

Royal Horticultural Society Communities Impact Report 2022



RHS
Communities

“At one point, I felt close to tears as I could smell the earth in the flowerbed next to me. Looking down the winding path ahead filled me with joy.”

Participant in an RHS Communities project

2022 in summary

The RHS Communities team works with community groups, schools and individuals, bringing the joy of plants, growing and gardens to people across the UK.

We believe that gardening can change lives, enabling us to inspire, connect with and empower people, whether they have their own garden or not, whether they are beginners or experts and whether they are a child or adult. We take every opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments, journeys and stories of those groups, schools and people with which we work.

Throughout 2022, we have continued to respond to the lasting effects of the pandemic by supporting communities to build resilience, listening to their needs and helping to develop skills, knowledge and confidence. Our NHS partnership has seen the creation of numerous gardens and activities to support hospital staff, patients and the local community to provide ways to support their wellbeing.

Wellbeing remains a priority for people so we launched 'Grow Well', a national engagement activity focusing on the positive power of plants; introduced a new training course to support teachers looking for ways to enhance wellbeing in schools; and continued to provide outreach support to community groups to tackle social isolation, loneliness and stress.

We have also listened to our audiences' concerns about the environmental impacts of the climate emergency and on biodiversity. This year saw the end of a three-year citizen engagement project, IGNITION, which has provided huge amounts of data and learnings on how people can incorporate 'green infrastructure' into their daily lives to combat climate change. We have developed a new training course for schools, engaged people on supporting wildlife through our Wild About Gardens campaign, and brought these issues to the forefront through our annual Britain in Bloom awards, which celebrate the achievements of the hundreds of thousands of volunteers that work tirelessly to green up their communities.

To support schools and groups further to achieve their goals, we also launched a new grants programme which has so far supported 53 groups and counting.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2022

CAMPAIGN FOR SCHOOL
GARDENING MEMBERS

28,901

+2,508 ON 2021

BRITAIN IN BLOOM AND IT'S
YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUPS

2,861

GRANT FUNDING AWARDED

£229,177

SCHOOL GARDENING AWARDS
GRANTED

1,822

PARTNERSHIPS GROWN THROUGH
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

278

PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH OUR
OUTREACH TEAM

10,561



Where we work

In 2022, our work reached over 32,200 schools and groups.

This map shows our reach, with the darkest spots indicating a higher concentration of groups engaging with us, London for example shows a reach of 3,800 groups.

Below is a snapshot of some of our most impactful projects featured in this year's report.



We awarded £230k to fund some incredible projects by schools and groups, including The Sorted Project, working with people overcoming addiction in Edinburgh (pg17)



We created four gardens in community-based health centres in Manchester and Salford, designed to reduce stress for staff and patients (pg14)



We opened our flagship Wellbeing Garden at Lewisham Hospital to support NHS staff, patients and the local community (pg12)



We hosted growing sessions for 340 participants of a women's group in Surrey that focuses on reducing social isolation in their local area (pg10)



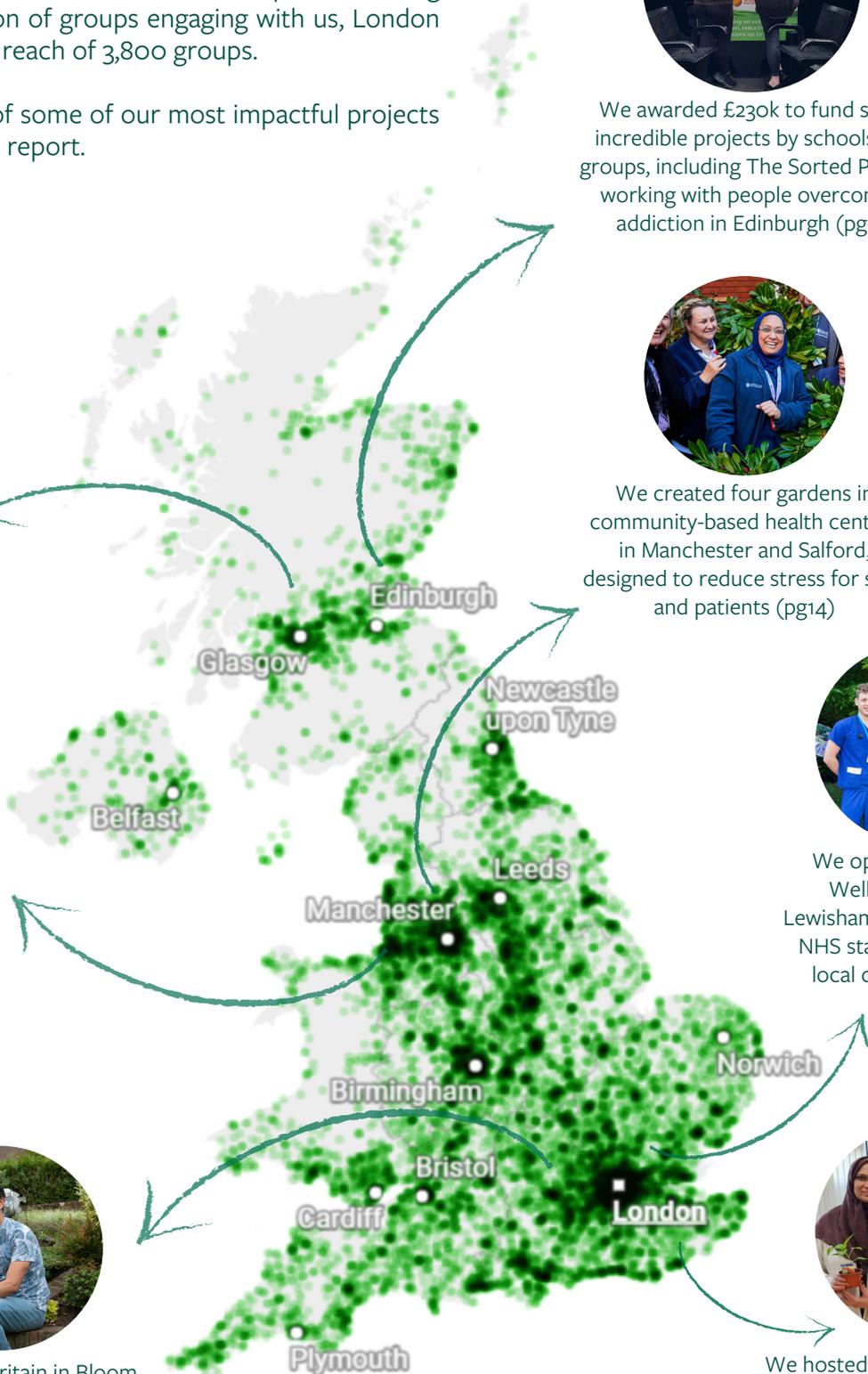
We delivered wellbeing activities in Glasgow to bring the community together (pg14)



We worked with 3,000 people in Greater Manchester to develop solutions to the impacts of climate change (pg9)



Our national Britain in Bloom Awards returned, celebrating the most inspirational community gardeners. Amersham in Bloom was crowned the overall winner (pg18)



Purpose driven growing

Schools and community groups have their own priorities and objectives when it comes to growing and so our team continues to offer different ways for people to engage with plants.

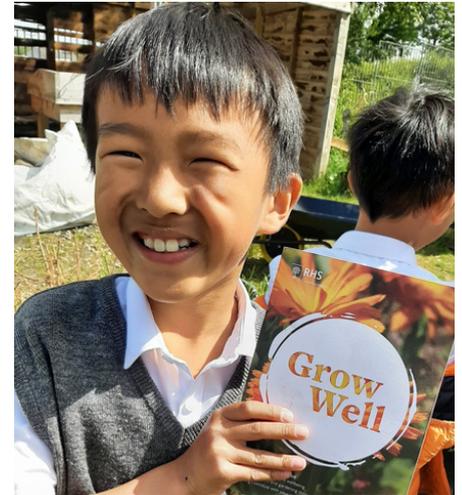
From projects around food growing and supporting wildlife, to using plants to tackle topics such as climate change and wellbeing, we work with our audiences to understand their needs and co-design solution-based programmes to support them.

Last year we ran two national campaigns for schools and community groups, covering the subjects of wellbeing and wildlife

Grow Well

In Spring 2022, we launched Grow Well, a call to action, to highlight and share the wellbeing benefits and positive power of plants and to inspire participants of all ages and experiences to get growing with their community.

Schools and communities across the UK were invited to sow, grow and share *Calendula officinalis*, or pot marigold, a beautiful flower with lots of health-giving properties.



5,780 groups and schools across the UK signed up to take part in Grow Well. Groups worked with participants of all ages, from 0 - 75+, but the most common age group was 5 - 11, inspiring some of our youngest growers. An estimated 149,000 people got dug in!

“We used our calendula seeds in our local community hospital who have a lot of dementia patients. They have a Meaningful Activities project to help support the wellbeing of the patients who are in their care.”



Wild About Gardens

A longstanding partnership with the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, Wild About Gardens is designed to support wildlife and biodiversity across the country through mass action and engagement of our UK gardeners.

The theme for 2022 was ‘High Fliers’, focused on Swifts, Swallows and Martins, all of which are protected under UK law but continue to decline in numbers due to loss of habitat and reduction in the insect population they feed upon.



In total, 1,366 people signed up to support these special birds by pledging to plant up an insect haven or install a swift box in their green space. We believe these small, actionable pledges inspire people to engage with nature and greenspaces and add up to make a huge difference across the UK.

Through the Campaign for School Gardening, we developed two new training courses, designed to upskill teachers and school staff so they feel more confident delivering outdoor learning activities to young people

Grow a Better World

We believe gardening and growing is a practical way to inspire young people to take climate action so in September, we piloted and launched, 'Grow a Better World', a planet-friendly training course in direct response to the climate emergency and the new sustainability strategy launched by the Department for Education.

The course empowers and equips teachers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to address the climate crisis in the classroom by integrating the topic into a range of engaging outdoor activities.



Roots to Wellbeing

The wellbeing of young people is a top priority for schools, increasingly so since the pandemic began. Our course 'Roots to Wellbeing' has been developed this year, ready to launch in 2023, to provide teachers and school staff with fresh new ways to help young people explore the natural world and understand the links between plants, nature and their own wellbeing.

Developed in collaboration with young people's mental health charity, Place2Be, the course is framed around the well known '5 Ways to Wellbeing' and takes a solutions-based approach to create a positive way of thinking when it comes to wellbeing and mental health issues.

Futureproofing our training

Teachers are experiencing increasing pressures on their time and school budgets are stretched more than ever before. To help support more teachers and school staff we will be developing a number of online courses, workshops and webinars to give them more flexibility around when and where they learn.

2022 was the final year of IGNITION, a three-year EU funded project developing community-led solutions to the impacts of climate change through plants and nature

Protecting people from floods, heatwaves and droughts

IGNITION brought together the combined expertise of 12 organisations working across Greater Manchester to find new ways of using plants and nature to protect communities from flood, heatwave and drought events, with project partners including local government, universities, environmental organisations (including the RHS), businesses and people from the local community.

RHS led the citizen engagement strand, and RHS Science provided the latest plant science and expertise to help develop a cutting-edge 'Living Laboratory' at the University of Salford. Here, real world research takes place providing real-time data to measure the effect of plants on indoor temperatures, biodiversity and human wellbeing.



Working with residents, youth groups and schools, we developed a citizen engagement programme to encourage people to value plants and nature as important solutions to the climate emergency. We broke down scientific concepts into tangible and relevant ideas, and in doing so, cultivated local advocates for nature-based solutions.

The programme has spurred communities on to take action and supported others to drive forward their plans. To mark the project's success, the 'Planting for the Planet' exhibition was created at RHS Bridgewater to celebrate the contributions and achievements of the community and demonstrate the importance of plants and nature in creating resilient communities.

3,000+

PARTICIPANTS

Through our Outreach teams, we have developed some strong partnerships with local communities and supported them to make new connections through growing

A new community wellbeing garden

Our team provided a group of horticulture students at RHS Garden Wisley with a unique learning opportunity to design and build a new wellbeing garden at Kings College, a secondary school in Surrey. The project was designed to test their engagement, project management and design skills in a real community setting.

Working with a number of local businesses, the garden was created and opened in summer 2022 to provide students and local community groups with a positive environment for learning, relaxation and exercise. The garden is also a wellbeing hub for all partners - in the autumn we partnered with Surrey Young Carers to provide a wellbeing workshop at Kings College, who themselves have a high percentage of young carers.



Breaking barriers through gardening

We are passionate about working with local communities to co-design and co-produce workshops and activities that celebrate diversity, heritage, skills and knowledge.

This year, we developed a partnership with Jabeen Qureshi, an NHS Link Worker based at a community centre in Surrey, who runs a women's group to help reduce social isolation and promote a more active lifestyle.

Working with Jabeen, we hosted nine face-to-face sessions on topics chosen by the group, including how to sow seeds and food for cooking, and a celebration day for the women to share their experiences. The team also coordinated and led a visit to Wisley to help develop the women's confidence to access the garden.



339

LOCAL WOMEN
ENGAGED IN THE
PROJECT

Our Community partnership with the NHS

Through national lockdowns and indoor social distancing, it became increasingly apparent that gardens are a vital resource for supporting wellbeing, with an estimated three million people becoming new gardeners during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We have long known that the best community gardens have the ability to connect people together around a welcoming, safe and inclusive space – a social hub where plants, skills, ideas, kindness, and support can be shared.

However, it is also clear that access to green space is not equal for everyone everywhere. We embarked on a number of projects with the NHS to try and address this.



Wellbeing Gardens

The Wellbeing Gardens Programme was developed in response to NHS keyworkers seeking our input to create gardens in their workplace for respite – a place for staff to get away from the unrelenting pressures of hospital wards where they could literally ‘ground’ themselves. The vision of the programme is to build a network of community wellbeing gardens within healthcare and other settings, created with, for and by local people.

To ensure these gardens become a sustainable asset for their communities, we have committed to work in partnership with local voluntary and statutory organisations over a three-year period to engage and support the NHS. This includes developing inclusive local networks, training local volunteers to help care for these places and developing a linked wellbeing activity programme focused on the art, practice and science of horticulture.



Designed by Adam Frost (pictured), our pioneer Wellbeing Garden at University Hospital Lewisham opened in June 2022. Features of the garden include:

- a large covered social gathering space
- quiet reflective seating areas
- lighting to make it feel safe for night workers
- sensory planting & wildflower walk
- a ‘working garden’ with 12 raised beds where community groups or hospital staff can come together to grow fruit and veg

In 2022, a total of 1,620 people, including NHS staff, local community groups, and volunteers, got involved in a range of horticulture, arts and wellbeing activities at the Lewisham Garden.

Over 40 partner organisations have been engaged in the project to date, sharing skills and knowledge across the borough.

Building on the successes and learnings taken from the Lewisham project, in 2023, Wellbeing Gardens are being developed at Colchester General Hospital and at St. James’s Hospital in Leeds.

1,620

PEOPLE ENGAGED IN
THE PROJECT IN
2022



A barefoot walk on rain-soaked grass,
Softly feet feel the ground,
So fresh the air as it brushes past,
Quietly without sound.
In breathes the scent of petals unfold,
Awaiting the arrival of bees so bold,
Gathering the sweetness of heady
perfumes,
Showers bring nectar like gold.

POEM WRITTEN BY A MEMBER OF HOSPITAL STAFF
TO CELEBRATE THE COMPLETION OF THE GARDEN

Extending our reach with the NHS

In a new partnership with the NHS Properties Group, who manage around 3,000 sites in England, we worked with NHS staff to create four gardens in community-based health centres in Manchester and Salford. Each garden is unique to its setting and has been designed to reduce stress for staff and patients by improving their outdoor environments.

Due to the success of these gardens, we will be extending the project to other parts of the country over the next year, with a focus on improving climate resilience and biodiversity, whilst enabling green social prescribing activity to take place on the sites.



In Glasgow, we were commissioned by the NHS Health Improvement Team to deliver a programme of seasonal horticultural activities, bringing together community members who may otherwise be socially isolated and vulnerable.

From exploring how to care for houseplants, to creating a planter for a community space or as a gift for a neighbour, each activity has been designed to help participants to connect with new people around them. Accessible to all, even those who are unable to leave their home, workshops are being delivered face-to-face and digitally. New funding has enabled the project to continue in 2023 with a focus on food-growing to support people facing the cost of living crisis.

Celebrating and supporting our audiences

Community groups work tirelessly to green their local areas and provide opportunities for others to learn, share and socialise.

This year we launched a new grant scheme to support more groups to achieve their plans and objectives, and we saw the return of Britain in Bloom, our annual celebration of some of the most inspiring volunteer-led groups across the UK.

Funding for the people behind the plants

We recognise our role in supporting the long-term sustainability of community gardening groups and so this year we launched our new Community Grants Programme designed to empower groups so that they can continue to spread the joy of plants.

The programme is made up of three funds which support three priority areas for schools and groups:

Connected Communities Fund	Community Wellbeing Fund	Community Environment Fund
to increase community cohesion and reduce social isolation through gardening	to support groups using plants and gardening to improve community wellbeing	to address local environmental issues



One recipient of the Connected Communities Fund was The Sorted Project, a community gardening initiative in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The project supports local people in addiction recovery to form new social connections and develop their confidence through a number of volunteering roles.

The group operate from a canal boat where individuals come to take part in a variety of crafting workshops and, more recently, the group has been turning an overgrown area of land along the canal into a new peaceful garden.

The Community Fund has allowed the group to purchase more equipment and we have also been able to provide horticultural expertise to help the project continue to thrive.

Watch our [video on the project](#).

£229,177

IN GRANTS AWARDED
TO 53 UK SCHOOLS &
COMMUNITY GROUPS

Britain in Bloom Finals

After a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the RHS Britain in Bloom UK Finals returned in 2022 to celebrate the very best of community gardening. A group of 45 volunteer-led community groups participated, representing villages, towns and cities from every corner of the UK from St Austell in Cornwall to Linlithgow in Scotland. Pairs of RHS judges toured the UK meeting the groups and assessing their achievements in terms of horticulture, environment and community.

The environment has always been a core pillar of Bloom, accruing 30% of the available marks, but this year we strengthened the criteria to reflect the climate change and biodiversity crisis we are facing and the important role that all gardeners can play in combatting them.

The 2022 cohort of Bloom UK Finalists were the very first to use the enhanced the criteria, which encouraged them to do more to conserve resources, plant sustainably and aim to be peat free.



The overall winner of Britain in Bloom 2022 was the town of Amersham, Buckinghamshire. Led by their coordinator, Steve Caternach (pictured), Amersham incorporate sustainable gardening practices into everything that they do, prioritising perennial and pollinator friendly plants, carefully managing resources and planting thousands of new trees. They are also tremendous advocates, sharing key messages about the power of plants, working with every single school in the town and more than 1,000 local people.

Contact Us

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