

# Case Study: A Community Journey

## Location: YMCA Humber England

After making the decision to plant 100 fruit trees and plants at their Peaks Lane location, YMCA Humber staff and management recognised that the Fruit-full Communities (FFC) project’s success would crucially hinge on being able to excite and involve their own residents as volunteers. Staff personally approached interested residents to reassure them that by taking part, their social welfare benefits such as Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payment would not be negatively affected. Additionally, free meals would be offered to volunteers once 4 hours of work per day had been completed.

## The #Orchard Group

In a novel move, Humber created its own Constituted Group called #Orchard which met quarterly to steer the orchard development. Comprising of 8-12 residents and staff, the group democratically decided a specific role for each volunteer and to fund free meals for orchard volunteers which YMCA Humber believes was pivotal in getting commitment over the course of the project. As staff reflect, the group was *‘set up to empower and give full autonomy to the volunteers on all aspects of decision making’* and was fully supported by

YMCA Humber staff. This helped to ensure the success of the project. Being part of the group gave each volunteer the opportunity to build life and work skills which also enhanced their personal CV and increased chances of future employment.

YMCA Humber identified each individual residents’ strength and used these to attract ‘buy-in’ for the project. Staff confidently say that this tailor-made, asset mapping approach was key to get the residents involved. For example, a resident who had previous experience in the building trade would have the necessary skills to take the lead in digging trenches for water irrigation and those who had prior horticultural knowledge could share it with other volunteers.



Fundraising proved an important activity for #Orchard which submitted ambitious and successful funding bids to O<sub>2</sub> (Think Big), Tesco Bags of Help, Peoples Postcode Lottery and Grow Wild.

The Peaks Lane orchard also achieved a Level 5 Outstanding award from the RHS and Britain in Bloom East Midlands 'It's Your Neighbourhood 2017' award scheme with a deserved recognition for their high community participation.

In total, 56 young volunteers gained new skills, knowledge, experience and confidence. Of those, 15 who had no previous work experience are now in employment or education:

- Four employed at Lindsey Oil Refinery
- Nine employed at either New Covent Garden Soup Company or Youngs Seafood Ltd.
- One studying Bio-sciences at university
- One completed a Gold Duke of Edinburgh award

The project volunteers from the YMCA Humber community recognised that by being part of a group helping to improve their own outdoor environment gave them an opportunity to foster personal skills and qualities that might otherwise have remained undeveloped.

*'Being a part of Fruit-full Communities project has given me the opportunity to learn new skills in horticulture, but on a personal note has helped me to gain confidence and self-esteem to apply for*

*the T.A (Territorial Army). I never really believed in myself before, but now I do.'*

OS, YMCA Humber resident



*'I came to YMCA to complete the skills and volunteering section of my Gold Duke of Edinburgh award. I have now completed my DofE and with the support from YMCA Humber and being part of the Fruit-full Communities project, my social skills have developed and I find it much easier in group settings. My own confidence has increased and given me the foundation base I needed to start university. Without the project I may still be in my own shell. So thank you very much for the opportunity'*

CJ, YMCA Humber volunteer

### **What makes Humber's story special?**

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From the 42 sites that grew orchards over the 3 years of FFC, YMCA Humber residents and staff uniquely set up their own steering group when they realised that the scale and ambition of the Peaks Lane project would need planning, funding and ongoing maintenance. Free meals were offered to residents and 'earned' volunteer hours registered on their CVs to help with



employment or further education prospects.

YMCA Humber staff observed a reduction in drug use while residents were engaged in outdoor activities such as planting fruit trees. The 'buzz' generated around the orchard has seen a measureable increase in young people wanting to be outside in nature, even in the winter months.

