

## Case Study: Safe Garden Project (Enfield)

The Safe Garden Project was a pilot initiative promoting good relations between people from different faiths and cultures, whilst supporting inter-generational understanding and respect between young people and elderly residents in the Ponders End & Edmonton areas of Enfield. The project also aimed to reduce anti-social behaviour, crime and burglary targeted at elderly residents in the London Borough of Enfield.

This project meets a specific need of elderly or disabled residents who often find it difficult to maintain their gardens. Evidence shows that vandals and burglars often target homes of residents whose gardens are not up-kept because they are easily identified as being vulnerable, this project therefore also aimed to reduce the risk of burglary or vandalism targeted at elderly or disabled residents, by reducing the risk factor of untidy or overgrown gardens.

The Ponders End & Edmonton areas of Enfield were identified to pilot the project as this is a relatively deprived area of the Borough, where such support to elderly residents is greatly needed (identified with Age Concern Enfield).

Enfield's Safer & Stronger Communities Partnership awarded Interfaith Action £4,960, to deliver the Enfield Safe Garden Project, between August 2008 – March 2009. Interfaith Action provided match funding towards the project from Trust for London, Connecting Communities Plus and City Bridge Trust. The Project was also supported by Age Concern Enfield, Enfield Volunteer Centre and North London V-Involved Team, whom we are all very grateful to.

We advertised the volunteering opportunity widely with Enfield Volunteer Centre, the North London V Team and local universities, with a fantastic response. Fifteen volunteers (aged 16-25) were recruited and inducted on the project, the majority being students from Enfield College studying for their level 3 certificate.

We advertised the project and voluntary service to older people through a variety of community groups, with large elderly membership. Many of these groups and organisations included our advert in their newsletters, or referred directly to us individuals they knew who required the service. In total we had over 15 referrals whom we have supported.

Volunteers supported residents with a variety of basic gardening tasks including cutting grass, trimming edges, sweeping, weeding, pruning, planting and painting fences or gates. One of the photographs shows a pair of volunteers clearing a whole wall of overgrown ivy.

“Volunteers reduce the risk of vandalism and burglary, often targeted at elderly people with unkept gardens.”



“Over 416 voluntary hours completed, and 15 residents supported.”

### Outcomes and Benefits of the Project

- 15 volunteers over 416 hours volunteering.
- 15 elderly & disabled residents were supported with their gardening.
- Age Concern Enfield delivered a training workshop for volunteers, on ‘Volunteering with Elderly People’.
- An end of project celebration allowed residents to say thank you to volunteers and award their hard work.
- Improved perception of young people amongst older residents in the Ponders End and Edmonton areas of Enfield, through volunteering support provided and regular interaction.
- Improved communication, interpersonal and team working skills amongst the volunteers, from participating and interacting with each other and the elderly residents.
- Reduced isolation and loneliness of those residents living alone.
- Increased assistance and support for elderly residents enabling them to live in their homes independently, without fear of crime.
- Improved community cohesion through young volunteers from different faith and cultural backgrounds working together for the benefit of the whole local community; increased interaction and understanding between the generations; and improved residential areas.



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### Lessons Learnt

There is a definite need for this project. There were many more residents looking for gardening support than we were able to help. Age Concern advised that this would be likely, so we set simple criteria to prioritise people (the criteria were living in Ponder's End or Edmonton; Living alone; or having a disability).

Young people (aged 16-25) are very eager and willing to volunteer with elderly people, for a variety of reasons.

The best time to deliver a gardening project would be between March – October; delays are inevitable when delivered during winter months, and gardening activities are restricted.

Residents like to know the recruitment process for volunteers, and whether they are trustworthy and reliable.

It often takes longer for a project to be advertised than anticipated; developing relationships with established community groups and organisations speeds up the process as they advertise opportunities in their newsletters and directly at events.

The induction was run with a group of volunteers allowing the project manager to identify who worked best together, and who may need extra support or supervision.



### Recommendations for Replication

- Volunteers must be CRB checked or where this is not possible provide at least 2 character references.
- Volunteers should be inducted including health & safety training, boundaries of their role (including what tasks they can't do) and expectations.
- The Volunteer Supervisor should meet with the resident to go through the boundaries of the volunteer role and do a health and safety assessment of the garden before placing volunteers.
- Volunteers should be introduced to the resident (by their supervisor) and spend time discussing what needs to be done (and what should not or can't be done/achieved).
- Volunteers should work in pairs.
- Volunteers should be encouraged to talk with the resident they are supporting, to show interest and find out basic information & interests – encouraging interaction and relationship building.
- Follow up with residents and volunteers after each 'session' to ensure there are no problems or concerns, if there are these can be dealt with and are unlikely to worsen.