



ST. RAPHAEL'S EDIBLE GARDEN IMPACT REPORT 2021

AN OASIS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION,
ORGANIC FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

In 2011, local residents lobbied Brent Council to establish a food growing project on derelict land on St. Raphael's Estate – one of Brent's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Despite being awarded funding by the Ward Working Fund, the project stalled, leaving many residents feeling disenchanting.

In April 2014, Sufra NW London moved to St. Raphael's Estate to establish a permanent base for our Food Bank, Community Kitchen and advice service work. In consultation with local residents, we agreed to host and facilitate the project as part of our mosaic of services, providing legal and financial accountability, operational oversight and fundraising capacity.

Since then, with the help of hundreds of volunteers and businesses, the space has been gradually transformed into the beautiful oasis it is today. St. Raphael's Edible Garden spans over **238 square meters** (2,562 square feet) of growing space and hosts a teaching tipi, a chicken coup with 20 free-range chickens, a wildlife pond, over **40 fruit trees**, numerous **growing beds**, a large-scale **composting system**, a **compostable toilet**, a **stunning pergola and bricked pizza oven**. The site has been made fully **wheelchair accessible**.

Although the garden is managed and run by Sufra NW London, it exists solely to benefit the community, enabling disadvantaged people from all backgrounds to adopt simple changes to their lifestyles that benefit them and others. As such, the garden provides a social-therapeutic space from where we can invest in the skills, health and wellbeing of local people – all whilst improving the appearance of the estate and giving residents an opportunity to come together, have fun and grow organic fruit and vegetables for those experiencing food insecurity.

By the Community, For the Community

Over **1,000 people have benefited** from our programme of therapeutic and learning activities; including **200 adults and children** who have received **AQA accreditations** in horticulture, chicken care and nature-based skills. A series of field trips and work experience placements have hosted hundreds of students from local schools such as **Ark Academy, Phoenix Arch, Woodfield School**, as well as many cohorts of home-schooled students who have gained invaluable lessons on the source of their food and the biodiversity within the space.

We have partnered with many organisations such as **Mencap, Park Royal Mental Health Centre and The Social Inclusion Project** to provide a safe space with meaningful opportunities for civic engagement for the many individuals living with often multiple and complex support needs, as well those experiencing isolation in the community.

Over **two tonnes of organic produce** have been distributed to the local community – worth **£10,297** and the equivalent of **15,414 meals**. A **weekly organic Community Garden Market** provides local residents with nutritious vegetables, harvested within 24 hours, on a ‘pay as you feel’ model. The Garden provides immense environmental benefits to the Estate’s urban micro-climate and contributes to Brent’s strategy for environmental sustainability by promoting an ethos of self-sufficient growing practices. The Community Garden is home to a wildlife pond which hosts a vast biodiversity of plants and animals, and **our 43 fruit and nut trees absorb an estimated 946kg of CO2 per year**.

Achieving an **Outstanding Award from the Royal Horticultural Society two years in a row** would not have been possible without the support of thousands of individuals and partners who have participated in activities and helped develop the Garden. These include local residents and businesses such as **Careys, Daniels Estate Agents, Lamabuild, Quintain and Sisk & Son**, as well as generous donors such as **Brent Council, the David Cock Foundation, the Ernest Cook Trust and Islamic Relief**.

In total, Sufra NW London has worked with partners to deliver **over £140,000 capital investment in the site** (exclusive of staff time), including construction materials and equipment, plants and seeds, compost and topsoil.

St. Raphael's Edible Garden: Key Objectives

The project set out to establish a landmark food growing project that provides local people of all abilities the opportunity to grow fresh fruit and vegetables. Equally, it was crucial to Sufra NW London's mission that the project confronts disadvantage, reduces health and other inequalities, and fosters a cohesive community spirit – and in this way contributes to the regeneration of St. Raphael's Estate and surrounding areas.

Below, we set out our key objectives and highlight the work that has been done to achieve them.



OBJECTIVE 1:

BUILD A LANDMARK FOOD GROWING PROJECT THAT INSTILLS PRIDE IN THE COMMUNITY AND RESPECT FOR THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT.



The vision of establishing a thriving food growing space in a derelict, tarmacked site would never have been possible without working in partnership with local residents, volunteers and businesses. Initial works involved volunteers from **Careys, who created the architectural design**, secured the site with fencing, removed tonnes of toxic tarmac and laid gravel on the floor. Two storage containers were installed and transformed into **an office for garden staff and volunteers**, and two tool sheds were erected. Volunteers from the local community created a home for our **Chicken Club** and established a **stunning wildlife pond**. **Lamabuild created CAD designs for a new pergola and brick oven, and constructed our tool sheds.**

In July 2019, **Sisk & Son used sustainable Breedon gravel to resurface our pathways** so that those who depend on wheeled transport can easily access all areas of the garden. They also **built a sizeable and accessible decked pergola with a bricked pizza oven** and reconstructed the base for our teaching tipi.

Three large composting bins were also constructed, allowing us to repurpose the charity's compostable waste, as well as that of the local community who have been actively delivering their household food waste.

The site is **fully fitted with CCTV equipment** and is widely used by the community to host events in the summer, celebrate religious holidays, host community meals and deliver open-air classroom sessions. The Garden is available for hire for residents and private events. In 2019, five community events were attended by up to 500 individuals from the local community.

OBJECTIVE 2:

PROVIDE A REGULAR SUPPLY OF LOCALLY PRODUCED ORGANIC FRUIT AND VEGETABLES AND FREE-RANGE EGGS FOR THE FOOD BANK, COMMUNITY KITCHEN AND LOCAL RESIDENTS.



The Community Garden includes a wide variety of growing spaces and raised beds, a polytunnel, a chicken coop and spacious chicken run which is home to 20 free-range chickens, as well as over 40 fruit and nut trees (including espaliered varieties). In 2019, we were supported by **Social Orchards who sourced 16 espalier fruit trees**, provided by London-based cider producer, Hawkes. Many of our trees and perennial varieties are maturing well and have increasingly high yields.

Since we started weighing our produce two years ago, **two tonnes of organic produce worth £10,297 have been harvested, the equivalent of 15,414 meals** for the community. After employing our Community Food Grower in 2020, the quantity of organic produce harvested increased significantly – by 225% compared to the previous year. We expect this growth in the quantity of harvested produce to continue in the coming years as we further expand our growing spaces, and our trees grow and mature.

We have worked with an award-winning horticulturalist to develop a growing planner to ensure proper crop rotation and accurate harvest collection. With over **70 varieties of organic fruits and vegetables** growing, our growing strategy ensures a supply of seasonal everyday staple produce, medicinal herbs, high value crops such as Aztec broccoli, garlic, chives and edible flowers, and a series of culturally diverse produce (such as okra and various chilli varieties) to reflect the diversity of the community [See Below].

Usually, the produce harvested is used to supplement emergency food parcels distributed to those in financial crisis through our Food Bank. More recently, the Community Garden has trialled a **weekly Community Market** (managed by a local resident), where **free-range eggs and seasonal organic produce harvested in the Garden are distributed within 24 hours to the local community** on a 'pay as you feel' basis. The market is widely attended by members of St. Raphael's Estate – ensuring they have access to nutritious food for the family that many would not otherwise purchase, whilst reducing their weekly food bills and other financial pressures.

Varieties of Organic Vegetables and Fruits Grown

- Apple
- Aubergine
- Asparagus
- Aztec Broccoli
- Basil
- Beans Chickpea
- Beetroot
- Bell Peppers
- Broad Beans
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Carrot
- Carrot (Large)
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Celeriac
- Chard
- Chicory
- Chocolate Mint
- Chilli
- Chives
- Coriander
- Courgette
- Cucumber
- Damson
- Dill
- Fennel
- Fig
- French Beans
- Garlic
- Garlic Chives
- Ghost Pepper
- Globe Artichokes
- Grapes
- Kale
- Kohl Rabi
- Lettuce
- Marrow (Medium)
- Mibuna
- Mint
- Mooli
- Nasturtium
- New potato
- Onion
- Okra
- Oregano
- Pak Choi
- Parsley
- Pear
- Peas
- Peppers
- Plum
- Potato
- Purple French Beans
- Pineapple Mint
- Radish
- Radicchio
- Raspberries
- Red Current
- Runner Beans
- Rhubarb
- Rocket
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Salsify roots
- Shallot
- Spring Onion
- Sprouting Broccoli
- Strawberries
- Sorrel
- Spinach
- Squash Pumpkin
- Sweetcorn
- Tomato
- Thyme
- Turnips
- White Currants

**Aztec
Broccoli**

Raddichio

**Pepper
Stick Ce**

OBJECTIVE 3:

DEVELOP A SPACE WHICH DELIVERS A YEAR-ROUND PROGRAMME OF OUTDOOR LEARNING AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES THAT ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS AND LOCAL PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN FOOD GROWING ACTIVITIES, IMPROVE COMMUNITY COHESION, AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD INFORMAL SUPPORT NETWORKS.

Over the course of the project to date, hundreds of children and adults from the local community, mainly from highly disadvantaged backgrounds, have participated in a range of social and educational activities or received AQA accreditations in the garden (In 2019 alone, before the pandemic, **575 people participated in such activities**).

We currently deliver three **AQA accredited courses weekly**, and **100 people every year** receive an accreditation in food growing, chicken rearing or nature-based skills through our **Forest Academy** (they are either referred through the Food Bank or sign up as residents on the estate).

Our **Holiday Activity Programmes** have been vital in providing opportunities for children on the estate to discover nature, engage in physical activities and learn important social and life skills. They are popular with local residents, with around **30 children attending each club**. The Community Garden also plays a key role in **supporting our guests into employment**, with a number of guests gaining employment with partner organisations or setting up as self-employed tradespeople – one of our guests even establishing his own waste recycling businesses.

The project has also been vital in providing meaningful **opportunities for children and adults living with disabilities, mental health issues and multiple complex support needs**. On average, at least 10 individuals access the space on a weekly basis and have included groups from **Brent and Barnet Mencap, Crisis' Social Inclusion Project, Park Royal Mental Health Centre, Phoenix Arch School and Woodfield School**.

The space has provided a meaningful civic engagement opportunity for hundreds of individuals carrying out Community Service or at risk of engaging or returning to crime and gang-related activities (**1,260 hours of community service has taken place in 2021 alone**).

We also host **monthly field trips for young people** to learn about the meaningful connections between the food they eat and how it is produced. Schools that have visited the Community Garden include **Ark Academy, Elsley Primary, Hephzibah Nursey, Jewish Free School (JFS), Phoenix Arch and University College Hampstead**, as well as a cohort of **50 home-schooled students**.

During the pandemic, we established a project to support local residents to grow their own food, which helped to foster new friendships among isolated neighbours. Of the **26 households that participated**, the majority continue to volunteer regularly and have built a social network through which they share skills, tips and the progress of their growing initiatives. The project attracted media attention and the Estate was **featured in the magazines 'Where the Leaves Fall' and 'Grow Your Own'**. The impact of community food growing projects on St. Raphael's Edible Garden has also been **researched by Reading and Coventry Universities**.

OBJECTIVE 4:

CONTRIBUTE TO BRENT'S STRATEGY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY.



In recent years, extreme weather conditions such as drought, fires, heat waves, heavy rain, floods and landslides have become ever more frequent, even in the UK. Meanwhile, the Covid-19 pandemic laid bare a wide range of pre-existing inequalities in the borough, which **increased demand for emergency food aid at Sufra NW London by 332%**.

We know the effects of the climate emergency will disproportionately affect the groups who are least resilient to them, and we fully support **Brent Council's strategy** to enable communities to adopt simple and sustainable changes to their lifestyles that can have a positive ecological impact. As such, **environmental sustainability** is at the forefront of all our garden-based volunteering and learning activities.

Our composting system and compostable toilet ensure that all food and other **recyclable waste from the Food Bank and Garden is reused to create the soil needed to grow produce**. Our neighbours on the estate have also been delivering their recyclable waste to the garden, and we work with local tree surgeons, farms and schools who bring woodchip and animal waste to be composted.

In 2019, we increased the number of fruit trees and bushes planted by 62%. We currently have 43 trees with plans to plant many more in the years ahead. Tree planting is a viable solution for naturally absorbing harmful atmospheric carbon dioxide, which is critical on St. Raphael's Estate where pollution levels are higher than average. It is estimated that **one tree absorbs 22kg of carbon dioxide emissions annually – which equates to an estimated 946kg of CO2 absorbed per year from the Community Garden alone**.

Additional environmental benefits of St. Raphael's Edible Garden include:

- Improved air and soil quality
- Increased biodiversity of plants and animals
- Reduced food miles for the organic produce we harvest
- Reduced neighbourhood waste through composting
- Improved, cleaner and cooler urban micro-climate
- Increased environmental education and awareness

TOGETHER, THESE RESULT IN SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL, ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS FOR THE COMMUNITY AND BRENT AS A WHOLE.

OBJECTIVE 5: ENCOURAGE WIDER ACCESS TO ST. RAPHAEL'S ESTATE FROM NEIGHBOURING AREAS TO CHALLENGE THE STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES ASSOCIATED WITH ST. RAPHAEL'S ESTATE AND PROMOTE THE AREA AS A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY-LED GROWING PROJECTS.

The Community Garden is a hotbed of corporate social responsibility and civic participation from businesses and organisations across London. Over the years, more than **40 organisations have provided over 300 volunteers** to develop the infrastructure of the space alongside St. Raphael's Estate residents [See Box 2]. In the year before the pandemic, an average of **one corporate team a week** visited the garden, providing valuable funding and volunteer hours, whilst helping to raise the profile of the project.

St. Raphael's Edible Garden is widely recognised across London as an innovative community garden model, with the core aim of encouraging access to nature and green spaces amongst the most vulnerable and marginalised in Northwest London. This is evident through our participation in leading green space and sustainability networks.

We achieved an '**Outstanding**' award by the **Royal Horticultural Society two years in a row**, and in 2020, St. Raphael's Edible Garden was awarded four certificates in recognition of our food growing initiative with residents. **After providing 26 households on the estate with half a tonne of soil, seeds and growing frames**, Sufra NW London gained awards for 'Feeding Your Community', 'Sharing Your Know How' and 'Inspiring Others'. The space has also featured in two magazines. Most notably the '**Grow Your Own**' magazine covered our **Neighbourhood Growers Project in their Community Champions Feature**, and a virtual tour was featured in the magazine 'Khidr Collective', found [here](#).

We are also **members of the Royal Botanic Garden Kew - Community Visiting Scheme**, which has enabled us to organise free visits for **70 households in Brent**. We are a key member of **Social Farms and Gardens** – a support network for farms and community gardens across London who contribute to policy development and innovative practices and projects. They developed the **ERASMUS programme** in gardening and food growing '**Gardeniser**', for which St. Raphael's Edible Garden in an educator and hosts field visits for those setting up new growing projects. We are also members of the **Ernst Cook Trust Green Influencers scheme**, where we share knowledge on the Community Garden Model and offer opportunities for young people to learn and gain confidence in green space development.

The Community Garden is a member of a **London National Park City Movement**, a network of 280 organisations in London committed to improving and increasing London's lived experiences of green spaces. The impact of our work is widely recognised by the movement, and we are currently in the process of being awarded a grant administered by **Brent Nature Connection Project**, specifically for activities in St. Raphael's Estate.

Corporate Volunteer Teams

Accenture x 3
Air France
AppNexus
Bristol-Myers Squibb
Careys
Charles Russel
CMA
College SU
Danone & Sodexo
Disney

Department of
Communities & Local
Government
Ernst & Young
Lama Build
Liberty
Lloyds Banking
Lola's cupcakes
loyds Performance and
conduct

Marks & Spencer
Marsh Group
Mace Group
National Grid
NC
Network Homes
North Highland
PWC
Quintain Group
Santander

Sewa Day
Sisk & Son
Squibb
Tideway
Volunteer Matters



OBJECTIVE 6: IMPROVE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BY REDUCING ISOLATION AND ENCOURAGING HEALTHY EATING.



Our Learning and Outreach Coordinator incorporates the principles of Social Therapeutic Horticulture in all aspects of the Garden. Social Therapeutic Horticulture uses plants and garden spaces to improve physical and mental health, as well as communication skills. There is ample research demonstrating the positive physical, mental and social impacts of community gardens in supporting people in low-income communities that have chronic disease.

A wellbeing survey by 'This Natural England' found that people who visit the outdoors at least once a month record the highest levels of overall life satisfaction and happiness and are more likely to believe that their life is fulfilling and worthwhile. They also report the lowest levels of anxiety. Well-being scores are also higher amongst those who take part in gardening and those who buy seasonal or locally grown food.

Over the last eight months alone, and with the help of our volunteers, we have harvested **760 kg of organic fruit and vegetables, as well as 1,500 free-range eggs that have either been distributed to vulnerable people through food aid or have been distributed (on a 'pay as you like' basis) to local residents at the Garden Market.** Aside from the positive impact on local food security that the project supports, the volunteers who grow the food benefit immensely from the social interaction, exercise and learning that the garden enables them to experience.

In short, St. Raphael's Edible Garden presents a win-win-win situation for vulnerable people, the wider community of stakeholders and the environment.

St Raphael's Edible Garden



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