

Case Study

Survival School



A Transition Edinburgh South project delivered by Gracemount Community Garden, in partnership with Gracemount Primary School, June/July 2020

Funded by the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund #WellbeingFund.

A brief reflection..

My experience of The Survival School at Gracemount Community Garden was that these garden sessions became a crucial way to respond to some of the challenges experienced by families struggling in the time of this pandemic.

Throughout the sessions I had the privilege of getting to know some of the families, and it became clear that many had been experiencing crippling emotional and financial challenges.

Several different parents gave insight that lockdown had a huge impact on job security, from people being furloughed and then future employment was unstable. Financial challenges of being self employed to not having any income and unsure of the future.

I gained insight that some children that hadn't been out of the house for weeks, were really struggling with the emergence back into the world. Some children were

evidently traumatised and found social interactions challenging. However time spent in the garden children and with other children their own age seemed to provide reassurance.

There was in general a marked increase of foot traffic of people coming into the garden. People keen to make time for conversation, evidently a sign of people craving for conversation outside of their house, and also an increase of interest to access a local green space. Conversation often involved appreciation of food being grown and heightening of awareness of where food is coming from.

The local food bank 'Lunch Stop' was used by those attending the Survival school. Following a garden session when families would gather fresh produce, they would also make a point of going to LunchStop to get some additional core household or food ingredients.

We received active support from the local Head teacher of Gracemount Primary School, Pupil Support Workers and several teachers. Along with providing referrals, they also popped to some of the sessions to provide a friendly face to families and strengthen the link between the school and garden. And on occasion provided those families in the garden with an update on what is happening with the return to school, and which teacher pupils will have on their return to school in August.

Each session normally started with introductions, if needed, in case members of different families were meeting for the first time. Also the beginning of a session often provided an opportunity for people to see what had been growing since the last time they were in. And specifically if anything had germinated or grown. This then was often followed with a fun activity, such as an ice breaker or a run around type game, or a ladybird minibeast hunt. This then led onto a focused practical garden activity, such as harvesting, weeding, or sowing.

Feedback was positive, parents would comment that children would talk about the garden and when they were next to return. And parents would also often comment how nice it was to meet with other parents or adults.



The sense of a social place in a natural setting with a focus on practical learning around growing seemed to resonate with the people that attended and an increasing number of the wider local community. There were some that noted interest, to come along to the garden outside of the Survival School. There had also been some families that noted interest to attend the Survival Sessions, but then weren't able to attend due to other pressures. I made sure that parents felt they were still welcome and still provided the various times they could informally come up to the garden. I also ensured that the Pupil Support Workers were informed which specific families despite being keen to attend, were struggling to come along to an initial introductory session.

I see the successes of the Survival School will help embed the garden into being an important social hub for the local community. The continuing commitment of the school and local people will help the garden to continue to grow and be a vital social community space of learning and growing.

Chris Macefield

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