

Walworth Community Gardening Network Newsletter and Conference Report

Newsletter May/June 2018: Report of the WCGN Community Gardening Conference held on April 21 2018 at Walworth Garden



Cllr Barrie Hargrove addressing community gardeners

The Walworth Community Gardening Network (WCGN) held its first annual conference on Saturday April 21st at Walworth Garden

Set up last autumn with the support of the United St Saviour's Charity, the WCGN brought together community gardeners from Walworth and the Elephant & Castle to discuss how we can support each other and can gain greater support from Southwark Council and other funders. A report on the conference afternoon plenary discussion and the three morning workshops is given below.

Support from Southwark and other funders

In the plenary session, Cllr Barrie Hargrove, Southwark's Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Leisure, outlined his vision for community gardening in Southwark. This was followed by a Q&A in which community gardeners raised the issues they saw as key. The need for joined up thinking from Southwark Council was stressed - it can be frustrating trying to find the right officer to speak to, and who can get things done. A single point of contact - a knowledgeable and sympathetic officer, able to advise and take action would be a great step forward. Many noted that residents keen to start a new community garden or develop an existing one need help to plan. Access to water is crucial. Projects can flounder if ready access to water isn't considered right from the start - without a nearby supply of water the summer months become a burden rather than a joy as so much time is taken up with watering before we can turn to other much needed tasks.

Barrie agreed that getting value for money from grants to community gardening groups means proper planning, and that projects could benefit from the involvement right from the start of professional community gardeners such as Walworth Garden and Glengall Wharf. Provision for this could be built into the funding application and TRAs and community groups made better aware of this. Community gardening groups could also be encouraged to apply for revenue grants at the same time to fund training and community events to build local support and attract volunteers.



Discussing how Southwark Council can help local gardening groups

Barrie said he was learning a lot from the gardeners at the conference and took on board what they were saying about access to water. Sustainability was a priority for him too and he would look into the ways Southwark could imaginatively aid community gardeners to get easier access to water and recycled compost. Barrie wanted Southwark to be a leader in supporting community gardening and to put environmental volunteering at the forefront of its policies. The conference chair, Jeremy Leach of the Walworth Society, thanked Barrie for his support to the warm applause of all those present.

Walworth Garden Show

29th Sept, Nursery Row Park

Want to be involved?

Email: vincebrown@walworthcgn.co.uk

Tel: 07401 552 139

Twitter: @CgnWalworth

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Setting up and maintaining a community garden

Vince Brown, from the Walworth Community Gardening Network, led off the discussion in the workshop on how to set up and maintain a community garden. Apart from the crucial issue of water, gardeners discussed taking account of sun and shade in the garden, soil quality and safety, and appropriate planting for the garden site conditions. Composting and what to do with green waste should also be top of the planning agenda, with help and training to compost on site where practical, and otherwise, for Veolia to recycle composted green waste back to the community gardens.

Many stressed the point that community gardening groups flourish or flounder depending on how well they bring forward new people from their local community into gardening. Garden groups need to be imaginative and outward looking in bringing in new volunteers and to support and develop their existing volunteers through training.



Discussing how to set up and maintain a community garden

The long waiting lists for allotments show that many people are wanting to garden and we need to make contact and welcome them in to our community gardens. We should also pay particular attention to supporting those with additional needs and attracting volunteers from our diverse community, young and old. The Walworth Community Gardening Network has excellent potential in helping with this. By bringing community gardeners together to discuss, share experiences and learn from each other, and encouraging neighbouring garden groups to pool resources and work together, we can widen the communities we attract and the people we can support. Robert also spoke about Community Southwark and how they can help community gardening groups extend and widen their base of volunteers. Robert invited gardeners to get in contact for more information and help (contact details below).



Attracting and supporting volunteers is the key - Pullens, April 2018

Attracting and supporting volunteers

Robert Jamieson, of Community Southwark, led the workshop on volunteering. Robert noted that it can be a challenge to attract and retain volunteers, but we shouldn't be shy about promoting what we offer. We should celebrate the 'unique selling points' of our community gardens - volunteers will benefit from the beauty of the gardens; learn about and connect to nature; and enjoy the health and social benefits of coming together to garden. Our volunteers should be encouraged to feel proud that together we are greening our neighbourhood, providing a vibrant social hub, as well as bringing people to fresh healthy food through growing and cooking.

Social prescribing and GP referrals

Marcela Vielman from the South London & Maudsley Trust (SLAM)/Pembroke House, led the workshop discussion on community gardening, GP referrals and social prescribing. Marcela told the conference that there was strong evidence that connecting with other people promotes our wellbeing and can act as a buffer against struggles with mental health. And that regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety – gardening is a great way of connecting with people and taking exercise. Gardening is also a way of continuing learning, which keeps our minds active and increases self-esteem. It heightens our awareness of ourselves and of others and helps us enjoy the moment and the environment around us. Community Gardening also allows us to help others and to make a positive contribution to our neighbourhoods, and people who take a greater interest in helping others are more likely to consider themselves as happy and have better health.

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People with physical or mental health problems, however, may be less likely to volunteer with community garden groups precisely because of these problems. We therefore have to make a positive intervention to help overcome these barriers. As a minimum, we need to make sure that the information we give is accurate and up to date. We should have a named contact for potential volunteers who is easy to get in touch with. We have to ensure volunteers' details are kept confidential and make clear how we share information. Most of all we need to build trust.

We are not on our own in achieving this. There are organisations we can go to for help and advice such as Pembroke House and Talking Therapies Southwark. They can also help us build relationships with our local Primary Care Navigators – the professionals at our local GP surgeries who could refer on volunteers to our community garden groups. Marcela is happy to give further help and advice (contact details below).



Gardening is good for health and wellbeing - Friends' of Pullens Gardens and Pullens Kids' Gardening Club, May 2018

United St Saviour's Charity and other funders

The Walworth Community Garden Network has been set up with the help of United St Saviour's Charity. Sarah Thurman, Head of Community Investment at United St Saviour's, spoke to the conference about funding opportunities for community gardening groups. Sarah told us that United St Saviour's is very happy to fund the WCGN through its setting up period and is really pleased to see community gardening groups working together and supporting each other. United St Saviour's have a small grants programme for amounts up to £5000 that community garden groups from North Southwark and Bermondsey can apply for. They also provide a funding guide for Southwark, which lists many other funders that community

gardening groups can apply to; and are more than willing to advise people on how to make grant applications (contact details below).

Working together

The main theme of the conference discussion was how we can work together and support each other as a community gardening network. Vince Brown explained that the WCGN had only started last autumn, but the great turnout at the conference was a major step forward. The next is to get organised, and the main task will be to reach out to all community gardening groups in the area.



Kennington Park Road TRA invite their neighbours to a garden training day

The WCGN will be organising a number of garden training days to encourage neighbouring gardening groups to get to know each other and to work together; to start to talk about holding joint events; sharing volunteers, knowledge and tools; collective composting; and swapping plants and saving by buying in bulk. We also need to work together Walworth-wide. Many had emphasised the need for a means of communication and a website to provide advice, information and contacts. We need to consider the best communications platforms to use, but keep in mind that up to a third of adults in Southwark do not have access to the Internet or smart phones.

All present were invited to consider becoming part of a WCGN steering group, which will guide it over its first year and beyond. A number of those present put their names forward to offer their expertise and experience in gardening, volunteering and communication. Enthusiasm is what is wanted most of all and Vince will send out a call for more volunteers.

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Walworth Garden Show and other events

John Whelan spoke about some of the events that the WCGN is organising this year. We start with a Gardeners' Question Time as part of the Nursery Row 'Farm in the Park' on Saturday 19th May.

On Saturday 26th May the WCGN will be at Flowerful Elephant at Elephant Park. Other events will be organised through the summer, culminating in the inaugural Walworth Garden Show at Nursery Row Park on Saturday 29th September.

The Walworth Garden Show will be an annual event and this year it will be part of the Nursery Row Autumn Fayre. It offers local community gardeners the opportunity to get together to show their best fruit, flowers and vegetables – with prizes for all. This will be a great way to meet other gardeners, attract new volunteers, and show the people of Walworth how rich in community gardens we are. The WCGN is here to help you prepare now and get ready for the show just get in touch with the WCGN for help and advice (contact details below).

Finally, many thanks to those organisations that made the conference happen, United St Saviour's Charity, Walworth Garden, the Walworth Society, and thanks also to our speakers: Barrie, Sarah, Marcela, Robert and John; and to Pete Wright for the sound; Mali@positivecommunications for photography; Mama Thai for an excellent lunch; Ruth for catering and Diana Cochrane for the cakes.



Preparing the ground for planting for the Walworth Garden Show, Friends of Pullens Gardens first meeting, May 2018

WCGN Contact

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Other useful contacts

Robert Jamieson at Community Southwark
Robert@communitysouthwark.org

Advice on supporting volunteers
www.communitysouthwark.org/about-us/services/volunteer-management-support

Marcela Vielman at SLAM
Marcela.Vielman@SLAM.nhs.uk

United St Saviour's Charity
www.ustsc.org.uk

United St Saviour's funding guide
www.ustsc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Funding-guide-16-17-low-resolution-FINAL-2.pdf

Walworth Garden
www.walworthgarden.org.uk

Glengall Wharf Garden
www.burgessparkfoodproject.org.uk

Pembroke House
www.pembrokehouse.org.uk

Bankside Open Spaces Trust
www.bost.org.uk

Garden Organic
www.gardenorganic.org.uk

Talking Therapies Southwark
www.slam-iapt.nhs.uk/southwark

NHS Southwark Clinical Commissioning Group
www.southwarkccg.nhs.uk

Borough, Bankside & Walworth Community Council
email pauline.bonner@southwark.gov.uk

The Walworth Society
www.walworthsociety.co.uk

