



my Nature Garden (an independent evaluation)  
Oasis Children's Venture 2011 - 2013





Oasis Children's Venture is a local charity that runs three different and unique facilities for children and young people in Stockwell, London. Oasis is about playful, freely chosen activities that are challenging and fun.

Oasis runs a Children's Nature Garden, Karting Project and Adventure Playground. All projects are open access and available for local children to attend after school, on Saturdays and during the school holidays. Specialist activity sessions are also provided for schools, youth groups, private groups and other agencies.

Each of the three projects has a team of experienced play and youth workers who ensure that all children and young people are able to make the most of the opportunities and experiences that are available on each site.

The Nature Garden has been open since the 1970's, with over 700 members visiting annually and many more attending via schools and youth groups. It currently offers an under 5's club, after school club, holiday play schemes, forest school sessions, community events, volunteering opportunities, trips and outings and more recently a food co-operative. The Nature Garden prides itself on being a free, safe place to play, explore, and learn. The garden also provides a much needed habitat for local wildlife, flora and fauna.

#### **Oasis Children's Venture**

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## Acknowledgements

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We would like to thank all those community members and service users who took the time to answer our questions, reflected on our current services and the improvements we could make in the future.

Additional thanks to all the individuals who participated in the surveys, focus groups and interviews. It is their commitment and dedication that enable us to deliver our services. These included:

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Claudia Schmidek, service user (parent)

Diana Verone, teacher, Stockwell Primary School

Leah McNally, director, London Wildlife Trust

Malika McCosh, community member

Mark James, teacher, Larkhall Primary School

Paula Gordon, teacher, Larkhall Primary School

Pippa Spratt, teacher, Herbert Morrison Primary School

Sam Switchells, teacher, Larkhall Primary School

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Oasis is managed by a voluntary management committee. We would like to thank our trustees for their support and commitment and our funders without whom there would be no service to report of.





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## Section one: Introduction and methodology

### What is the best thing about the Nature Garden?

*“That they recycle things and take care of Mother Nature”*

*“So much oxygen and the plants are nice”*

User surveys 2013

In January 2013 Oasis Children’s Venture gratefully received funding from the Touchstone Trust to further develop our under 5’s group and crucially, to fund an evaluation of our educational services at the Nature Garden.

This report analyses data collected between April 2011 to March 2013 to evaluate the impact of the Nature Garden to users and the local community. This report presents the findings in relation to five key outcomes, improvements to: mental health and emotional well-being; physical health; access to education and skills; enhanced community cohesion and local bio diversity.

Oasis regards evaluation as an essential cornerstone of sustainability: all longer-term funding is now evaluated to help develop services and learning in response to local needs, and this approach has been largely successful at both the Kart Track and Playground. This said, till now Oasis hasn’t had the resources to fund an evaluation of it’s work at the Nature Garden. Therefore it is anticipated the support of The Touchstone Trust will have wide-reaching impact beyond the life-time of this report.

In January 2013, A5cend was engaged to independently analyse data, conduct interviews and focus groups, and write this evaluation report presenting key findings and recommendations for the future.

This report draws on the following data collected by Nature Garden staff, volunteers, trustees and A5cend throughout 2011-2013:

1. Community event adult survey spring 2013 (4 respondents)
2. Community event child survey spring 2013 (9 respondents)
3. Easter feast Event survey spring 2011 (13 respondents)
4. Educational workshop plans for years 3, 4, 5 and 6
5. Forest Schools user survey 2012 (48 respondents)
6. Local food monitoring Reports years 1, 2 and 4
7. School group satisfaction surveys 2011-2013 (94 respondents)
8. Stakeholder and parent interviews spring 2013 (10 respondents)
9. Staff and volunteer focus group spring 2013 (9 respondents)
10. Trip survey spring 2013 (12 respondents)
11. Users focus group autumn 2012 (24 respondents)
12. Under 5’s parent/carer survey 2011-13 (10 respondents)
13. User parent & carer survey winter 2012 (12 respondents)
14. Users surveys 2012 (24 respondents)
15. User surveys spring 2013 (33 respondents)
16. Desktop analysis of local statistics and needs

## Section two: Director's foreword

The Nature Garden has been providing innovative and exciting learning opportunities for local children for over 30 years.

The combination of support from the Touchstone Trust and the expertise of A5cend has enabled Oasis to carry out this evaluation of the Nature Garden, which we have desired for many a year. As a result we now have a clearer understanding of the impact the garden has on its beneficiaries, the local environment and how we can develop it further.

Things are forever evolving and in the time this report has been compiled we have already started implementing recommendations by applying for capital funding, developing ideas for new staffing posts/structures (a dedicated education worker) and trialling a low cost organic veg box scheme with Sutton Community Farm.

This evaluation analyses data collected from the wide range of local stakeholders, children and young people, teachers, Oasis staff, volunteers, parents/carers and community members.

The main findings are:

- The Nature garden plays an important role in improving the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and community members.
- The Garden is an incredibly valuable resource for increasing local access to education and skills, mainly by providing learning opportunities that are practical, engaging and inclusive of all learners.
- The garden promotes community cohesion and enhances biodiversity.
- A new building, fit for purpose, would enable all services to be extended and developed.
- Additional staff resources would provide greater impact for users and potential new users.

The key recommendations include;

- Securing additional funds for increasing the opening hours of the garden, extending and developing the educational work at the garden, increasing staffing levels so outreach and partnership working can develop, and capital funds for a new building!
- Improving mechanisms for evaluation, research and publicising activities
- Work in partnership to better extend all the work of the Garden including the successful educational work, local food growing and biodiversity
- Develop suitable climbing apparatus to extend the physical development of children

We are already using this evaluation as source information for a new strategic plan for the garden over the coming years – one that can continue to secure the garden as a much needed natural environment, play and learning resource for the local community.

Thank you to Gurpreet and all at A5cend for delivering such a comprehensive and accessible report. The in-depth research and analysis was carried out in a very knowledgeable manner and the overall approach was professional and informed.

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*“It’s very unrestrictive, they treat the children so nicely; they let them do what they like. There are rules, of respect mainly, but otherwise they are given free rein, and that must be very liberating - they are encouraged. It’s a lovely environment for children.”*

**Parent interview 2013**

## Section three: Summary of recommendations

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*“The hot chocolate makes me happy. The soup makes me happy. I like being round the circle with everybody”*

User survey spring 2013

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*“I feel happy because I really feel happy”*

User survey spring 2013

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*“Lots of our children struggle to learn in classrooms, and this is a great way for them to learn”*

Teacher interview 2013

This evaluation report explores the value of the Oasis Nature Garden for local users in an area where long-term poverty, high population density and lack of green space can have detrimental effects on health, wellbeing and learning.

The main findings are summarised in Section seven of this report however the headlines are:

- The Nature Garden performs a much needed and important role within the area by improving levels of mental health and emotional wellbeing amongst young users and adults through a combination of the high quality, nurturing environment provided by staff, and the stimulating nature of the garden and the activities on offer there.
- The Nature Garden helps improve levels of physical health amongst users. This occurs in large part through providing much needed green space. The combined safety and openness of the space means children play in a manner that increases fitness and enhances physical development. Food growing clubs are having a demonstrable impact by teaching children and families about healthy eating, nutrition and local food.
- The Nature Garden is an incredibly valuable resource for increasing local access to education and skills, mainly by providing rich play and learning opportunities that are practical, engaging and nature-based, and that are inclusive of all learners.
- The Nature Garden plays a significant role in both promoting community cohesion and enhancing biodiversity within the locality, the latter being of particular importance to users and a core project aim.
- Despite being well on course to meet its funder targets in terms of user involvement and outcome, the Nature Garden is nonetheless limited by capacity and space, and several identified areas for development, improvement and extension of project activities are thus stifled. A new on-site building and increased staffing are particularly needed.

The key recommendations are:

1. Explore the potential of securing increased levels of funding towards:
  - Opening the garden more (as requested by children and parents) whilst carefully balancing the needs of the fragile ecosystem with the needs of the community.
  - Work supporting the communication within families at the garden (review whether local partnership working could generate capacity in this regard, plus funding needed or available to create a new post)
  - Educational workshops for schools, thus reducing costs to users.
  - Extending staffing to be able to improve work against all outcomes (especially community cohesion and work with schools/research)
  - A new building with the involvement of users and the local community in it's design (preferably an exciting eco-build) which can serve as both a learning resource and venue for community cohesion.



2. Improve mechanisms for evaluating, researching and publicising (in order to help preserve, improve, better resource and duplicate these experiences more widely):
  - The impacts of direct nature on children’s health and wellbeing
  - The impact of Nature Garden on users who are ‘vulnerable’ and the potential for extending in depth therapeutic work (recruit partners to support this work).
  - The positive benefits of outdoor learning for children at risk of exclusion from mainstream learning opportunities – explore ways to develop this work
  - The impact of the project around inclusion and achievement
  - The knock-on benefits of learning outdoors (when indoors)
  
3. Work in partnership to better:
  - Extend local food groups and look into ways they could generate revenue for the project (also review how to delegate responsibilities to volunteers and to extend staff hours)
  - Create and model resource packs for teachers
  - Widen activities and resources available at the garden
  - Celebrate the great impact the Nature Garden has on local bio-diversity, raising Oasis’ profile and that of local people caring for one another and nature, thus improving their natural habitat.
  
4. Develop climbing apparatus in keeping with the natural feel of the garden in light of the lack of suitable climbing trees to further extend physical development of children.

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*“It can be frustrating, when you know there’s a lot more capacity to make things better, to do more, but there’s not enough time in the day. And a lot of that’s down to money and hours”*

**Oasis focus group 2013**



## Section four: Oasis and Touchstone Trust

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*“Because it’s hands on, the children do act get to do things themselves, they get excited, and they do remember, they have a better understanding of what we are trying to teach, things that we can’t teach in the classroom, or find difficult, we can do here.”*

**Teacher interview, 2013**

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*“Ingneous, metamorphic and sedimentary. How soil is formed. Thank you! Very valuable and has given ideas of how to bring topic to life”*

**School satisfaction survey 2012**

In January 2013 The Touchstone Trust contacted Oasis to see how both organisations could work together. It is through their support Oasis were able to launch the Nature Garden Under 5’s playgroup which has been a resounding success. In addition, the trust have funded this evaluation report: a true reflection of what the Nature Garden means to users, their families and the local community today. The findings from this report will help to shape the Nature Garden in the coming future: our resources, funding priorities, and emerging services. Thus ensuring we meet the needs of those who use the garden today and those who we could reach tomorrow.



## Section five: Local context and needs

*“It brings different kids together, it’s diverse, Portuguese kids, Afro-Caribbean kids, even some middle class kids from over the road in the old Victorian houses - lots of kids from different backgrounds mixing together in one place.”*

**Director London Wildlife Trust**

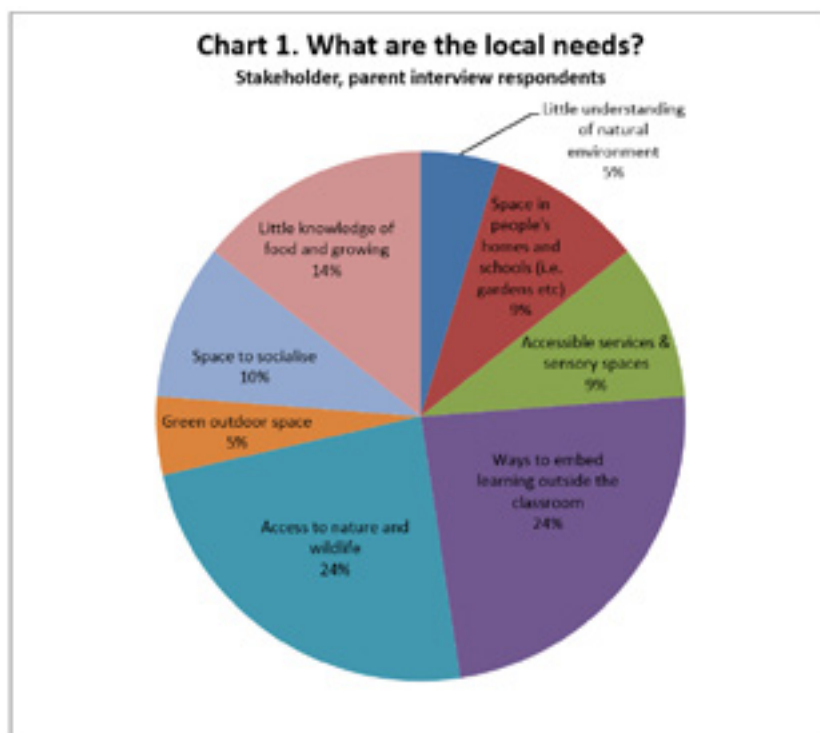
Oasis works within the Lambeth wards of Stockwell and Larkhall. Sandwiched between two arterial routes into Central London and less than two miles from the City, Stockwell is an inner-city area rich in cultural diversity that suffers from high levels of deprivation. The population density is 160 people per hectare, compared with the inner London average of 96.8 people per hectare (2008 Greater London Authority ward population projections).

The local area is home to one of the UK’s largest Portuguese communities (leading to it being known as “Little Portugal”). Many black African and East African people also live there. According to the 2001 Census, there were 4,800 children aged 5 to 19 in Oasis’ immediate catchment area and the population is growing.

Local housing is as mixed as the population. Conservation areas of Georgian and Victorian housing can be found next door to large pre- and post-war housing estates. Oasis is virtually encircled by large estates, many of which house residents living in poverty. They are 14 in the vicinity: Wyvil Estate; Patmore Estate; Vauxhall Estate; Mawbey Estate; Spurgeon Estate; Mursell Estate; Lansdowne Green Estate; Hemans Estate; Edrich House; Euro Tower; Springfield Estate; Gaskell Street Estate; Studley Estate; and Stockwell Gardens Estate.

There is no other Nature Garden in the whole of Lambeth. In fact we believe the Nature Garden to be the only free to use, fully staffed wildlife garden for children and adults in the whole of London. There are places to play, around London, and some of those are indeed staffed, but none have the horticultural skills and experience of the Nature Garden staff team coupled with play work knowledge which is what makes the experience for users so unique.

There are detailed statistics on the issues facing local people in Appendix 7. Stockwell and Larkhall suffer acutely from the problems of the inner-city: overcrowding, poverty, crime, substance misuse and a lack of accessible services for all ages are major problems.



Please see above Chart 1 depicting the local needs as viewed by interview and survey respondents, their viewpoints were varied and some are presented here:

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*“...there’s definitely a need for the Nature Garden, partly because in the area that it’s in, Stockwell, there isn’t much green space around. Larkhall Park doesn’t have much of interest for kids, apart from the usual play stuff, and the Nature Garden is unique; I think it’s the only Nature Garden in London that is just for kids. Lots of kids that come don’t have a garden, so it’s the only place they can experience nature in a hands-on way.”*

**Director London Wildlife Trust**

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*“[there is a] lack of access to nature for some children in inner cities. The grounds of where they live are not accessible to them. They get told off for doing the kinds of things kids naturally do - climbing things...”*

**Staff focus group attendee**

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*“For a lot of Lambeth kids this could be their only contact with nature, wildlife and planting a veg garden and that sort of thing.”*

**Parent interview 2013**

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*“Usually there is quite a negative response to wildlife, and the Nature Garden is a place where we don’t have to have those reactions to it; we can explore it, investigate, and reduce anxiety..”*

**Director London Wildlife Trust**

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*“It is essential to give children an opportunity to play as they would in rural England.”*

**Parent, Under 5 group, 2011**

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*“Lots of the children (locally) don’t have gardens or outside spaces they can play safely in, they don’t have much of an understanding of the environment, and nature...”*

**Teacher interview 2013**



## Section six: Key findings, impact

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*"I think they provide a vital service and I can't fault it in any way"*

Teacher interview 2013

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*"My family and I feel incredibly blessed to be a part of Oasis and are so grateful to the staff and everybody involved for making it possible for us to have such an amazing resource available to us"*

Parent interview 2012

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*Anything else you think about the Nature Garden? "It's beautiful"*

User, 2013

Chart 2. The difference Nature Garden makes to users (Stakeholder responses)	Highest to lowest rated
Helps to embed learning	1
Space to socialise and mix	2
Provides practical experience	3
Improves behaviour	3
Increases confidence	3
Develops communication	3
Interaction with nature & plants	3
Unique space	4
Exciting	5
Visiting is incentive for pupils	5
Increases motivation	5
Memorable experiences	5
Growing food	5
Develops imagination	5
Safe environment	5
Provides controlled risk taking	5
Reduces anxiety about natural world	5
Exploration	5

### Outcome one: Improved levels of mental health

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*"It's so important for mental health and happiness to have spaces like this."*

Parent, community event survey 2013

Survey, interview and focus group data was analysed to assess how well the Oasis Nature Garden helps improve levels of mental health among users. It is apparent there are both immediate and longer-term impacts for users' mental and emotional health that have resulted from participating in Nature Garden activities.

100% of stakeholders interviewed in 2013 for the evaluation (including teachers, parents and the Director of London Wildlife Trust) felt that children's emotional wellbeing is improved through participating in Nature Garden activities.

The following themes also emerged:

## Fun and enjoyment

It would appear that the Nature Garden's ability to meet time-honored human needs for security, sustenance, activity, fun, nature and community provides a winning recipe for happiness amongst its users. The Nature Garden induces near total levels of enjoyment according to user survey data. 97% of children surveyed in March 2013 said they felt positive and happy (smiley face) at the Nature Garden (none reported feeling unhappy). 76% of young users reported that the Nature Garden is fun. When asked what helped them feel happy at the Nature Garden, a mixture of afterschool club and school group users aged 5 – 10 years responded:

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*"I like it because it's fun"*

*"I feel happy because I really feel happy!"*

*"I feel happy because we do fun activities"*

*"I feel happy because I can plant stuff and can run around"*

*"Because we make food and play"*

*"The hot chocolate makes me happy. The soup makes me happy. I like being round the circle with everybody"*

The high levels of happiness experienced at the Nature Garden were mirrored in the responses of 5-9 year old respondents at a community event in 2013, with 89% also agreeing the Nature Garden is fun. Surveys of children aged 6-9 years attending forest school activities in April and November 2012 found that 100% of children 'always' enjoyed themselves. A survey from July the same year reported that 66% 'always' enjoyed coming, 29% 'mostly' enjoyed themselves and only one child 'sometimes' enjoyed the visits.

What would you tell your friends about the Forest School? "About the Treasure hunt, and that I had a great time" (user survey, 2012)

User feedback from an Oasis monitoring report for The Forestry Commission, 2012, included:

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*"I will come every day if I can"*

*"It was the best school ever"*

*"I feel good because we have fun together"*

*"I have enjoyed our plans and games and playing them"*

Parent/carer feedback from the popular Easter Feast community event in April 2011 included positive comments about enjoyment levels:

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*"The kids loved it"*

*"It was great, very lively and lovely! The children loved it!! Thanks"*

*"It had a nice community spirit, [my child] loved the event. The food was great too"*

*"I have enjoyed the food, the environment, the people, everything!"*

Survey data from parents of the Nature garden's under 5 group concurred:

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*"She usually hates playgroups but she is totally happy here"*

A 2013 trip survey of users who went out on trips to Kew Gardens, Barnes Wetland Centre or Coram Fields Playground with Oasis staff during 2012 found 93% rated the trip as 5/5 or 4/5 for enjoyment. 87% had fun and 73% felt happy during the visit.

The very high levels of enjoyment experienced by children during all the activities at the Nature Garden perhaps work some way towards explaining why only 39% and 44% of 2013 child respondents felt that the Nature Garden was open all the times they wanted it to be, and why several children requested in feedback that it be open all the time, or at least for more days than it currently does. 50% of parents interviewed in 2013 also suggested opening more, including every school holiday. Funding is the main challenge to increasing provision, as is balancing the needs of a delicate ecosystem with the needs of local people.

## Feeling safe and supported in a positive environment

88% and 89% of children aged 5-10 reported feeling safe in spring 2013 user surveys.

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*"They make it safe, it's a healthy place"*

School user, 5-7 years, 2013

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*"I feel happy because the adults take care of me and it really entertains me and makes me feel safe"*

Afterschool user, 2013

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*"Safe in a good way"*

Afterschool user, 5-7 years, 2013

This sense of safety also extended to how child users felt during trips to other places. 73% of children said that they felt safe on trips to Coram Fields Playground, Kew Gardens and Barnes Wetland Centre.

The skill of the two part time Nature Garden project workers and the gardener in creating and holding a safe, positive and nurturing space for children and young people, as well as adults, to relax and enjoy themselves was repeatedly highlighted within interview, survey and focus group data. This sense of sanctuary, which chimes with the core Forest School aim for children to feel comfortable and safe in the outdoors, inspires trust and encourages confidence in children.

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*"Everyone is kind"*

Afterschool user, aged 8-10

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*"Safe place to explore and gain confidence"*

Parent survey, 2012

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*"The place was lovely, the staff were very welcoming"*

Parent, Easter feast 2011

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*"Staff are kind and generous, go above and beyond"*

Parent interview 2013

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*"The staff are amazing and inspire real confidence. The garden is interactive and educational. Everybody makes you feel welcomed. I feel there are real benefits for the community, encouraging and inspiring unity and offering a safe and secure environment to grow and develop together"*

Parent survey 2012

The sense of safety results from effective mutually respectful non-hierarchical communication between project workers and children, plus the skillful way that the edge between safety and freedom within the garden is managed, both during play and more structured activities.

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*"It's very unrestrictive, they treat the children so nicely; they let them do what they like.*

*There are rules, of respect mainly, but otherwise they are given free rein, and that must be very liberating - they are encouraged. It's a lovely environment for children."*

Parent interview, 2013

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*"It's the people who work there, Harriet and Stewart, they are just so nice to the children, anything goes but there is a very strong sense of respect as a result. I really like their ethos, they are really good on the safety aspect, but they don't hammer it home too much. They let the kids get dirty and all that, it's quite hippy."*

**Parent interview 2013**

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*"Play in this space is very special because the relationship we have with the kids is very free, and they get a huge amount from that. There's not hierarchy: 'I'm the adult therefore you listen,' but there is a huge amount of respect going both ways. They know this is a free space, and it's their space, and the adults that work here are there to facilitate their play."*

**Staff focus group 2013**

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*"The staff are very helpful, they are professional and they are very aware of how to conduct themselves around children; setting boundaries."*

**Teacher interview 2013**

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*"From a personal perspective, it makes my mental stability great, the way we communicate on a daily basis - it creates that safe haven, it's great."*

**Staff/volunteer focus group 2013**

A staff respondent explains how this positive, calm and nurturing form of communication provides an alternative to the more confrontational models of communication regularly produced by a more hierarchical culture within formal educational institutions and lower adult to child ratios:

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*"We have far too much confrontation with children, having a direct confrontational conversation with a child with emotional problems is not going to help, so if you're in an environment where there's something else to talk through, you can actually get the message across much better, as opposed to lecturing, they get a lot of that, and they are very defensive because of this."*

**Staff/volunteer focus group 2013**

For children with special and additional needs, the outdoor environment itself can provide a sense of safety absent elsewhere: "One little boy we take, loves it, he goes straight up to the little house on stilts. He's usually very nervous around other children and worries about others running around but he feels safe up there where he can see everyone below. Our children really look forward to the visits." (Teacher interview 2013)

Some parental feedback pointed to the skill of staff in including children with additional needs in a space that helps to meet them:

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*"Somewhere natural for him to play. He has been able to mix with other children and gain some independence. He has Aspergers so it's important for him to be met with understanding, and at Oasis he always has been."*

**Parent interview 2012**

### **Self-expression, being heard, playing and developing autonomy**

Nature Garden forest school session plans build in time for children to share inspiration and reflect on the sessions (see appendix 5). An average of 78% of children aged 6-9 surveyed through 2012 felt that forest school 'always' helped them say how they feel. Children expressing basic needs for comfort and safety and having them met during sessions is a key aspect of the Forest School approach (see appendix 4).

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*"I took a group every week for a term who had been identified as having low self esteem or SEN. They went weekly and participated in activities such as fire building, wood cutting and general outdoor activities. There was a clear increase in confidence, they were more willing and ready to communicate, they had a memorable experience and they wanted to tell people about it, it was something they wanted to communicate, and it was motivating for them."*

**Teacher interview 2013**



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*As discussed above, the non-hierarchical approach taken by staff at the Nature Garden encourages and empowers children to express themselves: "We let the children tell us what they want to do and I think that's what's so nice about it. They can express themselves from a really young age."*

**Staff focus group 2013**

The practical nature of the garden supports staff to work in more depth with children to help express difficult emotions and talk through any issues. The physical nature of play and more structured activities can also provide an outlet for expressing emotional energy:

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*"...if a child is angry, they might kick a tree, the tree will survive, but it's a great learning thing to talk about how the tree might feel, then they can access how they might feel, you've then got something to talk through, it's a much easier way, so when you get to a difficult point in the conversation, you can refer it back."*

**Staff focus group 2013**

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*"The mental wellbeing is less conscious, it would be nice to work more closely with kids specifically around this, but people very rarely come to play settings, they look at the formal structures, social workers, teachers, but actually it's through the informal structures where the real differences can be made, taking them away from that sense of pressure. It would be nice to be more included in that and to target this to kids who really need it."*

**Staff/volunteer focus group 2013**

76% of child users surveyed in March 2013 agreed the Nature Garden is a place to play. Oasis project workers offer afterschool, Saturday, holiday and under 5 playgroup users freedom to choose between play, more supported activities or whatever children themselves might want to do. This space for self-determination helps develop children's confidence and autonomy, particularly when this space may be lacking in other contexts of their lives.

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*"For the kids, being able to achieve different things - they can make stuff, or they can just get muddy, they act in so many different ways. They can go home with something they have made, or they can grow something - digging and planting... There's the freedom of play, to find their own space, find their own friends. It gives them a chance to explore things they want to do, they can just say 'Can we do this?' and we can."*

**Staff focus group 2013**

32 adults and 41 children attended under 5 play sessions in 2011, with a group of 9 parents coming regularly. Surveys with a sample of parents indicated 100% positive feedback for the sessions and their effective facilitation both in 2011 and 2012. They highlighted the freedom and spontaneity that playing in the woods afforded young children.

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*"The freedom the children have to play and the stimulation it gives imaginatively. The balance between being allowed to create their own experience/do their own thing and the support of the really dedicated and enthusiastic support staff - they are never bored- or over supported."*

**Parent interview 2012**

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*"She loves it here, getting muddy, exploring the woods and being spontaneous in response to the nature around her."*

**Parent, under 5 group, 2011**

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*Can you think of a new thing that you can do now because of the Nature Garden? "Have adventures"*

**5-7 year old school user, 2013**

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*"A free space where they can roam around and encourage imaginative play"*

**Parent, under 5 group 2011**

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*"It provides a wonderful learning and play environment, we don't have a garden so it's great to play outdoors."*

**Parent, under 5 group, 2011**

## Trying new things, taking risks and gaining confidence and self worth

The combination of natural context and engaging, supported activities available at the Nature Garden provides children with a high level of stimulation and is replete with opportunities to explore and try new things - steps into the unknown that would not be possible in a less natural or more managed environment.

By continually providing novel stimuli for experimentation and exploration during play and activities, the ever-changing seasonal and successional aspects of the Nature Garden environment are reflected in children's increasing adaptability, flexibility and creativity in responding to it. Local stakeholders described the absence of this richness of stimuli from most urban public spaces, including parks, again highlighting the importance of the Nature Garden as the only place of its kind in Lambeth:

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*"If we make things sterile and safe, it hinders their development, they will never learn that if they swing on that branch it will snap."*

**Staff focus group 2013**

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*"It a very sterile place now, school, everything is done on computers, it's very sterile, it's all very 'one removed', they don't use all their senses in the same way, they are less aware of smells, and tastes and touch - everything around them is sterile."*

**Staff focus group 2013**

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*"...the park isn't great, they get bored, they reach an age when they don't want to go on the slide anymore"*

**Parent interview 2013**

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*How does the Nature Garden benefit your child? "They can explore"*

**Parent survey 2012**

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*"Children get experience of planting and watching plants grow over time, enjoy freedom of an outdoor natural environment that is not available in any other under 5's facility in this area, and I do not have at home."*

**Parent under 5 group survey**

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*What makes the Nature Garden so special? "Things that they grow and cook and you can play and go on trips and do treasure hunts so you do lots of things in one day - and that would be hard anywhere else"*

**Play user aged 5-7, 2013**

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*"She's come home, her shoes soaking wet, freezing cold, and she's happy, she's enjoying her childhood, learning, exploring, plants, animals, insects, even the smallest things, she loves it."*

**Parent interview 2013**

'Direct experience' forest school, curriculum linked visits and growing activities in the Nature Garden provide children with opportunities to try new things and take risks in a managed way with the gentle and non-directional support of staff. These novel experiences lead to increased self-awareness, confidence in their ability and pride in their achievements. The enduring impacts are growing self esteem plus flexibility of response and the confidence to try other new things. An average of 93% of all children aged 6-9 years surveyed over the year said they 'always' tried something new at Forest School. Children reported most enjoying making fire, and how they learned to cook soup on it.

What makes the Nature Garden so special?

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*"I can make fire"*

**School user aged 8-10, 2013**

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*"The fire makes it special"*

**School user aged 5-7, 2013**

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*"I feel happy because I dig and make"*

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*Children reported a sense of pride and enjoyment in what they had done and achieved: Why does Nature Garden make you feel happy? "We get to hand out cookies and drinks and we make it."*

User aged 5-7, 2013

100% regular participants surveyed in April 2012 agreed that forest school 'always' helped them feel good about themselves. 73% of users agreed they 'always' felt good about themselves in subsequent surveys in July and December – all others agreed it 'mostly,' or 'sometimes' helped them feel good about themselves.

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*"When they go they are doing things that kids don't do any more, building fires, making things with sticks, it's good for improving behavior. We can use it as an incentive sometimes, and also for confidence boosting - it's great for that, when they make things out of two sticks and a piece of string they are very proud. They can't wait to come and tell everyone. This from a child who wouldn't talk to anyone two weeks earlier."*

Teacher interview 2013

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*"Bringing together education and physical stuff, it's pretty hard work for a 3 year old to turn a handle of a drill, and then the smiles on their faces when you see them achieve, the hole that they have made, you learn how to use the drill and make something, it's reinforcing their learning, and getting excited about it."*

Staff focus group 2013

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*"It makes them feel good about themselves, they have done something for themselves, the last activity they did was like a treasure hunt, they were really proud that they could read the maps, find the places and they include that in their habitat unit."*

Teacher interview 2013

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*"One of the groups that attended for a block of six sessions was a small group of children with low self esteem and it was fantastic to see children that began by being afraid of leaving the shadow of their supporting staff member actively engaging other children in their play, glowingly showing the results of their tool use and speaking in the group circle (one particularly saying whimsically that he had 'enjoyed everything' which was an apparently huge contrast to his majority demeanor)."*

Oasis report to The Forestry Commission, 2012

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*"It makes them more confident to try new things. Because of the kind of activities they can do, they are more independent and more confident, leading them to become more adventurous, and given them some skills to attempt other things."*

Teacher interview 2013

This richness of opportunity is also important in the context of many local children and families living in poverty and experiencing deprivation, and for whom leaving the area and going on trips is a rarity. 73% of fifteen children who went on trips with Nature Garden in 2012 liked getting out of the area and 73% enjoyed going somewhere new.

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*"Lots of the types of families they come from, their parents won't take them to Richmond park or other areas with wildlife BUT they might drop them in on a Saturday. A lot of these families don't leave the area, if you ask them (the children) if they've been to the science museum or natural history and they haven't so if you can bring this to them in their area then that's good news for them"*

Teacher focus group 2013

## Nourishment from direct contact with nature

Simple proximity to nature – access to wildlife, being in a beautiful location, being outdoors in all weathers and being in green open space – was identified as improving aspects of mental and emotional health in stakeholder interviews and user feedback. For example, one parent answered: “It’s great for the children to be in direct contact with nature” when asked if the Nature Garden encouraged a healthier lifestyle at a 2011 community event. Attending the Nature Garden was identified as providing a natural form of therapy, and two local stakeholders mentioned the Nature Garden having a calming effect on users. This role for the Nature Garden is pertinent in light of 67% of stakeholders having identified lack of access to nature / wildlife as a local need.

User surveys and focus groups conducted between 2011 and 2013 did not explicitly explore the impact of direct contact with nature on inner worlds and mental health. However, user feedback directly related increased levels of happiness to being close to nature and interacting with it e.g. by planting repeatedly. Being in nature engages the whole user in emotionally satisfying and physically engaging ways. This finding points to the potential for future research and evaluation in this area, particularly in relation to meeting the needs of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties who are more at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, as well as the need to document impacts in order to help conserve and duplicate essential natural spaces in urban areas.

A user survey in March 2013 asked a mix of afterschool and school group children aged 5-10 years why being at the Nature Garden made them feel happy. 22% mentioned direct contact or learning about nature in their response:

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*“Like the plants”*

*“Because it’s nature”*

*“I love all the nature around and playing”*

*“I feel happy because I can plant stuff and run around”*

*“I learn nature”*

*“Because I learn more nature”*

*“I like the plants”*

In the same survey 67% of children reported that they discover nature and wildlife when they attend. 32% of comments stated some aspect of nature, wildness or planting as the best thing about the Nature Garden e.g. “I like best the forest.” Of the 66% of children who responded that the Nature Garden was indeed a good thing for people living close by (the rest did not know), 23% mentioned nature, habitats or animals as what made the Nature Garden such a special place.

Teachers from a local primary school reported how much children love their visits to the Nature Garden. Some favorite aspects were: “caring for plants, and nurturing the garden” and learning “how important nature is...” The children became noticeably more aware of the things they liked and more adventurous in their tastes through the interaction with the natural world and the food and other nourishment it provides.

## Developing empathy, team-working skills and making friends

79% of mixed age and activity child users surveyed in March 2013 agreed that the Nature Garden was a place to meet friends. Comments in praise of this aspect of the garden included:

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*“My friends are here and it’s fun”*

*“It makes me feel happy because I feel safe and I have lots of friends to play with”*

*“I can now make more friends...”*

*“Best thing about Nature garden is... being happy and playing with people”*

Activities provided by Nature Garden staff including growing and forest schools explicitly aim to develop children's communication skills, group working skills and the ability to understand and relate to others. Tasks might involve working alone, in pairs and small groups or in larger groups. 100% of regular Forest School users aged 6-9 surveyed in April 2012 said that forest school 'always' helped them talk to other people. In December 2012, 80% of surveyed users reported that forest school helped them talk to other people at least 'sometimes', with 46% saying it 'always' helped. A 2012 average of 87% of users reported that forest school 'always' helped them work with other people and 71% reported that it 'always' helped them understand other people.

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*"A reception group teacher reported that the sessions were excellent with benefits being brought by the fact that: "the children had to work independently, as part of a group and as a whole class during different parts of the sessions. This is a large part of their personal and social development. The children thoroughly enjoyed going on an animal hunt and this involved following paths, looking all around and working with their peers. Other children were willing to share what they had found with someone who didn't have an animal... They have also grown in confidence through their work together and new friendships have been forged"*

**Staff report for Forestry Commission 2012**

75% of parents interviewed in 2013 identified making friends (including learning how to resolve conflict) as key ways the Nature Garden improved emotional wellbeing. Just being in the space and playing in a less structured way with peers and with the support of the project workers produces positive impacts on children's ability to relate and communicate. The following comment from a parent points to how Oasis differs to other local contexts in this regard:

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*"I think Oasis is the most important place in L's childhood, he's about to be 13, it's been so important to have had the Nature Garden. It's not the same as the park, and it's not the after school club - kicking a ball is not his thing but he learnt so much about nature doing stuff there, and socially it's a wonderful place. It's the way they deal with the children, help them to learn, develop social skills. It's more in depth - it's different from school; they have learnt lots more socially at Oasis, they have the time to be with the children rather than just to teach things..."*

**Parent interview 2013**

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*"I think it's a good place to come, for children ... make friends, to socialise. I used to come as a child and I've seen it as a child, then I used to volunteer, so I've seen it from all different angles, and it's good that people come, when they come here shy, or when they have had a hard time, we work with them, and then when they come they come with a smile on their face, and they're happier"*

**Staff focus group 2013**

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*"She has a few friends there, if it's snowing, they are there, if it's raining, you'll see them there."*

**Parent interview 2013**

## **Providing valuable relaxed one-to-one time for parents and children**

Community events and the under 5s playgroup provided valuable opportunities for family bonding and opportunities to model ways to interact with children within an unstructured natural space. One-to-one time between parents and children is a high determining factor in the development of children's emotional wellbeing and ability to communicate effectively. Two staff focus group participants also described providing space for de-stressing and respite for parents as a valuable role of the Nature Garden.

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*How does the Nature Garden benefit you? "It's something to do with my child"*

**Parent, under 5 group**

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*"Many parents don't know what to do with the children at Nature Garden because it's unstructured. In the park their kids will run off and get involved with the swings or the slide, but here, they can be a bit unsure of how they should use the space"*

**Staff focus group 2013**

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*“One parent commented to a staff member after the Easter Feast that: ‘This is the most relaxed I’ve been with my two boys since I think the second one was born.’ She said it so heart-feltly, it was really moving.”*

Staff focus group 2013

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*“Fun for both parent and child to interact”*

Adult survey, community event 2013

However, the limitations of funding and the time available for staff means that this work with families remains relatively undeveloped.

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*“I’d like us to work more with the parents; some really need support, a cup of tea and chat. It would be great to have enough budget to have another member of staff, and for them to have that in their remit: reaching out to the parents, building relationships with each other.”*

Staff focus group 2013

### **Longer-term impacts for children’s mental and emotional health**

That the Nature Garden project is an established space means there is a longer-term aspect to projects and opportunities on offer. Project workers identified this repetitive contact as producing outcomes that would not be achievable in the shorter-term, mirroring the forest schools approach. We have already discussed some of the ‘sanctuary’ aspects of the Nature Garden in relation to some of the deprivations and need experienced in the surrounding area. The impact of this safe haven was identified as potentially taking months or years to build up for users for whom it is novel:

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*“It’s hard to put in words, but it’s something you see happen over a number of weeks, maybe they don’t talk much or are very, very shy at first, by allowing them to experience the freedom in Oasis, it improves wellbeing and confidence over time.”*

Teacher interview 2013

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*“It’s a slow process, I don’t know if you see it in clear steps, but just to have the freedom and confidence to play and just be a child, and to not take things so seriously, I think there is a real pressure amongst schools, especially in London, to be very strong about everything, and the Garden has a lot of freedom to it, both in the sense of space and the interactions with the other kids, you can see the kids become positively affected by the space, you see them come in looking quite ground down by the weight of the world and feel like you can watch them come into their own, relax and become more child like.”*

Staff focus group 2013

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*“Some of the kids that come might have a rough time outside this space. I really feel that their shoulders drop and that they don’t feel they have to put on a face, and that’s really nice, to be facilitating that. It all comes naturally through the activities, it’s not a sitting down, therapeutic counselling session, it’s over time, and you see the relationship develop. The kids relax over time - things, conversations will come out while you’re building a bird house, and that’s really nice, it’s all very natural - it becomes part of their routine, and their relief, and they know they will always see the same faces around.”*

Staff focus group 2013

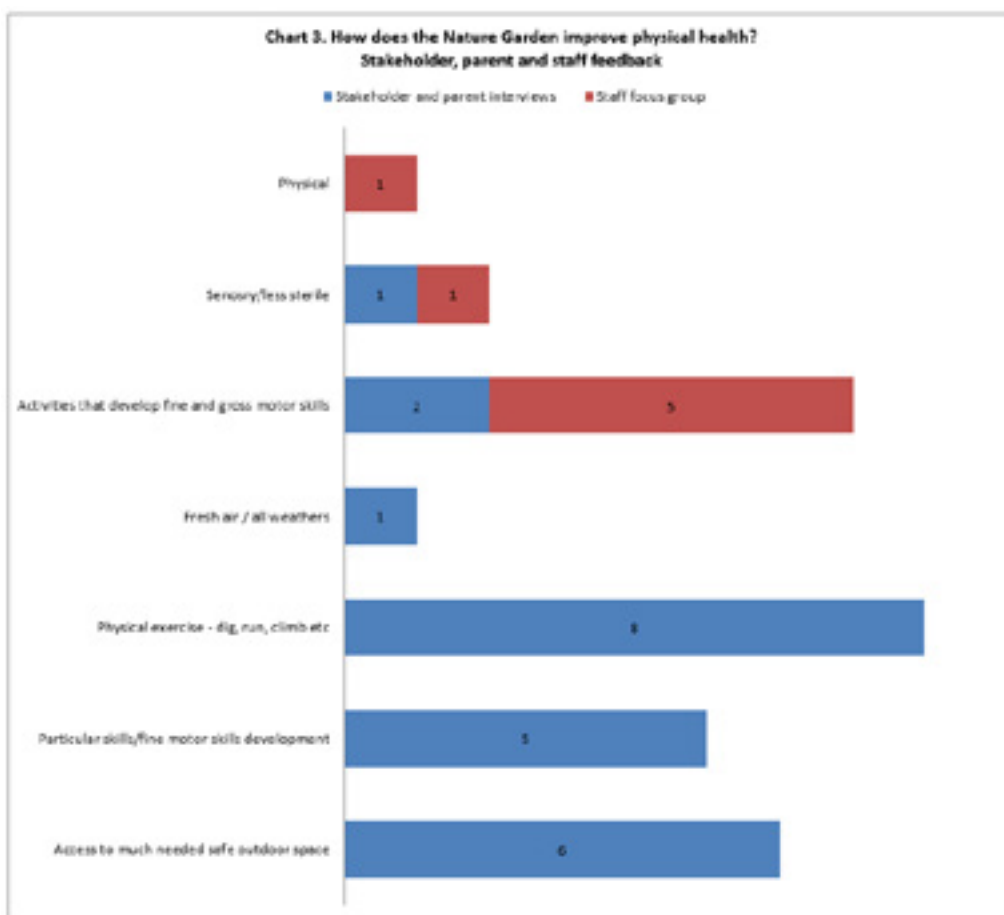
### **Case study: improved emotional health.**

‘M’ is 6 years old. He is a refugee from Somalia who moved to the Stockwell area in March 2012. He is the second eldest child in the family and has two younger siblings. His mum brings ‘M’ to the garden every Saturday where he can enjoy the freedom of the outdoor green space. In Somalia ‘M’ and his family lived in a rural location so he appears at home and happy in the natural environment of the garden. It is a contrast to the harsh built urban environment which he now finds himself living in. ‘M’ explained to a staff member how in his village in Somalia he had to hide in a tree whilst his village was attacked and some family members were killed. The garden, to him, has become a safe nurturing space where he can explore the trauma that he had previously experienced, in his own time. ‘M’ continues to be a regular visitor to the garden and is clearly growing in confidence.

## Outcome two: Improved levels of physical health

This section describes some of the impacts of the Nature Garden on levels of different aspects of physical health amongst users, as reflected in user data and stakeholder feedback. Where possible it explores the kinds of characteristics and processes generating these outcomes.

100% of adult users surveyed at the under 5 playgroup and a community event in 2013 agreed that the Nature Garden improves the physical health of both themselves and their children. The following chart shows some of the ways local stakeholders and staff interviewed in 2013 felt the Nature Garden improved physical health among users.



### Access to safe open space

Coinciding with growing contemporary concern about young people's decreasing access to nature and green space, and the impact of this on physical development, strength and vitality, 67% of interviewed local stakeholders identified a lack of green space in the public domain, and 17% a lack of space in people's homes and gardens, as needs in the local area (see chart 1).

*"[there is a] lack of access to nature for some children in inner cities. The grounds of where they live are not accessible to them. They get told off for doing the kinds of things kids naturally do - climbing things..."*

**Staff focus group attendee**

*"It is essential to give children an opportunity to play as they would in rural England"*

**Parent, Under 5 group, 2011**

The Nature Garden therefore has an important role in meeting this need for its local users.

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*"It's great to have some green space."*

**Parent, Under 5 group 2011**

100% of adult users surveyed at the under 5 playgroup and a community event in 2013 agreed that both their own and their children's physical health was improved by being outdoors at the Nature Garden. 100% of the playgroup respondents agreed that being around nature/wildlife improved the physical health of adults and children, and 75% of community event respondents agreed it improved physical health.

This was mirrored in children's responses: 100% of 5-9 year olds agreed that the Nature Garden made living in the area better in a 2013 community event survey. Comments as to why included:

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*"...it is better to all this" and "it provides a space for young children."*

Staff, local stakeholders and parents that were interviewed and surveyed for the evaluation in 2013 all identified a role for the Nature Garden as providing safe space within the locality. The heavily built up area of Stockwell, sandwiched as it is between arterial roads into the capital, offers particular as well as unspecified dangers from which the Garden provides sanctuary. The sense of physical boundary provided by the fence and gate provides an important function for the peace of mind of adults, which in turn provides children more free rein to play and run around, with the associated benefits for physical development.

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*"It's safe for them to run about, if you run too far in an area like this you're likely to get hit by a car, it's great to have a space that they can run freely"*

**Teacher, 2013**

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*"...it's secure, having the big fence, and they are really good about locking the gate, the children feel they are really free and we know they are safe"*

**Teacher, 2013**

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*"It's safe, the parents feel it's safe."*

**Staff focus group 2013**

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*"Keeps children together and in a safe place."*

**Parent, community event 2013**

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*"It's... a haven in the urban playground we live in"*

**Parent, Under 5 group 2012**

100% of adults surveyed at a community event in 2013 agreed that the Nature Garden makes a positive difference within the community: 75% agreeing that it provides much needed green space and 75% agreeing that it helps make the community safer. 60% of adult feedback from an under 5 playgroup survey in 2013 agreed that the Nature Garden makes the community safer.

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*"It gives them a taste of the wildness of nature, what I love about it is that it's quite rough and ready, there's a lot of space, they can go and get lost but in a safe place. It's amazing for parents: you know they can't actually get lost."*

**Parent interview, 2013**

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*"I love the fact that my child has had the opportunity to play in a healthy, green and safe environment for many years, great staff too!"*

**Parent survey, Dec 2012**



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*“They get to explore nature and get messy in a safe environment”*

**Parent under 5 group**

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*A 2013 user survey asked children, ‘What is the best thing about the Nature Garden?’ Answers included: “It’s wild” and “It’s bigger than the school playground”*

Respondents identified greater physical health as resulting from this availability of open space, increased opportunities for varied physical activity and the fresh clean air. 100% of adults surveyed at a 2013 community event agreed that running around and playing improves physical health. 80% of parents of under 5 playgroup users surveyed in 2013 agreed that running around improves their health and 100% agreed that it improves their child’s health. 73% of mixed users surveyed in 2013 reported that the Nature Garden is a place to run around and play. 67% of children surveyed at a community event in 2013 agreed that Nature Garden helps them keep fit and active and 89% said they run around and play in the garden.

### **Developing motor skills and physical dexterity**

50% of local stakeholders mentioned focused activities as positively benefitting the physical development of users, some explicitly mentioned motor skills developed whilst digging, planting, climbing etc. 52% of users surveyed in 2013 reported that they do gardening when visiting. 100% of adults surveyed at a 2013 community event agreed that physical activity like gardening improves physical health. 80% of parents of under 5s playgroup users surveyed in 2013 agreed that physical activity like gardening improves their health and 100% agreed that it improves their child’s health.

Centre staff also mentioned the value of Forest School sessions in this regard:

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*“6-8 year olds have real difficulty with basic motor skills, coordination, maybe it’s because they are a generation that doesn’t get out enough, or get to use their bodies enough, or maybe it’s that they play indoors more. With the groups we work with, who are targeted, the physical element is really strong in forest school, anything that involves coordination or fine motor skills, sawing, weaving, those kind of things”*

**Staff focus group 2013**

A young respondent aged 5-6 years who had attended the Nature Garden for the first time with their parent/carer described how they had been on a bear hunt outside and how this had benefited them physically: “I learned how to balance whilst we did the bear hunt.” Demonstrating the rich and multiple benefits of well-supported, nature-based learning, the same child also described enjoying the flowers, observing ‘a lovely grassy spot’ and being taught new things about the garden by the Senior Project Worker.

Staff also drew attention to the natural play-based possibilities available for users to improve motor skills within the garden – with some limitations:

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*“In the garden, that natural invitation, from nature is to climb, and run. We are lacking structures, something that they can climb, it’s hard because they come here and they see all these trees but they can’t climb them, they are just too small weak, or too large. It would be nice to have more safe risky play where kids can enjoy, they are always trying to do, they are always looking in the garden, we try to make things safe, but that’s their natural inquisitive development. To try and test their own boundaries.”*

**Staff/volunteer focus group 2013**

### **Healthy eating and nutrition**

The Nature Garden was granted four years of Local Food funding, starting in 2011, to provide growing and cooking workshops and community events that promote local organic food growing and healthy eating which children regularly attend.

81% of participants surveyed during year 1 reported that they had 'learned a lot' about healthy eating and food at the club, with 19% saying they had 'learned a bit'. 38% said they 'always' eat what they have grown, 44% 'regularly', 15% 'sometimes', and 6% 'never'. 65% of 2012 respondents said they had learned a lot about healthy eating and food at the garden and 35% said a bit. Asked how coming to the Nature Garden helped them understand more about food and health, children said:

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*"Telling me how it grows and how healthy it is"*

*"Saying what part of your body it is good for and which vitamins are in it"*

*"The healthy plants, it encourages me"*

*"Telling us certain things that we should and shouldn't eat"*

*"Growing it, cooking it, eating it!"*

*"Eating the things planted"*

A focus group with 24 core participants in 2012 asked how much they had learned about healthy eating during clubs: 58% had learned a lot and 42% had learned a bit. Feedback from children in a 2013 user survey gives an idea of the difference that the club is having on eating habits and health awareness:

What is the importance of healthy food?

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*"To make you big and strong"*

*"So you get strong and have a healthy body"*

*"So you have lots of energy"*

*"Because it will keep you healthier and you won't get sick quite as often"*

2013 feedback from a focus group with staff backed up the children's responses:

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*"Just seeing from the kids, all the cooking we do, they no longer ask for junk, they know they are only going to get a healthy snack, they are always asking for fruit, I've never seen so many kids ask for fruit, and because we are teaching them about this, they know."*

Families of the children who visited the garden were invited to eat food cooked by children and invited to quarterly community open days, and also took home fruits and vegetables from the garden. During open days the project staff displayed information about locally grown produce and retailers in the area and created fun trails and activities around nutrition and healthy eating. In the second year, parents of the Under 5 group were also invited to become involved in food growing activities with their children.

Local Food Fund targets included 250 families enjoying more healthy lifestyles, developing a significant understanding of the link between food and nutrition, and choosing to buy more locally grown produce by the end of the project. By the end of year 2 (2012), 126 parents had stayed for sessions with their children over the year. Additionally, 104 parents attended open days and 29 visited Morley College, making a year total of 259 families to add to the 85 different families worked with the previous year. The overall figure has already exceeded the target number by working with 344 families by the end of year 2. Information as to how many of these have increased the healthiness of their lifestyle is unavailable, though indications from surveys point to improvements for some.

100% of parents of children who regularly attended the garden reported that the Nature Garden helped them and their family to enjoy a healthier lifestyle in 2011 and 2012. 83% said that the garden encouraged them to buy more locally grown produce, and 92% said the garden helped them and their family understand the link between food and nutrition. Four parents said the garden encourages the family to buy more locally grown produce. 2011 and 2012 parent responses included:

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*"It's the only place where my son likes to go after school, where he gets fresh air, exercise, and where they grow vegetables that he brings home to cook"*

*"Children learn about growth and the food chain. They are taught about eating healthy i.e. fruit and vegetables"*

*"It makes you eat vegetables and fruit more"*

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*"The children come home often with food items they have cooked or baked for themselves, using alternative natural flavourings. This helps to widen their knowledge of food and nutrition"*

*"It has made us more aware of the importance of staying healthy"*

*"It teaches them what foods have nutritional value"*

*"My child is a health freak and I love the way this place is showing how to be a part in helping things grow"*

80% of under 5 playgroup parents surveyed in 2013 agreed that learning about food and nutrition at the Nature Garden improves their health and 60% agreed that it improves their child's health. A parent commented that:

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*"The child in my care has had problems eating and he has successfully eaten veg that he has picked/dug up himself at the nature garden"*

The Nature Garden holds seasonal open days such as the Easter Feast, Plum Jam Day, Summer Festival, Cob Oven building day, Halloween celebration and Christmas Fair.

100% of parents surveyed at the Easter Event in both 2011 and 2012 agreed that the event had helped their family enjoy an improved healthy lifestyle. 85% in 2011, and 91% in 2012, agreed that the event had helped the family share knowledge and skills in food and cooking. 84% in 2011, and 100% in 2012, agreed that their family now understood the links between food and nutrition. 91% of 2012 respondents reported that the nature garden encouraged them or their family to buy more locally grown produce.

Despite all this positive feedback of impact on health, staff focus group discussion indicated how healthy eating could be further developed at the Nature Garden, and revealed some of the limitations to this within current conditions:

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*"Healthy food could be developed, lots more. We have the space, the massive green house, there's an interest from the community, we're setting up a food co-op, people really want to be able to host something like the co-op, we have the space, it would attract more people, who would then bring their kids, there would be a lot of knock on effects from that."*

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*"It can be frustrating, when you know there's a lot more capacity to make things better, to do more, but there's not enough time in the day. And a lot of that's down to money and hours. Everyone is on whatever set hours they've got - they could do double the hours; every member of staff could probably do double their hours to make their jobs better, or the events better, but there's just not enough time. We have to do other jobs because this isn't enough to make a living. If we had enough time to commit to the project, it would be amazing. There's so much good stuff going on but we are always limited somewhere. It would be nice to expand it as much as possible, and get as much out of it as we can."*

## Case study: improved physical health

'C' is Portuguese, 8 years old, and lives with his parents, grandmother and two older brothers in a small overcrowded flat. They live in a superoutput area as identified by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. English is a second language and their family speak Portuguese at home.

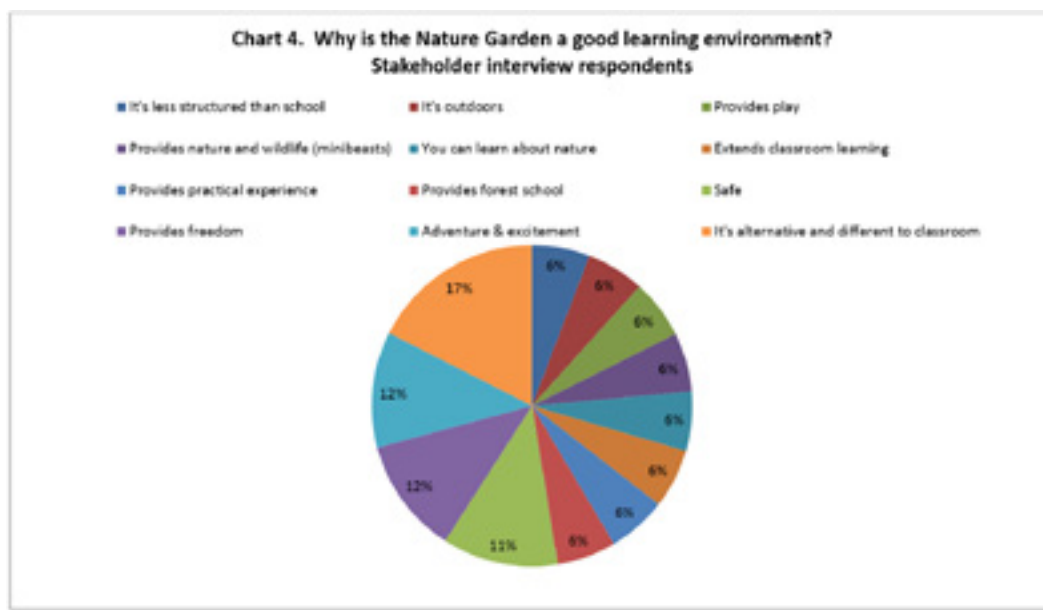
C has attended the Nature Garden play sessions for over two years. He is imaginative and creative and loves helping out.

C has little space to play at home and loves being outdoors in the garden environment. He demonstrates a very caring and conscientious attitude to looking after the garden and helping it to thrive. C is over-weight but is able to spend most of his time at the garden being active, digging, watering, weeding as well as playing chase and hide and seek zombies! He seems to really enjoy being active and the sense of space afforded by the woodland, with him often initiating chase games.

He has also started to really enjoy cooking and learning about herbs in the garden and experimenting with what goes into cooking with other children at sessions. The combination of being active and learning about food (and the range and taste of fresh fruit, vegetables and herbs) within a supportive environment where weight is not challenged or used as a bullying tool is also showing in 'C's own self image and he is starting to talk about himself as "healthy".

## Outcome three: Improved local access to education and skills

The Nature Garden provides regular, year-round opportunities for children and local community learning and skill development. These include formal curriculum-linked sessions with schools, food growing and forest school activities for schools and local groups, community events, and the more informal afterschool, Saturday and holiday play drop-ins. This section explores and makes reference to some of the characteristics of the project that enhance access to learning and skills, and describes the impact of some of the activities that are on offer in this regard, based on the available data from monitoring surveys, focus groups and stakeholder interviews.



As seen earlier, chart 1 illustrates some of the need around education identified in the area by stakeholders. 24% of local stakeholders and parents identified a need for ways to embed learning outside of the classroom and 5% identified lack of understanding about the natural environment within their locality.

### Experiential nature-based learning

Referring to chart 2, 83% local stakeholders identified that the Nature Garden makes a key difference to users by helping to embed learning through practical learning experience.

*"Facilitates a creative, stimulating space for her to learn about nature, wildlife, friendship, gardening and cooking. Gives an essential space after school, in the inner city to access a different type of learning - embodied and practical - vital!"*

2012 Parent Survey

As discussed earlier in outcome one (improved mental health, trying new things), unstructured play within the stimuli-rich context of the Nature Garden also affords continual opportunities for children to learn and develop personal creative responses to their environment. The relaxed safety of the Nature Garden helps children feel happy and positive, hence more receptive, which are all prerequisite states for effective learning. Feeling free and confident enough to explore and try new things, children continually develop decision-making, adaptability, self-awareness and problem solving capabilities as well as social skills through free play at the Nature Garden.

The after-school, Saturday and holiday sessions, forest school sessions, food growing and cooking sessions and the under 5s playgroup all involve learning through practical activities. The senior staff member, forest school leader and gardener lead children in interacting with the natural environment, enabling them to gain practical and traditional skills rather than a purely theoretical understanding. The sessions are overwhelmingly enjoyed - because they are fun and engage the whole child - e.g. lighting fires, cooking and woodwork.

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*"Great activities encouraging creativity, problem solving and independence."*

**Teacher, as reported in Oasis report to The Forestry Commission 2012**

2013 user survey data showed that 82% of respondents felt that going to the Nature Garden teaches them new things and that these skills very often involve interaction with the natural world. Surveys included the following comments from children:

What makes the Nature Garden special?

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*"Because I really like making stuff"*

**School group user aged 8-10**

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*"I can make fire"*

**School group user aged 8-10**

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*"There is lots of different activities and I learn more"*

**After-school user aged 8-10**

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*"You make treasure hunt"*

**After-school user aged 8-10**

What is the best thing about the Nature Garden?

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*"That the stuff is fun, and crafting"*

**After school user aged 5-7**

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*"Cookies and pineapple, sewing and making"*

**Play user aged 5-7**

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*"Making things for animals"*

**School user aged 5-7**

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*"Is fun making the bracelet"*

**School user aged 5-7**

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*"Making the necklaces"*

**School user aged 8-10**

Can you think of a new thing you can do now because of the Nature Garden?

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*"Make a den"*

**School user aged 8-10**

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*"Sawing"*

**School user aged 5-7**

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*"Make up my own games"*

**Playgroup user aged 5-7**

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*"Make go-karts"*

**After-school user aged 8-10**

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*"Woodwork, planting"*

**After-school user aged 10-12**

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*"Cooking"*

User aged 5-7

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*"Eat fruit, find new bugs"*

User aged 5-7

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Why do you feel happy at the Nature Garden?

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*"Because its fun and learn about new stuff"*

School user aged 5-7

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*"Because I learn more nature"*

After-school user aged 8-10

### **Forest school**

The forest school project worker ran taster and ongoing sessions with mainstream children from five pre-schools and settings, four schools, a home schooling group and two local community groups between March 2011 and the end of 2012. In addition she delivered sessions with groups of children with special educational needs from seven primary schools, a high school and two community groups. As discussed in earlier sections, forest school activities were very popular with children. This high level of enjoyment clearly helped generate the significant level of user engagement and learning.

What would you tell your friends about forest school?

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*"That it was the best school ever"*

forest school, user, 2012

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What have you learnt at forest school?

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*"How to saw and do drilling"*

*"How to plant and make a pencil holder"*

100% of forest school users surveyed in April 2012 reported that Forest School 'always' helped them develop new skills. 96% of July 2012's survey and 100% of November's said Forest School 'always' or 'mostly' helped them gain new skills.

The following teaching / nursery / centre staff feedback, compiled by staff in monitoring data between March 2011 and 2013, gives a flavour of the nature and quality of some of the learning that occurred and skills that were gained during forest school sessions:

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*"The children made strings of beads for tree mobiles. This took patience and used their creative skills."*

*"Exploring the outdoor environment. Lots of investigating skills and observations"*

*"The hands on experience of looking through the dirt to find 'things' was great - the children loved this and the freedom to run around the garden and look for animals/leaves."*

*"I thought the children got a lot of ideas about different plants, creatures and life such as frogs and insects"*

*"Story maps, following a story trail and making up their own stories. The activities reinforced their understanding of sequencing and story language. The environment really engaged the children developing their understanding of the world around them."*

*"Teamwork. They really enjoyed the bees and flowers game"*

*"Cooperation and team building"*

*"It's great that you've provided activities in which the children need to work collaboratively"*

*"Organising themselves into teams and learning to cooperate with each other. Understanding of relationship between insects and flowers"*

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*"The children learnt the names of wildlife they might find in forests and were very excited at the prospect of making the birds and bird feeders. The children continue to bring their birds to school and ask about the bird feeders, which are hanging outdoors. We all really enjoyed the sessions! The children have learned to appreciate the delicate balances in nature."*

**Reception teacher, as reported in Oasis report to The Forestry Commission, 2012**

Over three user surveys in 2012, an average of 80% of forest school users aged 5-10 reported that sessions 'always' or 'mostly' helped them solve problems. Other benefits for formal schooling were indicated when 100% of users surveyed in April 2012 reported that they 'always' do better work in school as a result of attending forest school. 83% of July 2012's survey and 86% of November's reported forest school 'always' or 'mostly' helping them do better at school. Two users reported homework as a new thing they can now do because of going to the Nature Garden in a 2013 user survey.

Challenges identified for extending provision by creating resources and training for building local teacher capacity include the time constraints experienced by part time workers:

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*"We did not in the end run a teacher's information pack or event (beyond a couple of individual meetings, risk assessments, session and benefit outline and behaviour policy) due to far more time than anticipated taken up with actual groups due to the large demand. This was positive overall, though it would also be of benefit to have the time put aside to specifically do this."*

**Oasis report to Forestry Commission 2012**

## **Food Growing Clubs**

52% of young users surveyed in 2013 had learned about growing food during visits to the Nature Garden. 43% of responses were in regards to some kind of food growing or gardening activity, including:

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*"I can plant new things"*

**Afterschool user aged 8-10**

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*"I can plant things and can see lots of wild animals"*

**After-school user**

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*"Plant/dig"*

**School user aged 5-7**

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*"I have planted some seeds which I learnt here"*

**After school user aged 7-9**

What is the best thing about the Nature Garden?

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*"How you grow things"*

**User aged 5-7**

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*"Planting and making new friends"*

**Afterschool user aged 8-10**

547 individual children made a total of 4733 visits to the food growing clubs by the end of the second Local Food funded year (2012). This puts the project on track to meet its target of 750 regular users by the end of year 4.

Groups of children from local children's centres, community groups and schools attend growing clubs at the Nature Garden. Twelve children's organisations participated in the project in 2011, bringing in a total of 175 children. Children planted a lettuce seed to take home, explored the fruits and vegetables growing in the garden and cooked with some of the garden's produce.

Food growing club activities have included food planting and growing, watering, weeding, cooking, quizzes, treasure hunts, signs and interpretation making, open days and tours. According to an Oasis monitoring report for the Local Food Fund in 2012, popular activities included visiting a 'pick your own strawberry' farm, cooking over fires and experimenting with bread recipes.

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*"The children have become noticeably more aware of the things they like and more adventurous in their tastes. They are also on their way to becoming competent gardeners."*

Oasis staff member

A focus group with food growing club participants in 2011 found that 58% had learned a lot and 48% a little about healthy food, and 71% had learned a lot and 6% a bit about growing food. A 2011 user survey explored how and what they had learned during food growing club:

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*"What type of plants we eat and what we don't"*

*"By using compost and [learning] where food comes from"*

*"See it grow"*

*"Telling me and showing me"*

*"Growing plants and playing treasure hunts about vegetables and fruit"*

The following selection of teaching / community and children's centre practitioner feedback, as compiled by Oasis from monitoring data gathered between March 2011 and 2013, gives a flavour of the nature and quality of some of the learning that occurred and the skills children gained during food growing club sessions:

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*"They have tried organic food that was planted and came from the ground - seeing it was great as they did not know that some food came from the plants."*

*"How important nature is and that eating fruit and veg is good for you"*

*"Colours, growing, living, moving, mini-beasts"*

*"Identifying insect in 'real life.' Seed planting, a good intro to the process. Colour matching. Really good mix of structured and unstructured activities. Worked really well for this age group."*

*"Caring for plants - aftercare. Nurturing garden"*

*"Where things grow and what they can touch and pick and can not. The staff was very good and made the group very welcome."*

## **Extending the curriculum: putting theory into practice**

Refer to Chart 2, difference made to users, embedding learning is highest rated amongst stakeholders.

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*"Lovely to extend our work in such an inspiring environment"*

Teacher session feedback 2012

As well as the more informal nature-based activities provided by forest school and food growing (described in the sections above), groups from sixteen mainstream primary schools received between them 353 curriculum-linked workshops (during 2011-12) that helped embed theoretical class-based topics. Topics included plants (year 3), habitats (year 4), life cycles (year 5), water (year 5), interdependence and adaptation (year 6).

The following selection of teaching / nursery / centre staff feedback, from data compiled by staff from monitoring surveys between March 2011 and 2012, gives a flavour of the quality and nature of the learning that occurred and skills that children gained during curriculum-linked sessions:

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*"Talked about and acted out seed dispersal and talked about probability of seeds growing - hadn't covered that in class yet. Lots of hands on activities and the children loved exploring in the garden"*

*"That leaves provide food for the plant through exposure to the sun"*

*"Comparing soil samples"*

*"Head, thorax abdomen song"*



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*“Life cycles, different habitats, adapting to environment, how they protect themselves, parts of mini-beasts  
“They got a better understanding of the process of reproduction and how important it is for the survival of different species”  
“Igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary. How soil is formed. Thank you! Very valuable and has given ideas of how to bring topic to life”  
“Lots of activities but just enough information for their work back at school. Everything was at just the correct level”  
“Drama and exploring. Children learnt that plants need CO<sub>2</sub>, where sun is used, what leaves do, food as plants. It was great the children were trusted and given so much freedom, also very good behaviour management and high expectations”  
“They consolidated their learning on lifecycle topic”  
“Concepts already covered but an excellent way to reinforce the concepts. Also a great way to introduce our city children to a natural environment”  
“They benefited from the diverse creative learning opportunities they were provided”*

Teacher feedback from interviews as well as in the monitoring survey data listed above indicates that the quality of facilitation provided by Oasis staff is key to the success of the Nature Garden as a resource for local schools.

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*“The staff, they are really amazing, accommodating, flexible and keen to learn about what is best and what works for our children”*

**Teacher interview 2013**

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*“A great resource and we really appreciate being able to use it, the staff are really wonderful.”*

**Teacher interview 2013**

As in the sections above, the real-life and experiential elements of the activities produced positive impacts for learning and help meet diverse users' learning needs:

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*“The difference it makes is having real life experiences - practical, sensory - things like the frog life cycle for example, experiencing that over a number of weeks and seeing the changes over time. When we can show them the growing plants, producing fruit or vegetables, and then taking them back and cooking with them - lots of the kids are used to seeing them only in the supermarkets.”*

**Teacher interview 2013**

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*“Because it's hands on, the children do act get to do things themselves, they get excited, and they do remember, they have a better understanding of what we are trying to teach, things that we can't teach in the classroom, or find difficult, we can do here”*

**Teacher interview, 2013**

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*“...then back at school there was a good discussion and writing that they did afterwards that would not have happened if we had not been [to the garden]. You can see from the comments, or the pictures they draw after, you can see that yes they have learnt something, it meets the needs of the different children.”*

**Teacher interview 2013**

Patterns observed in the 'real world' of nature were also identified as relevant in enhancing understanding and providing life lessons for young learners:

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*“The schools that come... come as a class to reinforce what they are learning through the curriculum. ...it's a brilliant opportunity to show them things in the real world, to make links with the stuff they are learning. I feel that in school it's so compartmentalized – ‘this is a maths topic’, ‘this is a science topic’... it's good for them to see that; particularly in the natural world, everything is so interlinked, and so importantly interlinked. That's important learning in itself, and for them to see that learning is exploring what's around you.”*

**Staff focus group 2013**

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*“Living in this society where everything is litigious, it always has to be someone’s fault. But probably there isn’t anyone to blame; it’s just something that’s happened, that happens in nature - you just have to accept it. When all the frogs came back last spring to the pond, to mate and to lay their eggs, something was going on where two frogs would squeeze to death the one in the middle. Nobody knows why they did that, and it was cruel...but we just had to accept that there was nothing we could do. And the children saw adults shocked and appalled but just accepting it and not knowing the answer – it’s that I think that’s really important. There are some things in life, bad things happen, and those kind of lessons are very hard to have in a school setting. It’s in nature that you find that resilience, that life can dole you an unfair hand but you can get through it.”*

**Staff focus group 2013**

Challenges identified by users and Oasis staff as inhibiting more effective provision of curriculum-based learning included the cost in an area where many families live in poverty and the poor state of the existing building:

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*“I think it’s fantastic resource to have just down the road, with fantastic staff. In an ideal world I would love to visit more often, but if it’s £30 per visit, with a class with children from disadvantaged backgrounds asking the kids to bring in a pound often doesn’t go down too well with parents, so we have to limit it, which is a shame”*

**Teacher interview feedback 2013**

User respondents repeatedly highlighted the poor state of the building on site as inhibiting service quality. Just 48% of young users felt it was a nice building, and four children commented that a new building would improve the Nature Garden in a 2013 user survey.

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*“The building is not fit for purpose... does not get thirty kids in it, and if I have a school group, I need to have a back-up room. We do a lot of cooking, it’s been amazing, they love it, but the kitchen, they can’t go in it. We need to be able to do several activities at the same time. We need a bigger indoor space that is separate.”*

**Staff focus group 2013**

## **Learning on trips**

User feedback in 2013 indicated that 73% of children going out on trips felt that they had learned something new.

## **Impacts on learning for children with special educational needs**

Targeted groups of pupils made up of diverse children with special educational needs (SEN) from eight different schools, a community centre and a local community organisation visited the Nature Garden during 2011 – 2012 for forest school sessions. Monitoring data from 2011 indicates that the majority of children benefitting from targeted intervention were male.

The outdoor space and the practical and enjoyable nature of the activities were identified by staff as being particularly suited to the learning needs of pupils who find it difficult to remain engaged in classroom settings. Referring to outcome two, (improved levels of mental health) points to the value of the space and activities happening therein for users with emotional and behavioural difficulties and other complex needs.

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*“Lots of our children struggle to learn in classrooms, and this is a great way for them to learn.”*

**Teacher interview 2013**

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*“Hands on activities always add to children’s learning. I’ve seen the children who can sometimes be disruptive really engaged.”*

**Teacher feedback, 2011**

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*“Kids that are a nightmare in the classroom, the untouchables in the classroom, do really really well there - it’s incredible the change in these hard to reach kids.”*

**Teacher interview 2013**

User surveys with forest school participants in 2012 point to knock-on benefits for those identified as having behavioural difficulties in school: an average of 77% of pupils felt attending forest school 'always' helped them to behave better in school.

Having observed them at the Nature Garden, the value of forest school activities for groups of children with autism was identified by teaching staff.

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*"Because we work with children with Autism, it's really good to be able to show the children in such a practical sensory way, to demonstrate what we are trying to teach them in the classroom."*

**Teacher interview 2013**

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*"The children always look forward to their weekly visit and gain enormous enjoyment from the garden.... They are able to see life processes at first hand... and enable the children to experience the changes first hand in a visual/sensory way which is so important for children with autism.... We have also found that the garden provides opportunities for imaginary play which is an area children with autism find difficult, they have enjoyed building houses of sticks to act out the 3 little pigs story and pretending to build camp fires."*

**Teacher, as reported in an Oasis report to the Forestry Commission 2012**

Staff feedback from two school groups who took part in regular food growing activities in 2011 (including a children with SEN), described how children had identified caring for the garden and nurturing plants as enjoyable aspects of the sessions, and had appreciated the importance of nature and eating fruit and vegetables for their health.

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*"We have been able to link the visits to our science topics and staff at the garden have provided us with information and hands on activities which support the children's learning. The visits also support work we do on the seasons and enable the children to experience the changes first hand and in a visual/ sensory way which is so important for children with autism."*

**Teacher, as reported in Oasis monitoring report for Local Food fund 2011**

## **Family and community learning**

Monitoring data indicates that 344 families attended community events that included food growing clubs and activities related to healthy lifestyles and nutrition by the end of 2012.

Families of children who visit the garden were invited to try children's cooking. Having cooked children benefitted from taking home fruits and vegetables from the garden and were invited to quarterly community open days. Open days included information about locally grown produce and retailers in the area and trails and activities related to nutrition. Oasis staff also led a 'growing food in contained spaces' workshop on a local estate, which was attended, by 16 adults and 24 children.

76% of a sample of parents surveyed at the Easter Feast event in 2011 agreed the event helped them/their family develop new skills and increased confidence in food growing, indicating that the project is well on target for 70% of families to have gained skills in growing food by the end of the four-year project. 84% agreed that the event helped them/their family share knowledge and skills in food and cooking and a further 84% agreed that the event helped them/their family understand the links between food and nutrition.

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*"I want to grow my own food so this event encouraged me to take that step, thank you!"*

**Parent feedback, Easter event 2011**

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*"They have always [sic] good tips to give us about how to grow our own vegetables/fruits"*

**Parent, recorded in Oasis monitoring report 2011**

A 2012 monitoring report by Oasis staff reports that 12 parents were surveyed at the end of 2012. Comments included:

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*"Educated in what goes into grow natural vegetables"*

*"It's nice to know where your food comes from, and know it is good for the environment and local business"*

*"It's great for them to be outside in nature every week and develop a greater understanding of where food comes from and the different uses for plants"*

*"To see things grow from seeds is absolutely brilliant and to learn about different types is helpful"*

A parent survey comment in 2012 said:

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*"Definitely - we are actively able to see the food being grown at the garden and how it is cared for - it increased our confidence to grow and nurture our own food. Since going to the garden we have actively grown our own vegetables."*

80% of Under 5 playgroup parents surveyed in 2013 agreed that the Nature Garden helps children and adults develop new skills and knowledge by teaching people how to grow their own food and where it comes from. 80% agreed that it means people can experience new things and learn new skills: "All gardening activities are new to us."

75% of parents surveyed at a community event in 2013 agreed that the Nature Garden helps children and adults develop new skills and knowledge, that it teaches people how to grow their own food and where it comes from. 80% agreed that it means people can experience new things and learn new skills: "It is a good place to learn growing"

Oasis is also working with Incredible Edible Lambeth and Sutton Community Farm to promote locally grown produce. A challenge in relation to continuing and extending effective work with families and local communities around local food and health was identified in staff and stakeholder interviews as the building at the Nature Garden needing updating or replacing.

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*"The building, I don't think it was built to stand here this long, we've made it stand this long because it's the only thing we've got."*

**Staff focus group 2013**

## **Capacity building through training and volunteering**

Two regular afterschool growing club volunteers and one regular gardening volunteer in 2011 became nine volunteers working with Nature garden staff in 2012. Project workers aim for food growing to remain a significant part of the activity at the garden after Local Food funding has ended. Older children/young people will be invited to volunteer to share the knowledge and skills that they have learnt on the project with the next generation of children who come to the garden.

Seven volunteers have worked with the forest school leader over the past two years. Staff reports indicate that volunteering lead to capacity building and employment opportunities for these adults.

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*"We have worked with a team of seven volunteers to develop their skills in forest school activity leading. Giving them support, practice and feedback during the sessions in order to support their leading activities. They have all shown real dedication and ability in their work and we are now hoping to be able to bring several of them into our staff team."*

**Oasis report to The Forestry Commission, 2012**

The core staff team received a training session that extended the range of activities available for children during after school and Saturday sessions. The wood is a better used resource as a result.

## Case study: Education and skills

So much is learned at the Nature Garden that it is difficult to narrow things down to just one example. Experiences range from learning to explore different environments; noticing change within and between seasons; learning to identify different species; the gardening skills observed in our regular play attendees; and the benefits offered by an enclosed, safe, sensorially rich natural-world environment.

The Silver Group from the Centre for Autism (10 children aged 7-9 who have been diagnosed on the autistic spectrum) has been visiting the Nature Garden on a weekly basis for eight years, and the children have benefited greatly from the experience in terms of communication skills and confidence.

Members of visiting school groups exhibit similar growth. One of my favourite examples is a Year 3 girl who attended with Larkhall School's weekly forest school sessions over the course of a term. At the beginning she would never address the group and when speaking one-to-one she would really whisper. By the end of the term I watched her direct a group of five children (including some very vocal characters) on how to tie up a rope bridge and organise her team to win a challenge that had been set.

However, I think my favourite "learning" is observed when a school group starts to make connections between the different aspects of the garden: from tracking a child arriving and hearing him say "Urgh, it's all muddy, bet there's worms" to talking about how the worms help make soil, the soil grows our plants and "the plants make food and air for everything".

## Outcome four: Increased community cohesion

This section describes some of the ways that the Nature garden increases the sense of cohesion within the culturally diverse area, plus some of the limitations to this work.

### Bringing children together

That the Nature Garden is a very inclusive space is demonstrated in user survey data and stakeholder testimony. For example in a March 2013 survey, 85% of child users felt that Nature Garden was 'for everybody to enjoy'. The focus on nature-based activities rather than culturally specific ones helps engage children whatever their background, and as activities and play are experiential, language is less of an issue than in a classroom.

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*"It brings different kids together, it's diverse, Portuguese kids, Afro-Caribbean kids, even some middle class kids from over the road in the old Victorian houses - lots of kids from different backgrounds mixing together in one place."*

**Director London Wildlife Trust**

### Bringing communities together

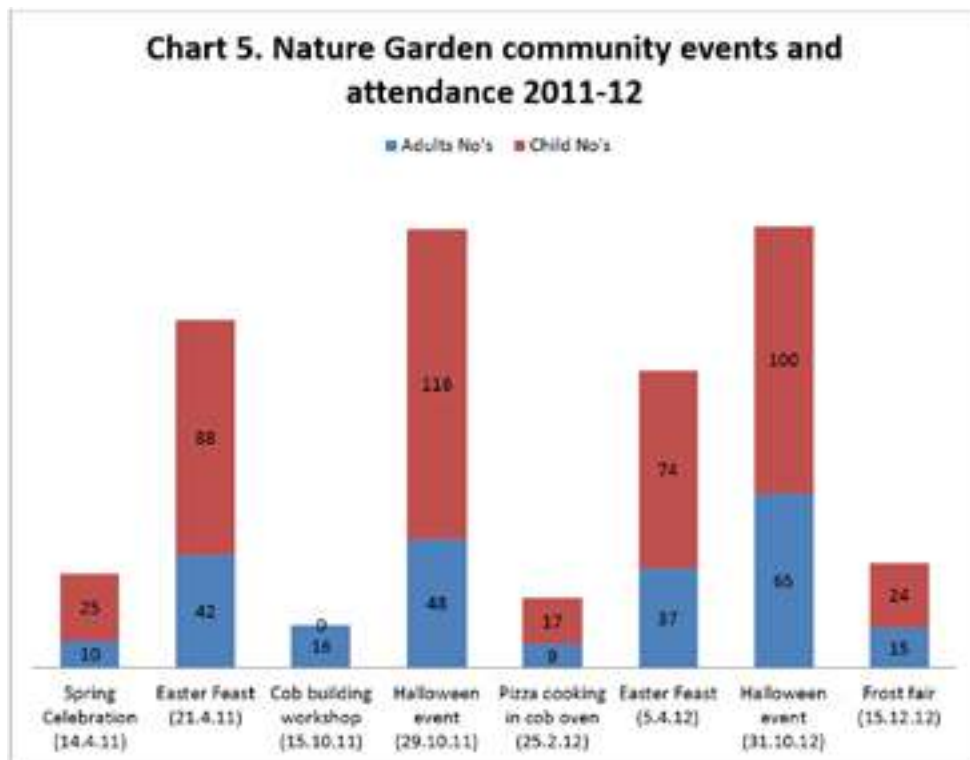
75% of adults surveyed at a community event and 80% of parents surveyed at the under 5 playgroup in 2013 agreed that the Nature Garden helps bring people together, and parents remarked that the Nature Garden makes a positive difference within the community by "bringing people together in a relaxed environment" and providing a "wonderful experience and opportunity to meet other members of the community".

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*"All of these contribute to a very valuable community spirit and gives an opportunity to learn in a happy relaxed atmosphere with children and adults together."*

**Adult user, community event 2013**

The Nature Garden held the following community events during 2011-12:



The Halloween and Easter Feast events attract the widest range of participants and are popular with staff, Nature Garden members and local people alike. The spooky trail, ghost stories, apple bobbing and games about night creatures at the Halloween event invited lots of positive feedback about their quality:

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*“Well done for the most amazing Halloween party! It was absolutely wonderful, and everyone enjoyed it so much!”*  
*“The spooky trail was really inventive (and very scary!) And you handled it perfectly. Full marks for the most charming witches, especially...”*  
*“It was a great community event and one we’ll be talking about in our family for a very long time!”*

A parent interviewed in 2013 highlighted the value of these community events for bringing people together. Staff monitoring reports describe the valuable role of the Easter Feast in particular for bringing diverse cultural communities together in a positive, enjoyable way. The first year’s event saw a local Portuguese resident and a Caribbean resident cooking national dishes in the garden. In the second year Oasis project workers worked with Stockwell Partnership (who run groups for Portuguese, Somali and Polish residents) to help engage these communities in a ‘cooking extravaganza’ of national dishes with the help of children and parents. This attracted a whopping 148 local people and this work meant Oasis met its two-year Local Food target of five local cultural groups sharing knowledge about food and cooking.

The Local Food funded growing project has entailed four open days, an end of summer BBQ and a wild food walk round the local area and garden, attended by a total of 104 adults from an estimated 85 different families. 2012 included a Plum Jam Day and attending Morley College’s Family Fun Day as well as the quarterly seasonal festivals.

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*“We plan to continue this beyond the two year lifespan of this project with our next aim being a multicultural pizza oven inauguration!”*

**Oasis monitoring report**

However, funding and the time available for staff limits the potential for positive community cohesion work with families and community members through both community events and family groups. Other events remained less well attended and a staff focus group held in 2013 identified the following challenges in relation to capacity:

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*“Advertising, marketing and getting the word out needs someone specific to liaise with the community. Staff need to spend their time doing what they do, focusing on the kids - there is a need to employ a staff member with this task specifically.”*

Staff focus group 2013

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*“It’s quite hard to find a suitable a space in the calendar, and it’s quite hard to make them consistently good. We don’t have enough capacity to invest in additional events to make them as high in standard...”*

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*“Staff are at full capacity with their existing commitments, both paid and voluntary. It would be too much to ask the staff to give more of their own time to put on more community events”*

Staff focus group 2013

## Case study: enhanced community cohesion

The Easter Feast is a community celebration, which has brought together people from different community groups for the past three years. Individuals and families from the Portuguese, Somali, Polish and Brazilian communities in Stockwell have been able to meet each other and get to know one another through their shared interest in food and celebration. This regular event involved amazing dishes, samosas, salads, fish stew, cakes and breads being cooked and shared at the garden. Each time we have had over 100 people come from the immediate local area and spend the day together cooking, eating and playing. A common interest in growing food in the allotment area also helps to bring together people from across the generations as well as the children who come to play.

## Outcome five: Enhanced local biodiversity

The Nature Garden woodland and growing areas form havens for wildlife within a built up urban area sandwiched between busy main roads. This section looks at the importance that users prescribe to this sanctuary, and explores some of the ways that local biodiversity is enhanced during activities and through increased familiarity and regard for nature. Oasis workers continually build up resources and an ideas bank for ways to engage a wider range of individuals in both the practical management of the forest and it’s ecosystem. The garden is maintained to preserve and enhance ecosystem health and biodiversity, which in turn creates a healthier and more stimulating environment for user enjoyment and learning. As will have become apparent throughout this report, care of the natural environment and care of children and the community can be seen to go hand-in-hand in supporting positive outcomes for all at the Nature Garden. The health of the one is intimately connected to the health of the other.

100% of both local stakeholders and parents interviewed in 2013 agreed that it is important that the Nature Garden is preserved as a natural haven for wildlife, variously mentioning the trees, pond/frogs, wildlife/birds, the evolution of the garden through the seasons and the fact that it was assessed as ‘best meadow in Lambeth’ by London Wildlife Trust.

Natural features of the garden, including habitats, animals and plants were referred to with appreciation by many users, as discussed in outcome one (improved mental health, direct contact with nature). Asked how the Nature Garden makes a positive difference locally, parents surveyed in 2013 said: “Access to nature for kids and parents. Having the green space...” and “I like being in a green wildlife area, with children...”

User surveys aged 5-9 in 2013 when asked ‘What makes the Nature Garden Special?’ commented: “There are animals like fox, bird and owl”, “The pond, tree house, there are animals like fox, bird and owl foxes, all of it”.

And when asked, ‘what is the best thing about the Nature Garden?’ “That they recycle things and take care of Mother Nature”, “So much oxygen and the plants are nice”, “The flowers”. “Helping and nature”.

## Organic growing

Food growing clubs taught children and community members about organic growing. Organic growing is easy, involves less cost and maintenance, is more self sustaining over time and enhances local biodiversity by avoiding the use of pesticides, herbicides and artificial fertilizers, all of which damage or kill soil flora and fauna. Knock on effects of this damage include lower crop yields as well as poisoning or lack of food for organisms higher up the food chain. 547 individual children made a total of 4733 visits to the food growing clubs by the end of year 2. 76% of parents surveyed in 2012 agreed that the event helped them / their family to develop new skills and increased confidence in food growing. By teaching organic techniques to children from across the area, as well as to community members during events and workshops, Oasis project workers have promoted wider and longer-term ecosystem health and biodiversity within the Lambeth area. In addition, organic techniques involve creating healthy conditions for pollinator insects, with knock-on effects for the health of the whole ecosystem as well as effective food growing.

## Encouraging greater understanding of and connection with the natural world

In a user survey at a 2013 community event, 67% of children agreed that the Nature Garden provides a habitat for local wildlife. 78% agreed it was a place to learn about the environment and how to protect it, and 78% reported that they discover nature and wildlife at the garden.

This growing awareness was mirrored to an extent amongst adult respondents: 50% of community event respondents agreed it teaches people about the environment and how to protect it, and 75% said it teaches people how to conserve local biodiversity. An adult survey with under 5 playgroup parents found that 80% agreed Nature Garden teaches people about the environment and how to protect it, and 80% agreed that it teaches people how to conserve local biodiversity.

Local stakeholders (see chart 1, local needs) identified a lack of connection to and understanding of nature as particular areas of local need, which was backed up by parent respondents:

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*“For a lot of Lambeth kids this could be their only contact with nature, wildlife and planting a veg garden and that sort of thing.”*

**Parent interview 2013**

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*“Lots of the children (locally) don’t have gardens or outside spaces they can play safely in, they don’t have much of an understanding of the environment, and nature...”*

**Teacher interview 2013**

As discussed in outcome one (improved mental health, direct contact with nature) and outcome three (improved local access to education and skills, experiential nature-based learning) above, play sessions, activity sessions and workshops, including forest schools and food growing clubs, all encourage children to feel comfortable in wild / outdoor environments and to interact creatively with natural phenomena. Without familiarity and positive experiences, urban children who experience ‘nature deficit’ cannot be expected to grow into responsible members of ecosystems but conversely are more likely to damage them through lack of awareness of the delicate feedback mechanisms at play. A local stakeholder drew attention to fear that contemporary children regularly feel in relation to natural environments and organisms, through lack of familiarity:

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*“Usually there is quite a negative response to wildlife, and the Nature Garden is a place where we don’t have to have those reactions to it; we can explore it, investigate, and reduce anxiety.”*

**Director, London Wildlife Trust**

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*“Provides a wonderful environment for growing children to learn about wildlife and nature all together.”*

**Parent, community event survey 2013**



Staff observations point to the level of comfort and familiarity that quickly develops as children begin to feel more at home in the outdoors through positive experiences in the Nature Garden:

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*“During the half terms we took the regular Oasis play users to Sydnam woods where we played tracking games and built a large group shelter. It was fantastic to see a larger wild space and the children who are already quite secure in their knowledge of the forest environment get to really explore and have a sense of complete wildness. We also took them to Kew Garden’s tree walk which was great.”*

Oasis monitoring report 2012

### Case study: improved biodiversity

The biodiversity of the Nature Garden has been improving over the last 30 years. From a derelict wasteland the Garden has steadily increased in biodiversity as the habitats have been created and the use of the garden grows and changes. The ongoing challenge is how to balance the use of the Garden for children’s education and play with the need to protect and conserve the habitats in order to effectively maintain, increase and develop the biodiversity of the site. This has been achieved through careful management of the space, the development of ‘no go’ areas for children and the rotation of spaces for different uses. Perhaps most important has been the maintenance of this space within the concrete and carefully manicured parks and estate gardens of Stockwell (and indeed London) as a wild space where newts, frogs, birds and minibeasts can live, or pop by on their way to other climes.



## Section seven: Key findings and recommendations

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*“It’s the only place where my son likes to go after school, where he gets fresh air, exercise, and where they grow vegetables that he brings home to cook”*

Parent survey 2012

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*“It’s everything put together that makes it such a wonderful place: the environment, the people, the staff, everything they do - gardening, arts, playing with children. It’s such a compact area but it’s so rich: the pond, the trees, the treehouse - so much space to do everything the children want ”*

Parent interview 2013

1. The Oasis Nature Garden provides a safe haven and novel experiences for young users in Lambeth. Two part time project workers and a gardener offer a combination of after school, Saturday and holiday play sessions, community events and a playgroup, as well as more structured Forest School and food growing activities for school and community groups on a weekly basis, including groups of children with special educational needs. As such it is a valuable community resource and meets a variety of local needs, as identified by stakeholders.
2. The combination of a positive culture, skilled workers, engaging activities and the pleasant natural environment at the Nature Garden ensures that spending time there is an almost unanimously enjoyable and fun experience for users of every part of the project. Supported trips out to other places of interest bring further levels of enjoyment and novelty.

**Recommendation:** There is a suggestion by children and parents for the garden to open more. Explore the potential for this, based on funding availability for increased hours or more workers. Being careful to balance the needs of the fragile ecosystem with the needs of the community.

3. The Oasis Nature Garden does improve levels of mental health among users. It does so as a result of the following:
  - Oasis project workers are highly skilled in creating and holding a positive, nurturing space through a combination of respectful and non-hierarchical communication and the skillful management of a creative edge between freedom and safety for users. This environment encourages children’s relaxation, trust and spontaneity, and empowers them to express needs and feelings and make decisions, all of which improve emotional wellbeing.
  - The ever-changing natural environment and project workers provide a much needed repository of rich play possibilities and stimulating activities otherwise largely absent within the local area. Children respond by exploring, trying new things, gaining new skills and taking risks, which in turn boost their confidence, self-awareness, flexibility of response and self esteem.
  - Users and stakeholder feedback points to the therapeutic and calming aspects of direct contact with nature that time in the Nature Garden involves, though only a little survey data explores this theme explicitly.

**Recommendation:** Improve mechanisms for tracking and publicising impacts of direct nature on children’s health and wellbeing, to help preserve and duplicate these experiences more widely. E.g. ask this question in monitoring surveys and collect before and after data.

- Nature-based activities and events at the Nature Garden are inherently social - they encourage teamwork, empathy, community building and friendship. In-depth support by project workers also works to enhance children’s social and emotional development.
- Time for parents and children to participate in activities together is valued by parents but limited to one playgroup on a weekly basis. The capacity to deliver family and community-based provision is currently limited by funding, not skills or experience.

Recommendation: Potentially valuable work to support communication within families at the garden is limited by capacity of the part time project workers. Review whether local partnership working could generate capacity in this regard, plus funding needed or available to create a new post.

- Repetitive contact through ongoing year-round provision is observed to lead to slowly generated, longer term positive impacts for the mental and emotional wellbeing of users.

\*Recommendation: improve mechanisms for tracking and publicizing impacts of this work, particularly for at risk users. Explore the potential for extending in depth therapeutic work– look at research, funding, local partners.

4. The Oasis Nature garden produces improvements to levels of physical health for users, as a result of the following:

- Respondents near unanimously agree on the high value of access to much needed secure green space within an otherwise built up, busy and potentially hazardous urban area. Adult peace-of-mind gives children freedom to run around freely, improving their physical health through exercise and their spending time outdoors in fresh air and a healthier environment.
- Play and nature-based activity sessions provided by project workers at the Nature Garden provide opportunities for children to develop fine and gross motor skills and strength, as well as push boundaries and test their abilities.

Recommendation: Climbing apparatus in keeping with the natural feel of the garden could be provided in light of the lack of suitable climbing trees to further extend physical development of children.

- Food growing clubs and community events funded by the Local Food fund have met targets for user engagement and have been effective in increasing child and adult user awareness about healthy eating, nutrition and local food. However, the scope of the development of community food growing, cooking and healthy eating at the Nature Garden has been limited by time and funding.

Recommendation: Review the extent to which partnership working with local food groups plus further funding could support the extension of activities, and look into ways that food clubs could generate revenue for the project. Review and find additional ways to delegate responsibilities to volunteers and to extend staff hours.

5. The Oasis Nature Garden increases local access to education and skills. It does this as a result of the following:

Playing in a stimulating environment helps local children develop new skills and flexible learning patterns. Oasis project workers also deliver high quality, experiential, outdoor activities that are memorable, fun and creative, and that engage the whole child. Children from schools and community groups enjoy learning about nature and gaining new practical skills within the garden's inspiring outdoor classrooms.

- As well as the more informal nature-based activities provided by forest school and food growing, curriculum workshops help teachers to embed theoretical class-based topics. These workshops provide teachers with creative tools and ideas to present complex topics. The 'real world' of nature provides enhanced understanding and valuable life lessons for young learners
- Some research indicates that Forest School has an impact on users' quality of work, problem solving, concentration and motivation to learn in school beyond their time in the garden.

Recommendation: Improve mechanisms for tracking and publicizing impacts of the project, particularly for inclusion and achievement.

Recommendation: Capacity to provide training and resource packs to teachers and other practitioners around outdoor learning is limited by project workers already operating at full capacity within the hours provided by current funding. Review funding and partnerships with learning institutions potentially available to help create and model resource packs, and develop further research into the knock-on benefits of learning outdoors (when indoors).

Recommendation: Costs to users in deprived areas, though low (£1 a head) could restrict the use of the garden amongst school groups. Further research into ways of funding educational workshops for schools could increase access for more children.

- Multi-sensory Nature Garden learning activities are particularly well suited to learners with SEN who may find it difficult to engage with classroom-based teaching and learning. Project workers are skilled in providing activities that are easily personalised to suit a variety of learning styles and abilities.

Recommendation: Further research and document the positive benefits of outdoor learning for children at risk of exclusion from mainstream learning opportunities – explore ways to develop this work.

- Community growing and cooking events and seasonal celebrations held at the Nature Garden are generally positive, enjoyable affairs, and of high quality. They are well attended and generate learning within the community around health, growing food and cooking – particularly when project workers do have adequate time to plan, promote and implement them.

- Providing volunteering opportunities has worked well to build local young people's confidence and capacity, and has led to employment opportunities with the organization for some volunteers. It is hoped that volunteering will help sustain food growing clubs beyond the life of the Local Food fund and there is obvious potential for developing the role of volunteers to extend activities at the Nature Garden.

Recommendation: engage local business, partners, stakeholders, health agencies and community volunteers in widening the activities and resources available at the garden.

6. The building on the Nature Garden site is currently not fit for use either as a classroom, or for community events. This limits the potential of the project, as highlighted repeatedly by child and adult users and project workers within the evaluation data.

Recommendation: Review options for funding a new building. Involve users and the local community in the design and implementation of an exciting eco-build that serves as a learning resource for promoting local resilience and community cohesion around this, as well as a fit-for-use venue for project delivery.

7. The outdoor and practical nature of provision at Nature Garden helps include diverse children. The seasonal community events organized by Nature Garden project workers, along with partnership work to involve a variety of local cultural groups in them, leads to a growing sense of community cohesion in the area for some of those involved. Community events are well received and highly regarded, particularly when workers have adequate time to plan, promote and run them. However this work is largely undeveloped as a result of prioritizing due to the high demands on workers.

Recommendation: Look at ways to increase staff capacity to provide outreach and community work to enhance the diversity of user groups and subsequently encourage local cohesion through the unifying experience of appreciating and caring for nature.

8. The Nature Garden is a much-needed safe haven for local wildlife that enhances local biodiversity, and is valued by its users as such. As well as encouraging conservation through learning about organic growing and wildlife, playing in the woods on a regular basis promotes children's greater familiarity with and lessens their anxiety about nature - in turn more likely to breed care, connection and preservation. Care of the natural environment and care of children and the community were repeatedly demonstrated to be mutually reinforcing outcomes throughout the evaluation.

Recommendation: Celebrate the great impact the Nature Garden has on local bio-diversity, raising Oasis' profile and that of local people caring for one another and mother nature, thus improving their natural habitat.

## Appendix 1: User survey example

Please take 5 minutes to fill in our survey to help make the Nature Garden better!

If you need help – please ask an adult!

### 1. How old are you?

- 5-7       8-10       10-12       13-16

### 2. How do you know about the Nature Garden?

- I come here after school  
 I come here with my Mum/Dad/carer  
 I come here with my school  
 I come here at weekends  
 My friends come here  
 I live nearby  
 Other – please tell us:

### 3. How do you feel when you come to the Nature Garden?



Please tell us more about why you feel this way?

### 4. Do you think The Nature Garden is a good thing to have for everybody living close by?

- Yes  
 No  
 Don't know

If Yes – what is it that makes it special?

**5. Please tick the things you think are true**

When I'm at the Nature Garden I:

- Spend time outdoors
- Run around and play
- Do gardening (digging, planting, seeding, watering and pruning plants)
- Discover nature and wildlife
- Learn about growing plants for food

**6. Please tick all the things you agree with**

The Nature Garden

- is a safe place
- is open when I want it to be
- gives me a place to play
- is a place where I can meet friends
- teaches me new things
- is fun
- is for everybody to enjoy
- has a nice building/toilets

**Please let us know anything else you think about the Nature Garden?**

**7. Can you think of a new thing you can do now because you came to the Nature Garden?**

**8. What do you like best about the Nature Garden?**

**9. Is there anything that could be better about the Nature Garden? Please tell us more.**

## Appendix 2: Parent survey example

Adult Survey – Under 5's Play Group, Nature Garden

### 1. Please select the age range you fit into

- Under 18                       18-24                       25-34  
 35-44                       44-60                       60+

### 2. Where do you live?

- Stockwell Ward                       Larkhall Ward                       Vassall Ward                       Other Lambeth Ward  
 Other London borough

### 3. In that time have you noticed any of the following in your child:

- Improved confidence  
 Making new friends  
 Feeling relaxed  
 Having fun  
 Learning new things  
 Feeling happier

Anything else you would like to tell us about?

### 4. Do you think the Nature Garden improves you or your child's physical health?

- | You                          | Your child                   |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No  | <input type="checkbox"/> No  |

#### If yes how? Please select from following

- Being Outdoors  
 Being able to run around and play  
 Physical activity: like gardening  
 Learning about food and nutrition  
 Being around nature and wildlife

#### If yes how? Please select from following

- Being Outdoors  
 Being able to g around and play  
 Physical activity: like gardening  
 Learning about food and nutrition  
 Being around nature and wildlife

**5. Do you think The Nature Garden makes a positive difference to the local community?**

- Yes             No             Don't know

**If Yes – how do you think it makes a difference?**

**6. Please tick all the statements you agree with**

The Nature Garden

- makes the community safer
- is open enough
- provides play opportunities
- helps bring people (the community) together
- has good facilities (building, space, toilets etc)
- is well-used by adults and children
- is a safe place
- provides green space
- improves the health and wellbeing of local people
- reduces anti-social behaviour
- helps children and adults develop new skills and knowledge
- teaches people about the environment and how to protect it
- teaches people how to conserve local bio-diversity (protecting plants and wildlife)
- teaches people about how to grow their own food and where food comes from
- means people can experience new things and learn new skills

**Please tell us anything else you think the Nature Garden provides:**

**7. Do you think your child has learnt any new skills and/or had any new experiences from attending sessions at the Nature Garden? Please give us details.**

**8. What do you like best about the Nature Garden?**



## Appendix 3: Community event survey example

1. Please select the age range you fit into

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 44-60
- 60+

2. Where do you live?

- Stockwell Ward
- Larkhall Ward
- Vassall Ward
- Other Lambeth Ward
- Other London borough

3. Do you think The Nature Garden makes a positive difference to the local community?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If Yes – how do you think it makes a difference?

4. How do you know about the Nature Garden?

- My child attends
- I live locally
- It was recommended to me
- I was user as a child
- Through my work
- Other – please describe

5. Do you think the Nature Garden improves your child's or your physical health?

- Yes  No

If yes how? Please select from following

- Being Outdoors
- Being able to run around and play
- Physical activity: like gardening
- Learning about food and nutrition
- Being around nature and wildlife

6. Please tick all the statements you agree with

The Nature Garden

- helps make the community safer
- is open enough
- provides play opportunities
- helps bring the community together
- has good facilities (building, space etc)
- is well-used by adults and children
- is a safe place
- provides much-needed green space
- improves the health and wellbeing of local people
- reduces anti-social behaviour
- helps children and adults develop new skills and knowledge
- teaches people about the environment and how to protect it
- teaches people how to conserve local bio-diversity (protecting plants and wildlife)
- teaches people about how to grow their own food and where food comes from
- means people can experience new things and learn new skills

Please tell us anything else you think the Nature Garden provides:

7. Do you feel the nature garden has any of the following effects on you/your child?

- Improves confidence
- Increases social skills
- Able to make new friends
- Feel relaxed
- Have fun
- Work as a team
- Feel happier

8. What do you like best about the Nature Garden?

9 How do you think we could improve The Nature Garden?

Explain

10. Please indicate how you would describe your ethnic background

List

## Key Features of Forest Schools

The use of a natural outdoor environment.

Allows every child to have a voice, especially those who find it difficult to communicate in a more conventional learning environment.

Child-led approach to children's learning which is fun and unhurried.

A high adult to child ratio allows children to undertake new experiences and challenges whilst taking appropriate risks.

Long term programme that allows repetition where children come into contact with nature using all their senses.

Supports personalised learning.

Builds children's confidence and self esteem as they are responsible for making their own decisions and are carefully supported to achieve.

Trained adults are facilitators and observers rather than leaders and directors.

## What is Forest School?

“Forest School is an inspirational process that offers children and young people opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self esteem, through hands on learning experiences in a local woodland environment.”

National definition: by Forest School (England) Network

Forest School is about children and young people building self esteem and independence through exploring and experiencing the natural world. Forest School is a long term programme delivered by trained practitioners within a natural environment (not necessarily a Forest). Each Forest School programme is tailored to meet the needs of individuals within that group and is continuously developed as the children/young people grow in confidence, skills and understanding.

The ethos of Forest School allows learners the time and space to develop skills, interests and understanding through practical, hands-on experiences. It also allows practitioners to step back and observe the children/young people in order to then encourage and inspire individuals to achieve through careful scaffolding and facilitating.

Although each forest school is unique all adhere to the following 5 key principles:

- **Forest School is a long term, repetitive learning process that uses a natural outdoor space.**

It is a specific ethos of learning that focuses on processes rather than products and allows learners time and space to develop at their own rate. Learners develop a strong sense of space through repeated contact with the natural world (ideally woodland, but not always) throughout the year and in all weathers.

- **Forest School empowers children and young people to take responsibility for their own learning and development.**

The ethos encourages child-led learning and learning through play. Choice increases enjoyment, participation and motivation. Children are set up to achieve and supported to take appropriate risks through developing trust in themselves and in others.

- **Forest School promotes holistic, individualised learning and development.**

It is for all ages and abilities and its ethos is fully inclusive. It is most effective in smaller than class size groups (12-16 mainstream children, fewer for those with specific needs) with a high adult to child ratio. The natural environment provides stimulus for all senses, all areas of development and all learning styles; visual, auditory and kinaesthetic.

- **Forest School encourages emotional growth, self esteem, confidence and independence.**

It gives learners the time and space to be themselves, find peace and communicate with others in a safe and caring environment. Emotional literacy is actively practiced by adults and children within a Forest School.

- **Forest School instils a deep respect and awareness for the natural world and reconnects participants to their Environment.**

The repetitive ethos builds a deep, instinctual connection to the natural space and reconnects all to their ancient heritage. Being in nature allows learners to observe real life, witness cause and effect and consider our roles and responsibilities towards it.

## Appendix 5: Forest school lesson plan

Part	Duration	Activity	Resources	Objective (SPICE)
Enthuse and relax	10min	Can you remember your squirrel hiding places from before half term? Squirrel and nut game.	Nuts and pots.	Acclimatise to space. Enthuse and energise.
Focus	10min	What did we do last time? Tool use reminder. Safe fire procedure. Activity choice.	Tool to show	Ensure safe working practice. Ensure safe boundaries.
Direct experience	45 min	a) Fire building and lighting b) Story telling chair making c) Picture frame making	Sticks, paper, matches Screw drivers, screws, gloves Wood glue, hooks, base mats.	Learn how to make a fire Learn woodworking skills. Creativity
Share inspiration	15min	Show what made round the fire. Group story	None	Acknowledge achievements Create as a group
Reflect and close session	10 min	A wish for someone in the group. Reflect on achievements and things to improve.	Mobile Paper Pens Principle cards. <b>Hand wash!!!</b>	Develop empathy and altruism. Reflect on own behaviour.

### HELPING PLANTS GROW WELL ... YEAR 3

**Workshop Length:**

1 ½ hours.

**National Curriculum Context:**

Life Processes KS2:

1b) That the life processes common to plants include growth, nutrition and reproduction

1c) To make links between life processes in familiar ... plants and the environments in which they are found.

Green Plants KS2:

3a) The effect of light, air, water and temperature on plant growth

3b) The role of the leaf in producing new material for growth

3c) That the root anchors the plant, and that the water and minerals are taken in through the root and transported through to other parts of the plant

QCA Unit 3B Helping Plants Grow Well:

- Plants for food
- Growing plants
- Roots
- Leaves, stems and roots
- Water and plants
- Plants and light
- Plants and warmth

**Key Ideas:**

- Plants need water, heat, sunlight, minerals and air to grow well
- The roles of the different parts of the plant in it's growth
- It is important that plants grow well as they are eaten by us and other animals and they help produce oxygen
- Children are given the opportunity to relate their knowledge about the growth of plants to everyday contexts
- The interdependence of living things and how the environment and living things need to be protected.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- To know that plants grow and reproduce
- To know that some plants can be eaten
- To know that plants need water, heat, light, minerals and air to grow well
- To know that the stem of a plant anchors it in the soil and transports water to the leaves
- To know that the roots of a plant take in water and minerals
- To know that the leaves of a plant produce food for the plant
- To think about why plants grow where they do

**Activities:**

- Welcome to the garden and introduction
- Find the plants

Children to explore the garden looking for given plant.

Discuss why grow where they do.

- Food Factory

Game to show photosynthesis. Children become different parts of the process.

- Plant life relay

In teams collect all the things you need to make a plant and then to keep it alive and then reproduce.

- Plant a seed

Plant a chilli or a sunflower seed to take home/back to school.

What will it need to grow?

- Plenary

Simon says call and response game to cement learning

Go round to conclude.



## Appendix 7: Lambeth Statistics on local needs

- The 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) places Lambeth as the 5th most deprived borough in London and 19th most deprived in England - a worsening from the rating in 2004 where the borough was ranked 23rd in England
- 72% of Stockwell households are classed as deprived or seriously deprived. One in three children are living in poverty (Census 2001)
- In Larkhall and Stockwell, over 20% of children live in one-parent families. This is more than double the national average (Census 2001)
- One quarter (17,000 out of 67,000) of Lambeth's under- 19s live in areas of income deprivation and 38% of secondary school pupils are eligible for free school meals, the fifth highest proportion in England
- 84.5% of Lambeth's school population are from Black and Minority Ethnic communities
- 27% of school children are recorded at some time in their school career as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) and there are approximately 2000 children with a disability in Lambeth
- At March 2010, 299 children in Lambeth were on a child protection plan, 62% lived in households where they was only one child with a CPP, 20% in households with two children on a CPP and 13% with three children on a CPP
- Unemployment in Lambeth as a whole is 11%, almost double the national average of 5.8% (Census 2001)
- The number of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) people in Lambeth is higher than the rest of the capital and the national average, (Connexions 2010)
- Only 60% of Lambeth students achieve a level two qualification by the age of 19 compared to 71% of London and England students
- Lambeth currently ranks 12th out of the top 40 high crime areas in England and is one of the top three 'high crime' boroughs in London (Lambeth Strategic Partnership 2011)
- 61% of adults and 59% of young people said they were concerned about crime in the 2007 residents' survey – this is significantly (7% and 8%) higher than figures recorded for London as a whole (Lambeth Strategic Partnership 2011)
- There is known gang activity and the rate of violent crime is higher than the London average. (Lambeth Strategic Partnership 2011)
- In April 2009, a 16-year-old boy was stabbed to death in Larkhall Park.
- Drug and alcohol use also remain urgent issues and there are key links between these and robbery, theft, burglary and violent crime (Lambeth Strategic Partnership 2011)





