



PlayGROUND Art and Environment, Connecting People

Annual Report 2023 -2024



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Project - Celebrating Communities



Exploring life in the soil (above), Ink making workshop (top)

Celebrating Communities workshops took place during the Summer holidays, August 2023, thanks to funding from Birmingham City Council.

The first workshop explored life in the soil. Various samples were taken from around the garden, in addition to samples from the path, compost, wood chip and manure heaps. Fungi, mycorrhizal networks, nematodes, springtails, mites, insect larvae, worms, slugs, snails and many other soil dwellers were carefully examined and returned.

A second workshop explored biodiversity using DIY quadrats, made from string, pencils/sticks/bamboo. Unweeded trimmed areas of the garden, sometimes referred to as naturalised, were used for sampling. Daisies, dandelions and buttercups were identified by their leaves, along with other species traditionally thought of as common weeds. A wide range of grasses, and wild flowers i.e. sorrel, vetch, burnet, clover, speedwell and yellow rattle, were also found.

Natural ink making proved to be a very popular workshop. Walnut husks and oak apples (pre-soaked and boiled), tumeric, coffee, brambles and nettles, were trialed with readily available preservatives, fixatives and binders e.g. vinegar, alcohol, salt, gum arabic.

Home made inks were then used in the following two workshops to explore Fibonacci's numerical system and the shapes and patterns found in nature.



Everlasting Pierrot, Strawflower, genus - Rosa, petals grow in a distinct Fibonacci pattern. Unidentified insect

Soil Health



Trialing the no-dig method (top)
Dog vomit slime mould, *Fuligo septica* (above)

Though the inherited soil has been contaminated with plastics and debris from previous plot holders and pesticides have been used until recently to maintain allotment paths, the garden continues to be organically run for the benefit of nature and people.

This year, in addition to using green manures, we trialed a no-dig approach to manage the vegetable growing areas, with mixed success. In hindsight we probably fell into making one of the most common mistakes. Using wood chip and under composted organic matter, considerably increased the habitat for slugs, snails and a myriad of other insects and invertebrates. Waiting another year for sufficiently decomposed compost to become available would have helped reduce the slug feast, but in the long term increasing the soil biomass will greatly improve fertility.

Adding slots and boards to the compost bays has significantly increased the volume each bay can hold. Sufficient heat can now be maintained to optimise decomposition.

Produce

Fortunately, many of the edibles grown regularly were unaffected by the burgeoning slug population e.g. potatoes, onions, garlic, artichokes, beetroot, chard, squash, sweetcorn, endive and lambs lettuce. A wide variety of tomatoes were grown in the poly tunnel together with, aubergines, peppers, gourds, loofahs, pineapple and chilean guava.

Apple and cherry trees planted three years earlier produced abundant fruit. The hazel and cob nut trees will start bearing nuts in a year or two. Soft fruits bushes produced little fruit, despite mulching root development has been slow. Inherited blackberry and raspberry bushes put on their usual dazzling display of flowers and bountiful fruit.



Crown Prince pumpkins (left), Habanero chilli peppers (middle)
Romaine lettuce (right)



Poly tunnel tomatoes, self seeded potatoes and pumpkin (above)
Bottle gourds (top)

Maintaining and Developing the Garden



Dye and herb bed boundary, wood chip and brick lined path in progress



Horticulturist, Phil Stokes, vibrant perennial planting, now maintained by volunteers.

A small group of volunteers have done a magnificent job in maintaining the garden. The ornamental planting and infrastructure continue to be a work in progress.

Two quarter circular brick borders defining the herb and dye beds, on either side of the main path are slowly progressing, thanks to EH Smith Builders Merchants and B&Q for the brick donation. They encompass a thriving salt bush regularly nibbled by muntjac deer, and numerous herb and dye plants propagated/sourced from annual outings to The National Herb Centre.

Feature and hedgerow planting, require regular clearing and mulching. Inset wild flower sections surrounded by strimmed, naturalised grass, demand frequent weeding.

The garden layout evolves with nature, a few plants that are commonly considered invasive i.e. Scotch broom and buddleia have serendipitously taken up residence and are kept flourishing by regular pruning. PlayGROUND's ethos is to provide habitat for nature in coexistence with edibles and art materials for human consumption and creative endeavours.

Last year's brushwood cornered square filled with teddy bear sunflowers, entitled, Homage Leonora Carrington, has morphed into a Suprematist square of cosmos daisies. The Gourd Temple, has become a climbing frame for green beans and sweet peas.



The geodesic dome provides a climbing frame



Tendrils reach for the dome

Funding and Engagement

Between Winter 2022 - Spring 2023, PlayGROUND applied for two medium-term funding grants (3-5 years). Smaller project funding i.e. Celebrating Communities, didn't cover management or medium-term development and a disproportionate amount of time was being spent on applying for funding rather than engagement and delivery. Sadly, the two medium-term applications failed, one hadn't been read before representation to the initial panel and the other funder changed their priorities to support running costs. Its a consequence PlayGROUND's project manager was obliged to take up full-time work, resulting in no further funding applications being made.

Creative projects and engagement suffered due to lack of funding. Celebrating Communities, proved to be the only project that ran during the financial year. Seven adults, 13 children and five visiting participants attended the sessions.

Good company, fresh air and exercise, organically grown produce and creativity, continue to sustain five volunteers who maintain the garden and benefit from its produce. Edibles are regularly exchanged with other plot holders and distributed to people who drop in and live locally. Three schools benefitted from propagated mint, rosemary, pepper, tomato and raspberry plants.

PlayGROUND's lack of presence on site has effected the allotment community.

Three plot holder's that were introduced to the site through attending PlayGROUND's projects gave up this year. Lack of time and moving to an allotment closer to home were the main reasons given. However, an inability to provide prior levels of support and companionship were also acknowledged to have a bearing. Ideally, former plot holders and their families would have the opportunity to volunteer and benefit from the community garden produce but in the absence of supervision, visits are limited.

Nevertheless, volunteers have a strong commitment to maintaining the garden for the benefit of the wider community and founding purposes. Trustee support has been unanimous in maintaining the charity, albeit on a much reduced scale, in readiness for future opportunities and development.

	Name	Signature	Date
Prepared by.....	P. Crummay	<i>P. Crummay</i>	18/02/2025
Trustee approval.....	J. Parkinson	<i>JCParkinson</i>	23/02/2025

Annual Accounts April 2023 - 2024

Balance Carried over 2022-2023	£2,532
Income	
Project Income (B'ham City Council)	600
Bank Interest	30
Total	£630
Expenditure	
Project Manager/Artist Fees	1,213
Celebrating Communities - project materials	435
Allotment/plot annual fee x 3	330
AON Insurance	80
Total	£2,058
Balance Carried over 2023-2024	£1,104

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