside residents on the orchard, including the beautifully designed mosaic made by the residents. This was the first time some of them had engaged in a conversation with their local community and were very proud of what they have achieved.

'...The allotment will be there for years to come and many other young people will continue to benefit from it in the future...what a legacy!'

Don Irving, Youth & Play Manager, YMCA North Tyneside

