

Report for the Trustees of the Nineveh Charitable Trust: a new Sensory Garden at Techniquest

Summary

The Trustees of the Nineveh Charitable Trust generously awarded us a £5,000 grant in September 2022 to support the development of our new sensory garden and associated programme of visits and workshops.

The project enabled us to transform an unused outdoor terrace space into an educational sensory garden for all ages, inspiring children, young people and their families to connect with nature.

We are so grateful to the Trust for supporting this work – thank you!



Photo: the completed sensory garden

The project progress

Through engaging with our local community and visitors over recent years, we identified a desire for these audiences to connect with the natural environment and learn more about important issues such as why biodiversity and sustainability are important for our planet.

An unused and unloved outdoor paved terrace was the perfect opportunity to create an experience that would inspire children, young people and their families to connect with nature and learn more about these topics.

In 2022, following a period of fundraising, we opened our new educational sensory garden with huge success.

The garden features large planters with plants such as rosemary, mint, lemon balm and thyme, which are safe to touch and have a strong unique scent. A range of flowers have been incorporated to encourage pollinators. We have also installed information boards to provide

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information on the plant's history and use, value to the environment and the insects that they attract. A pond with solar water feature adds to the audible experience of the area and to help facilitate discussion about green energies. Our younger visitors can enjoy a mud kitchen and sand box within the garden.



Photo: Naomi, 10, with her brother Daniel, 14, and mother, in the Sensory Garden.

"We went to [the] beautiful and vibrant sensory garden where we saw a wide variety of plant species and one of them had really soft leaves that felt like velvet. I helped by filling in the water fountain for the plants and learned that it is powered by solar energy. Some plants had unique and nice scents like chocolate and lavender. It was a nice place to relax as you could see boats across Cardiff Bay from the garden."

Naomi, age 10 on her family visit to Techniquest.

New programmed activity related to nature

Alongside the sensory garden's development, we also developed new activity to support engaging our local community and visitors in nature.

Our first new interactive workshop focussed on investigating their natural world through the lens of a bird. During the workshop we discussed the role of birds in the ecosystem, the many niches they fill with their many adaptations, and built a food web, showing the links between all the different creatures and how interconnected birds are to the natural environment. Activities included looking at bird beak adaptations, using analogues made of chop sticks, sugar tongs and tweezers to grab food stuffs from a variety of environments, including a pond. Another examined bird feathers and all the different types under microscopes. The final part of

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the workshop was where participants made their own bird feeders to take home (or hang in their school garden), combining lard and a selection of seeds and meal worms on pine cones. The evaluation showed that this was almost unanimously the most popular element of the workshop.

So far, we've delivered this workshop with children from 5 schools (3 from Cardiff and 2 from Rhondda Cynon Taf) reaching 104 children in total. However, now we have the workshop designed and have received very positive evaluations from children and teachers, we plan to continue to offer this. The workshop is an excellent pre-cursor to visiting the new sensory garden.



Role of birds in the ecosystem workshop - photos from L to R: Looking at feathers under the microscope; using chopsticks to simulate picking up food with a beak; hanging bird feeders on trees.

We've also been to facilitate 120 free visits for families in our local community through our partners.

Since the garden has opened, in total, we've had 80,000 visitors during spring/summer 22/23 holiday periods and all have had the opportunity to visit the sensory garden.

We had planned to deliver what we call 'busking' activity on site related to the sensory garden. While the activity was developed as part of the project, staff turnover meant we weren't able to deliver on a consistent basis.

Future plans

We plan to continue our theme around connecting with nature and discussing environmental issues. The sensory garden is such a valuable addition to the experience here at Techniquest and we are delighted we can now link our programmed activity to a physical space at the centre. **We are so grateful for your support of our work so thank you once again!**

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