



# GROWING GRANTS

Inspiring Community  
Growing Projects





# Growing Projects

We have mapped over 50 community growing projects across Somerset. This booklet showcases 8 projects who received Growing Grants:

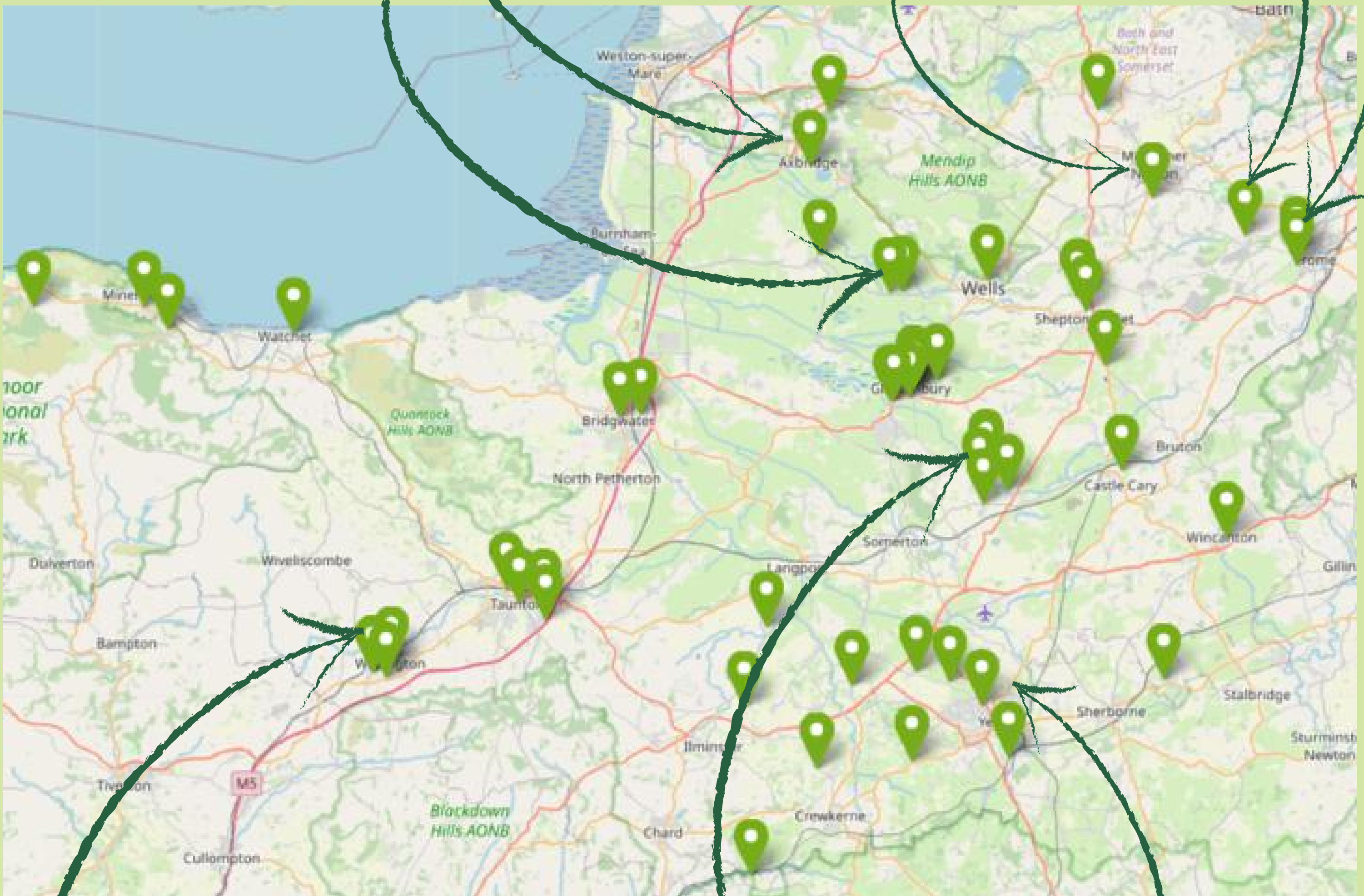
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# Introduction

This booklet shares the success stories and developments of a range of growing projects who received a Growing Grant\* from the Somerset Food Resilience Fund in 2021. Somerset is home to a diverse range of projects, including Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes, community allotments, gardens and orchards, as well as school gardens. There is a mix of well-established and emerging projects.

The Growing Grants became available during the Covid 19 Pandemic and Brexit - UK leaving the E.U. Both have created challenges for our food systems, access to healthy food and also revealed further food inequalities. This has brought a mixture of challenges and opportunities for projects.

Prominent themes include improving health and well-being for participants, enhancing the environment for local people and wildlife, as well as sustainable food growing for local communities and improved food resilience. Grant money provided infrastructure, staffing, tools and plants as well as improving community facilities (e.g. a polytunnel at Frome Field 2 Fork, a shed at Axbridge Community allotments and a pizza oven at Manor House Road Community Garden).

Growing projects have so many benefits. They enhance the local area and develop a sense of a community (Westfield Community Garden and Transition Town Wellington). They also have a direct impact on the individuals who take part, for instance, supporting people to rebuild their lives after difficulties (Root Connections), improving well-being for older people (Cultivating Community) or giving people skills for their next steps and increasing confidence (Plotgate Community Farm).

Thank you to all contributors - the project workers and volunteers who shared their time, reflections and photographs to bring this booklet to life. We hope it will bring attention to our strong community growing network. Perhaps it will spark new food and growing projects for the future. This would be an important contribution to better health and community connections as well as essential for improving local food resilience.

*Somerset Community Food*

April 2022

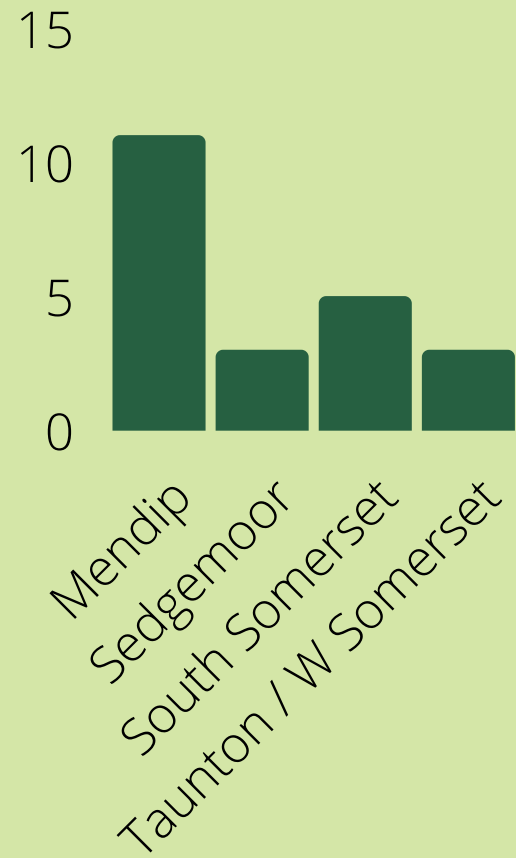
\*The 2021 Growing Grants were distributed by Somerset Community Foundation in partnership with Somerset County Council and Somerset Community Food.



# Somerset Growing Grants



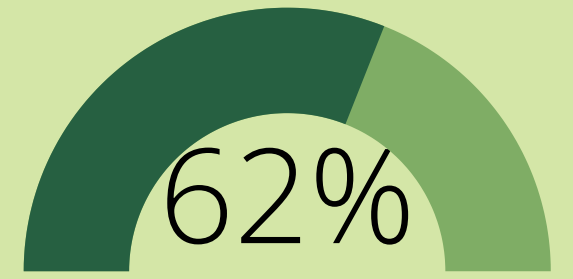
Grants distributed



A concentration of projects in Mendip area

## 12,000+

Total number of reported grant beneficiaries (at date of publication)



62 % of projects state their sites are accessible or partly accessible for wheelchair users

## Main project types who received a Growing Grant:



- 1 Cooking training series
- 1 Community Supported Agriculture project (CSA)
- 3 Community allotment groups
- 5 Social and therapeutic horticulture projects
- 8 Community orchards, gardens or fields
- 4 School and educational gardens

## Primary beneficiaries:

Half of the projects benefited local residents	Other projects specifically targeted: women, children and young people, older people, people with disabilities, those with mental health issues and people facing homelessness.
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## Key project themes:

Building community and connections

Increasing skills and confidence

Improving well-being and mental health

Protecting and improving the environment

Developing garden infrastructure and resources

Building local food resilience



# Axbridge Community Allotments

The group grows organic fruit and vegetables with the community for the community, across two plots in Axbridge. They share produce according to the need of members. Growing season surpluses are given to the local food bank, sold by donation to local residents, as well as being made into preserves.



## The Growing Grant

The grant was used to purchase a new shed and to re-cover their existing polytunnel, to enable the group to continue to make good use of their site.



## David Parkin, treasurer, reports:

We have purchased a new and larger shed for allotment tools and compost storage. We have also renewed the old polythene on our polytunnel and repaired the door structures.

Local people support the community allotment, even if they don't officially join it. A local builder lent us a concrete mixer to create the base for the new shed.

The group are part of the local response to climate change. They have been working in partnership to create a community garden in the town centre, clearing and planting up the area.

## Case Study

A participant who had an unexpected bereavement and felt very isolated and depressed, was encouraged to join our community allotment. She says it has saved her and she has enjoyed learning about vegetable growing as well as adding to some wonderful flower features. She is now completing a professional horticulture course at Cannington College.

***'This allotment has been a lifesaver for me.'***



Photos: David Parkin



# Frome Field 2 Fork

The group are developing a welcoming and inclusive community growing space within walking distance of Frome town centre. They provide opportunities for people to connect with each other and with nature, learn new skills and access local food. Produce is grown using healthy and sustainable methods.



## The Growing Grant

The grant was used to increase the capacity of their community growing site, to run regular growing activity sessions and for the purchase of a new polytunnel.



## Caroline Wajsblum, Director, reports:

In 2021 we ran pilot sessions and 29 activity sessions with 77 participants in total (there were 33 unique adult participants and 12 children). 80% of people returned three or more times.

Our Tuesday 'Growing Food and Friendships' session focuses on mental well-being, and our 'Sunday Green Gym' focuses on physical well-being.

Group sessions are free and run on a 'drop in' basis to offer flexibility, although regular attendance is encouraged. We also receive referrals from Mendip Health Connections and signposting from 'Frome Green Wellbeing' (a new partnership in Frome including ourselves, The Walled Garden at Mells and Shared Earth Learning).





**Session activities** included building no-dig vegetable growing beds, clearing overgrown areas, scything, weeding, planting perennials, harvesting fruit, nuts and flowers, building composting bays, learning about ecology and horticulture, discussions on design, wildlife surveys, picnics, fires, shared meals and many cups of tea!

### Meeting local needs

The main need was from people experiencing isolation, loneliness and mental health issues and the need for learning opportunities. People really appreciated coming and spending time on the land, reconnecting with community, sharing their troubles, learning new skills and being physically active!

### Case Study

One regular participant, felt isolated in a new area after a difficult relationship breakdown and experienced mental and physical health problems. Since coming to Frome Field 2 Fork, she has found that regularly spending time in nature greatly improves her mood and her ability to connect with others, share her thoughts and discuss problems. Getting stuck into some safe, physical and fulfilling work on the land gives her a sense of belonging and purpose. She is keen to get more involved in the design process and project management. She is slowly building confidence, tackling family issues and starting to build a life again.



***'We've learned a huge amount about the land itself, how we interact with it and maintain it, how it guides us to make decisions about design. We've learned that together we are stronger and have started to build a supportive community.'***



# Manor House Road Community Garden

Building a long-lasting pizza oven - Q&A with Andy Reid, Glastonbury



**Why did you create a pizza oven in your community garden?**

Our long-term plan is to make the garden a focus for the local community. A pizza oven is an excellent way of encouraging people to use the space.



## Describe the structure

A 10cm concrete foundation, a brick structure to support the oven, a 10cm base for the oven and the oven itself. It is part of a larger construction, which includes a BBQ and a worktop space. The whole structure is 3m long and a little over 1m deep.

## What materials were needed?

Around 600 bricks, just over 1 dumpy bag of sand and 1 of gravel, 15 bags of cement and 5 bags of perlite. A gym ball – to create the shape of the oven. We also made a strong "table" to build the oven on, with a large hole to sit the gym ball in. Also, 1" thick firebricks, insulation and some slates for the worktop. We also used recycled wine bottles in the base.



## What was the cost of the project?

A little under £1000. We could have reduced costs by scrounging bricks, but we wanted to have consistency with the bricks and finish the project quickly during summertime.

## How long did it take to build?

We have spent 2-4 hours on the project 3-4 days a week over 4 weeks (approx 50 hours).

## How many people were involved and what skills were required?

3 people completed the work and we are all DIYers who have done work in our own homes. We learned the skills on the job.

## How long will it last and any advice for keeping a pizza oven in good shape?

We are hoping it will last forever! The perlite mix has a sand and cement render on the top and we will be adding ceramic or glass tiles to make it completely weatherproof.

## Any other top tips?

Watch YouTube videos, it's an amazing resource and we (particularly Chris) watched many videos!

It is important to get the right consistency of perlite, sand, cement and water (5-2-2), we likened it to working with cocoa pops!

## How has it enhanced your community garden and those who use it?

It is already a draw and I imagine once we start to use it regularly more people will use the garden. We recently had visitors and suddenly we had 10 people sitting and chatting in the garden. It's a talking point and a place to eat and chat. We also have a long table next to the BBQ and oven and we aim to add a cover over them, more long term plans...



Photos: Andy Reid, pictured



# Plotgate Community Farm

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The Plotgate team grows food on 10 acres of land in Barton St David. Using agroecological principles they tend very productive vegetable gardens and polytunnels. Plotgate is a Community Supported Agriculture Scheme (CSA) - members subscribe for a weekly veg share. They also provide a range of training and volunteer opportunities.

## The Growing Grant

The focus was on supporting volunteers and trainee placements, by providing personal protective equipment PPE, sustaining food and improving the outdoor kitchen and gathering space.

***'The trainees provided invaluable support to the growing team and were key in passing on skills, methods and techniques when working with volunteer groups.'***



**Plotgate Trainees: Hannah Clark, Rebecca Tyres and Kiara White**



## Amy Willoughby, director and farmer reports:

With the grant, we were able to extend our trainee placements to cover a 12 week period. We also had a trainee funded by the farm, so we had three placements altogether. Two trainees have moved on to roles that continue their work in the local food sector, and the third individual plans to return to local food production in the future.

### Shared lunches for trainees and volunteers

We have been providing lunches for volunteers twice each week on Mondays and Fridays. We highly value the multi-generational nature of our volunteer sessions and this opportunity to sit and share. We began providing lunches in August as we decided that providing hot soup in the winter months was most beneficial - we anticipate continuing up to our Christmas break.



*'Sharing food with our work groups is a wonderful way of coming together, celebrating food from the farm and connecting people who may be working in different teams.'*

### Resources and infrastructure

We plan to purchase the PPE shortly e.g., gloves, as the weather is turning and mud season has arrived! We have been waiting on materials for the outdoor kitchen upgrade but we will get to that shortly as the growing season comes to an end and the harvests are safely stored. We complete most of our infrastructure developments over the winter months.



# Supporting trainees at Plotgate Community Farm

Plotgate has provided both short and longer trainee opportunities. Hannah spent 6 months living on site, providing both physical labour and support for community projects. Plotgate provided training, guidance and mentoring, with assistance from the Landworkers' Alliance as well as the Growing Grant.



## What did you do?

I spent three full days a week involved in all aspects of horticulture/vegetable production. This ranged from propagation, bed preparation and cultivation, to harvesting and vegetable box packing and delivery. I also had responsibility for caring for some of the livestock on the farm.

## What did you enjoy?

I enjoyed being fully immersed in the community and living alongside other trainees. I really enjoyed the physical work and living on the land and working in a beautiful environment. I also became a mama to two lambs which was very enjoyable.



## What did you learn?

I learned about crop planning and rotation and how to maximise the growing season. I also learned about how to improve the quality of soil and beds for a good harvest. I also developed skills in working alongside other trainees and volunteers.

## What were the benefits?

My overall health improved greatly as I was living and working in fresh air while being active and eating incredibly healthy and well-sourced food.

***'I have since been able to offer my growing skills to a smaller growing space, so it has helped me develop confidence in my experience and skills.'***

Photos: Hannah Clark



# Root Connections

Root Connections runs a community market garden in Stratton on the Fosse. They offer social and therapeutic horticulture sessions for individuals and groups. They grow and sell vegetables, salad and cut flowers on land provided by partners, beside a hostel for the rural homeless.



## Sue Cross-Bourton, manager, reports:

It has been a challenging time. Lock-downs (periods of Covid 19 restrictions) meant restaurants and markets closed, leading to a loss of income from their garden produce sales. However, Covid-related funding was a lifeline. 'There were advantages of being a relatively small project, it brought more freedom and flexibility and the ability to adapt to the constantly changing circumstances'.

## The Growing Grant

The grant included a contribution towards a project worker salary and the building of a small classroom on site. The project has unfortunately faced a series of delays, (Grade II listed building, Brexit and the Pandemic). They have needed to push through planning requirements, building regulations and materials submissions, but know that they will complete this important all-weather space. Sue explained that despite these challenges, they know that their work is essential.



***'We have seen an increase in the need and demand for our service, especially our social and therapeutic horticulture activities. This is where most of our time, energy and money have been spent this year.'***



## Success stories

One hostel resident facing a wide range of challenges has relapsed and re-engaged with the project several times. He currently works in the garden every hour he can. An increase in his confidence has been noticed, as well as more social and community involvement. He has become a role model for others, taking on a head volunteer role and managing his own area and team.

Another participant who had experienced bereavement and mental health difficulties has benefited from both the group and 1-1 horticulture sessions. It has increased his confidence and helped build more independence in his daily life.



## Forming connections and community

Sue highlighted that partnerships are at the heart of their project developments and that volunteers are benefiting from their involvement:

*'We are continuing to build connections and are developing a partnership with a local GP surgery, to reach more people who may benefit from getting involved in the project.'*



*'The wider volunteer team continue to learn more and gain a sense of purpose through their involvement with Root Connections, building a stronger community around the project.'*



# Transition Town Wellington

The group runs a range of projects and events relating to food, wildlife, community gardening, climate change, waste reduction, renewable energy and sustainability. They manage eight different sites around the town where food is grown for the community in a sustainable way to support wildlife and biodiversity.

## The Growing Grant

The grant contributed to plants, tools (including a scythe), signage and a foraging booklet for the Longacre community growing site.

## Helen Gillingham, co-ordinator, reports:

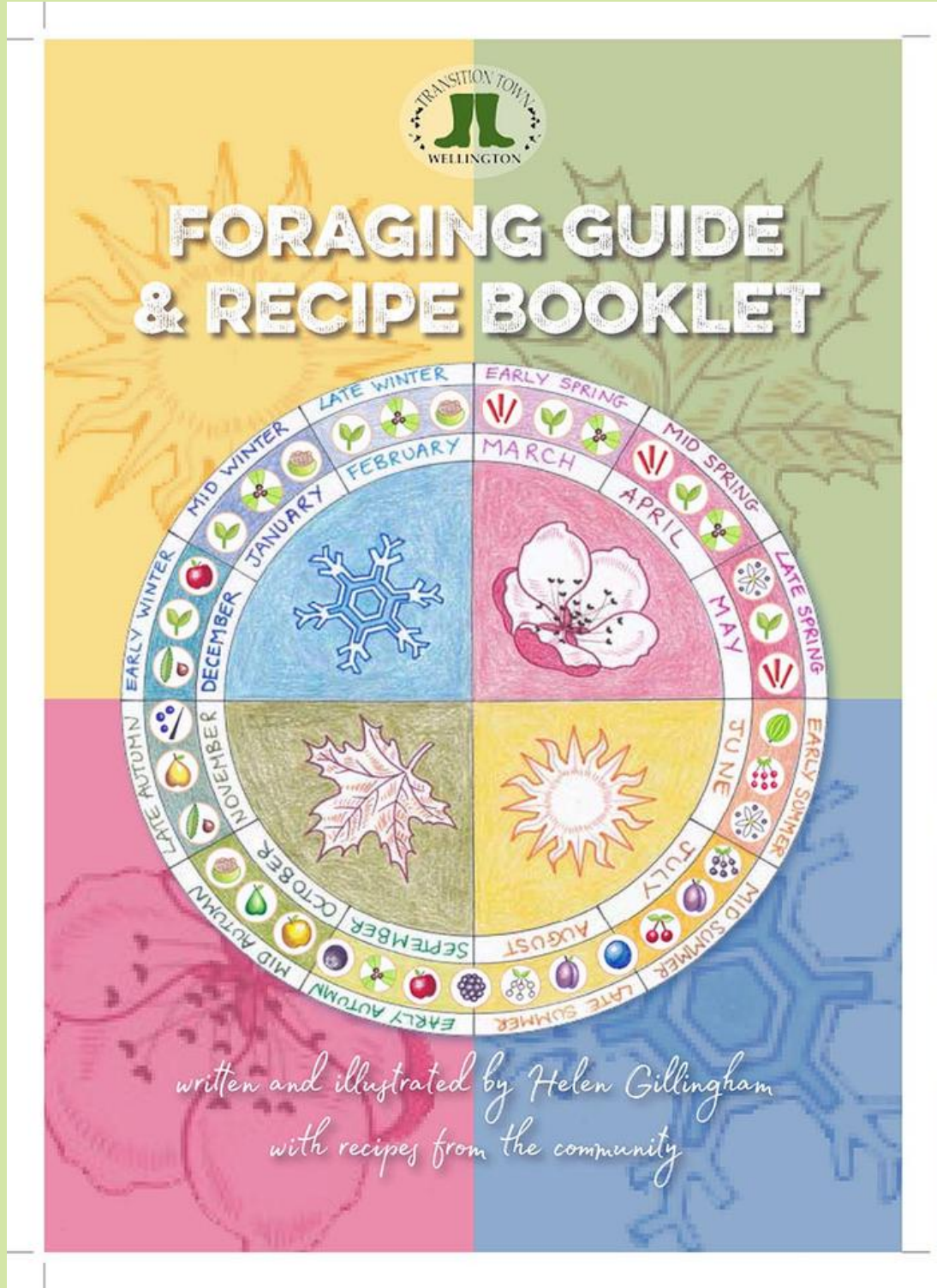
**Tools:** We have bought an extra scythe plus the kit we need to maintain the sharpness of all our tools. It has been used by volunteers to cut the meadow grass. We ran 12 autumn sessions with an average of 8 people attending each.



*'Children who play on Longacre have been picking the fruit and trying new berries, increasing the variety and health of their diet.'*

**Plants:** Edible and perennial plants have been bought and planted at Longacre, Rockwell Green. We purchased extra nitrogen fixing plants and some for a windbreak, which will help ensure the health of the fruit trees and bushes, as well as providing edible berries and fabric dye material.





### Foraging booklet

We have produced a plant foraging guide and recipe booklet. It explains where and when to pick the plants, how to prepare them, with a recipe for each. We have printed 1000 copies for local people.

It is also available digitally so many more people will benefit. We are offering the text and artwork free to other community groups to use under Creative Commons, please contact us for details: [community.ttw@gmail.com](mailto:community.ttw@gmail.com)

### Volunteers and building community

The Fox's Field project has been incredible with many people attending each community gardening session, it's become such a well known site.

We have been overjoyed with the number of new volunteers joining both our practical sessions and our online meetings. This support has kept us going and made us realise that projects that protect our environment and promote social cohesion are so valuable to residents in our town.



***'A neighbour has joined in whenever they can...they love the improvements to the site. It benefits their mental health to know something is being done for wildlife and climate and that we care about the site too!'***

We seem to be on the right track and hope to work with even more local community groups soon! We hope the foraging booklet, which has only just been printed, will keep the momentum going.

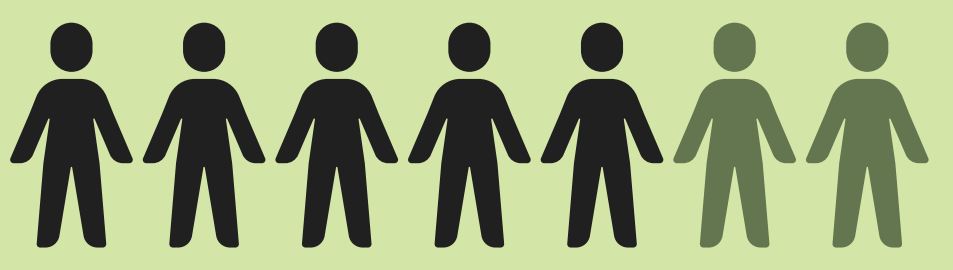


# Cultivating Community

**The Walled Garden at Mells** hosts garden and nature-based activities to improve physical and mental well-being, based on the transformative effects of therapeutic horticulture. The organised sessions in the garden provide opportunities for people to socialise and connect in the fresh air, with 150 beneficiaries across all activities.

## The Growing Grant

The grant provided additional staffing to develop and run the increased number of Cultivating Community horticulture programmes and develop opportunities to collaborate, grow the capacity of the nursery and make the space more accessible.



### Dr Sam Evans, Director, reports:

The funding allowed us to add on extra 'Garden and Connect' sessions, specifically aimed at older people and those with mobility issues. We ran the sessions for 21 weeks until Christmas and hope to restart them again in Spring as the weather gets better.

<b>Average attendance per session:</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>No. of unique participants supported:</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>No. of hours of programming:</b>	<b>52.5</b>





## Case Study

One participant was a professional woman until a number of physical challenges left her in pain, and isolated from her previous life. The weekly gardening and connect sessions provide her with some structure to her week and an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the project.

To start with she was quite anxious and needed time to settle in every time she came but as the sessions progressed, she was more comfortable and opened up more in the social elements of the session. Above all just the opportunity to sit in nature and absorb the sights, sounds and smell of the garden invigorated her.



## Challenges and opportunities

Transport to the garden is a barrier for some, the project supported the cost of community cars for a number of participants.

There is a need to advertise more widely to reach people in rural locations and areas that are not well serviced by support.

Photos: Gem Hicks



# Westfield Community Garden

The Westfield Community Association (WCA) in Yeovil, is in the process of creating a community garden from neglected land. The garden is made up of six zones, one of which is an allotment area. There will be raised allotment beds for growing fruit and vegetables, which will be shared with the community.

## The Growing Grant

The grant contributed towards the creation of the growing and allotment area, including raised beds, fruit trees, paths and infrastructure.



Plans and progress since the idea for a community garden emerged in 2019.  
Photos: WCA





## Mike Chant of WCA reports:

### Garden developments

We are making slow but sure progress with the Westfield Community Garden project, which the Growing Grant has enabled us to do.

We have now acquired raised beds (of various styles), fruit trees, a path extension, shrubs and miscellaneous related hardware. The garden opened with a successful community launch on March 12th 2021.



Volunteers planting a post-pandemic 'ring of blossom'

### Volunteers

A significant challenge for the group in these early stages of establishing the project has been community involvement and recruiting volunteers. However, steady progress is being made with this.

The first volunteer event was disappointing, but the stalwarts knuckled down. As one WCA member commented; 'the fact that residents have yet to take an active interest reflects just how much the project is needed'. The second volunteer weekend went acceptably well. We had four new folk on the Saturday and we have our next session planned.

### Involving schools

The group are involving pupils from the local secondary school to spend days on site. Sadly, Covid and staff absences caused the first school event to be cancelled, but we are optimistic the next will go ahead. Also, local college students have been involved in making some of our raised beds.

So, we strive and move forward with resilient and ever-hopeful minds to ensure that the growing area will be a long-lasting community asset.





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Produced by Somerset Community Food, April 2022, with support from Somerset Community Foundation and Somerset County Council



Thank you to the following groups for their time and contributions: Axbridge Community Allotments, Frome Field 2 Fork, Manor House Road Community Garden, Plotgate Community Farm, Root Connections, Transition Town Wellington, The Walled Garden at Mells, Westfield Community Association as well as cover / images from Gem Hicks photography:

<https://gemhicksphotography.com/>

