

## Case Study

# Survival School



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

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### **A brief reflection by the project leader**

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, including people furloughed and worrying about future employment and the financial challenges of being self employed with loss of income and also uncertain futures.

I gained insight that some children who hadn't been out of the house for weeks were really struggling with their emergence back into the world. Some were evidently traumatised and found social interactions challenging. However, the time children spent in the garden and with other children their own age seemed to provide reassurance.

During the project, there was a marked increase of foot traffic of people coming into the garden. People were keen to make time for conversation, evidently a sign of craving for contact outside of their house. There seemed to be an increase in interest in making use of local green space. Conversation often involved appreciation of the food being grown in the garden and demonstrated heightened awareness of the value of locally grown versus far-travelled fresh food.

The local food bank 'Lunch Stop' was used by those attending the Survival school. Families would gather fresh produce at the garden session and then 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 in to some of the sessions to provide a friendly face to families and strengthen the link between the school and garden. On occasion, school staff provided families in the garden with an update on what is happening with the return to school arrangements, and which teacher particular pupils would 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 sprouted. This then was often followed with a fun activity, such as an ice-breaker or a run-around 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 in coming along to the garden outside of the Survival School. There have also been some families that noted interest in attending the Survival Sessions, but then weren't able to 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 that the successes of the Survival School for families also benefits the wider community and safeguards the future of the garden. It reinforces the position of the garden as an important social hub for the local community. The continuing commitment of the school and local people enable the garden to continue as a vital social community space of learning and growing.

**Chris Macefield**

**Group Leader for Survival School Project, Gracemount Community Garden**

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