

Feedback for the Ninevah Trust – March 2023

How much were received and how we used the funding

We very kindly received £5,265 towards a pilot programme to supporting some of the service users from our elderly befriending project to maintain and manage their gardens. We worked in partnership with the charity UprisingUK, to recruit a project worker, for a year to co-ordinate a team of volunteers, who will maintain the gardens of older people who are no longer able to do this for themselves but are not able to afford a Gardener. This will helps the older people to stay in their homes for longer, but also provides the volunteers with skills for work.

We focused on two main groups of people in mind to recruit as volunteers for this project. Firstly, we worked closely with Ashford Borough Council's Syrian Resettlement team and provided a number of opportunities for the Syrians to volunteer. The other group of people that we worked closely with for this project, were young people, who are being supported by the Aspire programme, run by a partner charity (UprisingUK). These young people are a struggle to engage with education, so UprisingUK provide them with a mixture of personal development, maths and English skills and work experience. The gardening project will help support the work experience element of the Aspire programme.

Successful outcome indicators

This project had two groups of beneficiaries: older people and the volunteers themselves.

Through our project evaluation process, both groups of people will reported improvements to their mental health; for older people this will be reduced feelings of isolation and shame about their gardens and for the volunteers was increased self-esteem and confidence as a result of taking part in a project to help others.

Both groups of volunteers find it challenging to find employment, so they gained vital skills for work from this project and in the case of the Syrian volunteers, it improved their

improve their English language skills, further enhancing their chances of finding employment.

What the benefit will be, to our organisation and the wider world

- Running a gardening project – organisational benefit:
 - It developed a closer working relationship with UprisingUK and their beneficiaries (young people) and staff team
 - It developed a greater understanding between Ashford Volunteer Centre and UprisingUK about the services provided by each organisation – leading to an increase of referrals between each organisation and a more joined-up working relationship.
- For the beneficiaries (whose garden was worked on) they provided feedback that demonstrated:
 - A greater sense of pride in their homes/living places - “It looks much better now, I quite like sitting outside now” “I’ve taken a photo of how it looks like to show my daughter, she lives up north in the country, so she can see how good my garden now looks”, “I wanted to move but now the garden is done I don’t want to move. My daughter can wait for me to be in a nursing home, as I want to stay here now!”
 - Increased wellbeing: “Thank you ever so much for your help, my garden isn’t worrying me now”, “when I open the curtains my garden now makes me smile, rather than before when I saw my garden, I just wanted to close the curtains again”, “I now go for a walk every day around my garden and listen to the birds – its peaceful now in my garden. Thank you”
 - Greater purpose/independence: “Since getting my garden done I’ve found a new hobby and have been visiting local garden centres to look at and buy new plants. I’ve never been out so much!”
 - We provided peace of mind for the relatives of older people that were supported. Families gave feedback on the project: “Thank you ever so much – this had worried me for a while and knowing that there were someone I could trust, to help with their garden, was really appreciated. Thank you”, “Thank you, it looks so much better now and we now have different conversations about the garden. It has certainly affected her mood in a good way”, “We had a drink together outside in the garden, something we hadn’t done for ages due to the view of the garden”.

- For the volunteers (who worked in the gardens they provided feedback that demonstrated:
 - Enjoyment of the gardening activities: “I really enjoyed doing the gardens, it was hard work but was good. I’m hoping that I get fitter by doing it, but only if I cut down on the chocolate biscuits I eat whilst doing it!”, “Felt good doing it, helping someone else who needs it”.
 - Increased skill: “I hadn’t really done any gardening before, but I’m getting there – I know some of the plant names now and the strimmer is much easier to use now I’ve had some practice with it”, “I know some plant names now – something I couldn’t do before, who’d a thought it at my age!”
 - Increased employment skills: “I’ve put my volunteering experience in the garden helping old people, on my CV, it should help with getting a job. I’ve also put this down for a reference”, “I am now applying for gardening jobs, as I really liked helping in a garden”, “it also helped me with my English as I was using this more when I was gardening”.

Supporting the Nineveh Trust’s aims

This project met the Nineveh Trust’s aim of improving the health, welfare and education of the general public. The project supported the mental wellbeing of the volunteers and the elderly service users.

Throughout the pilot over 1250 hours of voluntary work was completed by young people who attended the Aspire programme. This provided them with real work experience that could be used on C.V’s, aid college/apprenticeship applications but more importantly the opportunity to build intergenerational relationships. This has proved invaluable to both the young people and older people as they learnt from each other, and it was great to see that pre-conceived ideas and misconceptions were broken.

In partnership with AVC we have maintained over 20 gardens, with referrals continuing to come in. Some examples of the work carried out are below:



Putting in some raised beds with the young people and a simple gate fix for disabled couple who were quoted over £200!!



Before and after – this client hadn't sat out in their garden for over 3 years.



Before and after of a front garden – with young people and volunteers.

Case Study:

We first meet T when Uprising were clearing a communal area in Ashford. T started to access one of Ashford Volunteers other projects – Men In Sheds after we referred him to the project. As we got to know T more it became evident that he enjoyed gardening and being outside. T started to volunteer with Uprising and has only missed 3 weeks in the last year, no matter what the weather he is always there! It has been wonderful to see his confidence grow and T is now interested in finding a part time job. T has developed some great relationships with the young people that volunteer and has become affectionately known as 'Uncle T'.