



PROJECT MANAGER'S REPORT 2020

If there's one thing this pandemic has highlighted is that that you can get a lot more done when you work together. Before lockdown had even begun, we joined a meeting of organisations across Moulsecoomb and Bevendean to discuss how we could deliver meals to the most vulnerable.

So when we had to make the tough decision to close the garden to volunteers, visitors and schools a skeleton staff began growing as much food as possible to supply the Bevy community pub's meals on wheels service, which has delivered over 6,000 locally, including to some of our volunteers. Rhubarb, runner beans, broad beans, French beans, onions, potatoes, courgettes, shallots, peas, black and red currants, lettuce and rocket have been used in meals or delivered directly to people so they can cook with fresh, locally produced, organic food.

Throughout lockdown our cooks Carly and Jo ran the kitchens at Brighton Aldridge Community Academy (BACA) helping deliver meals on wheels to the most vulnerable – not just for families that go to the school but anyone in the local community. It's no coincidence that the first outside agencies that were allowed back into BACA to work with pupils were Pat and Carly.

As lockdown eased, we knew that the garden had a massive role to play in people's mental health. At first, we ran small groups for our regulars a couple of hours early evening to do some watering, weeding, harvesting – or just to enjoy being at the garden.

Long term supporter Elaine said *"Thanks, Susie for spending so much time with me. It was a lovely evening and coming back on the bus I felt so well, it did me a lot of good. One of my nicest days out this year."*

Thanks to funding from the Sussex Crisis Fund we helped supply plants and seeds for nearly 100 growing kits delivered to Moulsecoomb Primary pupils and worked with the school to identify families who don't have a garden so they could come and have some time outside with us.

Thanks once again to the Pebble Trust we were able to run another free summer scheme for Moulsecoomb Primary pupils to give families some respite.

It was like a mini outdoor festival where for a few hours children could make art from materials they found in the woods, pond dip for baby newts, dragonfly nymphs and



leeches, make pizzas, scoff raspberries and blackberries, harvest vegetables, hunt for slow-worms, play hide and seek, have water fights, make wooden wands and fire and of course camps. One lad, covered in mud and busy pouring water into a leaf filled hole he'd dug with sticks next to his woodland camp told his mum proudly '*I'm proper natured.*' Me and Daisy are now back working at the school with Year 4 with instructions that we can only work outside, which of course suits us perfectly.

While the garden is back open again for workdays it is a bit different. No longer a drop-in, we are limiting numbers and only taking referrals for new volunteers. Everyone is kept busy gardening, there's still a hot lunch and a chance afterwards to relax and enjoy the garden.

Daisy has also been busy helping maintain the flower beds on Queens Road using plants grown by Dave from the Bevy's Friday Friends and also on the wildlife bank we have created at Moulsecoomb train station. Dave has been key in distributing the veg we've been growing at the garden to local older residents. Pat is also half way through also running a Connecting in Nature course with Brighton MIND and the South Downs National Park on a Monday afternoon.

Apart from the Big Bird Watch, we had to cancel our 12 planned wildlife events this year, but we continue to build our wildlife recording, and sharing what we see on our [YouTube Channel](#) and social media – and it's been great to see our volunteers' wildlife posts too.

Thanks to planning gain money from the Preston Barracks development our pizza oven has been totally rebuilt and has a new roof. We also have running water to our compost loo sink, will be getting new socially distanced benches around the firepit and have more covered dry spaces so we can work and eat lunch in groups of no more than six, improve access and buy some new tools.

Working together with numerous different organisations we know the garden has a massive part to play in whatever the future brings. What is important is that we don't work in isolation: while Moulsecoomb and the surrounding areas face many problems, it is also rich beyond the index of multiple deprivation. Across the area, there is a growing network of community organisations and partnerships and a rising sense of possibility and opportunity emerging. One person described it as "an ordinary estate doing extraordinary things" and Moulsecoomb Forest Garden is at the heart of this, with these networks invaluable to the people we support.

Warren Carter, November 2020