

Authors

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Sarah Rideout

With a background in graphic design, screen printing and ceramics, Sarah has completed a Permaculture Design course, worked for a vegetable box scheme, managed the Lewes Farmers' Market, initiated the Compost Doctor Scheme, and was South East Mentor for the Allotments Regeneration Initiative. Currently she co-ordinates the Lewes Organic Allotment Project, co-runs the Lottie Project, and facilitates an Eco club at a Lewes School. She is a director of Common Cause Co-operative.



Common Cause

Common Cause Co-operative is a not for profit company limited by guarantee that was established in Lewes, East Sussex in 1991. It promotes community development that is co-operative, supports the local economy, and is environmentally sustainable. Common Cause Co-operative promotes community development, taking action to make locally-produced, sustainably-grown foods more widely available to all and encourage direct involvement in growing food. We manage Farmers' Markets, offer training and education in all aspects of growing and production from allotment to orchard and farm.

Funding

This report has been funded by chances4change lottery grant.

Edited by Katharine Finnigan, a director of Common Cause Co-operative and project co-ordinator for the Community Food Growing Project which is funded by the chances4change lottery grant.

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Hanging out the clean gardening gloves to dry

Introduction

This document presents a report on the development of the Lottie project and how it is now run several years on. There is information about methods used to engage and work with schools and the policies we use including detailed description of our behavioural policy. We have also written a Guide to setting up and running similar projects that has more practical information.

The Lottie project

The Lottie Project developed as a way to address the fact that children's daily school life was more and more confined to the classroom with curriculum restrictions. It was initiated, and is run, by Sarah Rideout and Tanya Lewis and is a Common Cause project. The project is based at Lewes Organic Allotment Project, (LOAP), Highdown Road allotments, Lewes, East Sussex where Lewes District Council Sustainability Team secured and set up a community allotment of about 8 plots in size.

The project offers a range of workshop packages to local schools, running some one off, but mostly, ongoing sessions through a school year. Most workshops are timetabled as fortnightly morning sessions where either a whole class or selected pupils only have repeated visits. Sessions are structured to fit the seasons and to allow the children time to prepare land, sow seedlings, observe growing cycles and ask questions.

Children carry out a range of practical activities on site and then pick produce to take back to school where they carry out follow up cooking, craft and written activities including keeping a record of their work.

The project aims to develop and foster respect, independence, and a have a go approach with social, environmental and health benefits. Most notably the project provides an inclusive fun learning experience for children to:

- interact as a group outside of school
- to make connections with their environment
- increase their knowledge, interest and consumption of fresh food
- experience the stages of growth and learn about seasonal changes
- have access to a growing space



Above A fun and inspirational drumming workshop with 'Moving Sounds'



Left Children weeding the herb bed



Below We made Australian damper bread on a cold day

Background

A number of pilot out of school workshops were run by Sarah and Tanya inspired by local pond dipping and growing activities that their own children had enjoyed. Sarah co-ordinated the LOAP project where there was plenty of spare growing space and Tanya, a qualified teacher, was working in mainstream primary education. Together they developed the idea of using the LOAP site for children's holiday workshops based upon food growing aiming at 6-12 year olds. A charge of approx £3.00 was made per child towards costs with Common Cause covering the remaining costs.

Developing ideas for activities

To develop ideas for activities we looked at the site to see what it provided naturally, i.e. in terms of wildlife, and structurally. The workshop themes were designed to tie in with each season with a mixture of growing, wildlife and craft activities. A dedicated growing area was developed in Spring 2004 using local volunteers.

Aims of pilot workshops

The workshops aimed to enable children to make connections with their environment, offer an opportunity for children to interact as a group outside of school, provide a fun learning experience and introduce children to the idea of growing their own food.

Summary of workshops

Early August

- A mini-beast hunt
- Making giant bubble wands from fresh hazel branches
- Discussion about wildlife on the site
- Kite making using hazel from the allotment

Late August

- Making hedgehog homes and lizard bolt-holes with materials on site
- Planting loganberries and herbs
- Drawings with chalk from the allotment and locally made charcoal
- Bunches of herbs were picked to take home

February

- Making a new growing bed
- Weeding and sowing early seeds
- Making a camp by weaving twigs inside a clump of bushes
- Cooking damper bread over a campfire
- Eating different types of vegetable soups, (squash, leek and potato)

Advertising pilot workshops

The workshops were advertised by word of mouth and by leaflets which were distributed on foot to schools, the tourist office and play groups in the area, with titles such as Houses in the Hedge and High Flyers we had fully booked courses every time. The local paper wrote articles on the courses with photographs.

Outcomes

- Very positive feedback from children and parents, with many children saying how much they had liked their workshop. No negative comments.
- Health and Safety – children understood and kept to the Safety ground rules.
- Children attending more than one season remembered facts from previous visit.
- Increased knowledge of planting, growing and maintaining fruit and vegetables.
- Children who do not succeed in a classroom can excel in this environment, increasing their self confidence.
- Experience of working together as a group (making a camp, kites).
- Awareness of surroundings – project is on a battle site on the South Downs.
- Children learnt the names of native plants, insects and other wildlife.

Costs and income

Workshop	Outgoings	Income from fees
Summer – August <i>including project set-up costs</i>	£281.61	£72.00
Autumn – October	£200.00	£72.00
Winter – February	£221.80	£72.00
TOTAL	£703.41	£216.00
Deficit		£487.41
Common Cause subsidy		£487.41

Lessons learnt from pilot out of school workshops

Access to the course

We felt that the sessions were only being accessed by families who read the leaflets or newspaper adverts, were in tune with the project ideals already and who had the money to pay for the sessions.



Home made kites made from re-used envelopes

Local interest

The workshops were always fully booked so we knew that there was sufficient local interest, and as many parents and children came back a second and third time we felt it was something worth developing further.

Advertising

Local newspapers were mostly happy to print information about the workshops to advertise them which was free and reached a wide audience.

Age grouping

We reduced the age banding from a 6 year spread to just two years. This was because a wide age range meant that there were problems in organising activities to relate to each range needs and abilities and so it was difficult to keep younger ones safe whilst also challenging the older ones. It took careful diplomacy to instruct the older children who worked through the challenges faster and tended to assume that they knew what to do. Younger children needed more activities with movement, walking to different areas to work on to keep them engaged.

Familiarity

The more familiar the children were with us in an out of school capacity the less likely they were to allow themselves to be 'instructed'.

Health and safety

We were also concerned about being able to enforce sufficient health and safety standards when the courses run in holiday time had an informal and social feel to them.

Toilet facilities

We did not encounter any problems with the lack of toilet facilities as we always pre-warned parents that there were none on site. However, the length of workshops was partly dictated by this limiting factor.

Working with schools

First school-based workshops

In order to reach a wider audience and increase the numbers of children who had access to the courses, we decided to offer the project to local schools and to broaden the course to cover two terms.

Initially we worked with a local primary school where we had professional contact and where our children attended. This gave us the advantage of knowing the teachers, the Head and other parents and we were able to explain the concept of the project. A pilot project ran in Spring 2005, which was very successful, funded part by the school and part by a local grant.

We worked with year 4 children on a fortnightly basis, rotating so that the whole class had a turn. Each group would cascade their experience of the time at the allotment and share food cooked at the end of the day, so that there was a continuum and all the children were involved in the whole project. We worked with some whole and some part class groups, including taking a whole reception class for a visit with activities and a year 6 group of children for some bonding and team work. The activities were all enjoyed and we had a lot of positive feed-back from staff, parents and governors.

The onions are plaited and left to dry out before used for cooking

Getting new schools on board

New schools are approached by sending them an information sheet and covering letter with a follow up phone call or visit to discuss and explain the project further. Schools can then attend a taster session and look at the photo journals from other schools to get a good indication of what they can expect from the project. Proximity to the allotment and availability of kitchen facilities has been an issue for the schools as well as their access to growing space. Once the school wishes to engage in the project there are further meetings to define what the school is hoping to gain so that sessions can be tailored accordingly.



Top Enjoying the autumn raspberries

Below Children are registered on and off the site

Legal requirements and protocol

An important aspect of working with schools is ensuring that the project follows good practice and meets all the necessary legislation. We are constantly reviewing and improving these but this is a list of checks and guidelines we have in place:

- Up to date CRB checks.
- First aid qualification, first aid kit on site.
- Public liability for the site.
- Insurance for the children being off-site so we could also walk the children back to school at the end of the session.
- Agreements and restrictions on photographing the children.
- The number ratio is checked and the lack of toilets discussed and a time limit for the course established.
- Registering the children on site.
- Information on any allergies and parent contact.
- Following school protocol on health and safety and child protection.
- A set of 'Golden Rules' for the site ensuring that children were clear on guidelines to keep them safe.



Designing the project to suit the school's or teacher's needs

The schools and teachers we have worked with have used the project differently with the set of workshops designed to complement the school's targets and children's needs. Schools may select the children to be engaged in the project based on their own criteria. For instance this may be children for whom the outdoor, hands-on activities best suited their learning style or those children who wish to take part. Alternatively all children may take part in rotation.

Workshop structure

Each workshop is individual but this is a typical example of the workshop structure:

1. Preparation and safety check on site before each group arrives.
2. Initial talk or safety reminder.
3. A game to get children to move around and be familiar and comfortable with the site.
4. Explain intention for the session and split into 2 or 3 groups.
5. Group work on intensive small project.
6. Groups swap activities.
7. Whole group activity or individual or paired work on larger site space, i.e. story teller.
8. Return to school.
9. Split into 2 groups and rotate. cooking activity and work on the field journal.
10. Game.



Recording activities

Each group of children that we work with contributes to a field Journal after each practical workshop. It can be referred to by the teacher and the project co-ordinators to reference the next week's lesson plan and used by the children to remember and show what they have done. It becomes a beautiful document that the children have created with a catalogue of events, lessons learnt, achievements and a description of how they feel their activities and the site have evolved over time. It also becomes a place to express ideas for the site which can then later be implemented, to record experimental data, a place to ponder, review and reflect upon their work. We assist the children to make it a colourful document using photos and drawings as well as written work.



Top Showing children how courgettes can make a perfect ingredient to chocolate cake

Above The children are sanding large wooden plant labels

Left We took part in the HDRA edible flowers experiment

The children also make a recipe book with all recipes they have cooked through the term.

Skills and outcomes

Regular visits to the Lottie outdoor site where children have a very hands-on learning experience has a powerful and very positive effect upon children. We have witnessed many children grow in confidence and blossom in this environment where they receive close supervision on activities, such as using tools, but where there are opportunities for them to have a sense of ownership, control and independence.

There are many essential life skills taught and regularly used by the children on this project: problem solving, close activities involving hand eye co-ordination, working in a group, management of time and resources, discussion and listening as well as basic knowledge of where our food comes from and how to nurture growth. The positive outcomes are many. We see increased understanding of sessions at school as children see a practical connection between 'book taught' topics such as science and their daily lives. Regular visits to the site enable the children to see their work progressing and to have a holistic sensory experience of seasonal changes. This is especially important for those who do not have access to growing space, have little one to one contact outside school, or struggle with less hands-on activities in the classroom.

Within the workshop activities we incorporate many practical skills such as weighing, preparing and cooking of fruit and vegetables, identification and recognition of different vegetables and wildlife, drawing, painting, and 3-dimensional craft construction, visual and written record keeping and evaluation, soil analysis and map reading.

The children are also encouraged to develop their sense of place in the local community by looking at local and regional poetry, history, traditions and folklore, other local and national projects and community events.



Above Studying various local maps

Right The boys enjoy creating a living sculpture

Far right A simple soil test indicates the pH level of the soil and informs our planting



Some areas considered and focus for planning of activities

Food and culture	Wildlife
Healthy eating	Pests and diseases
Links with festivals and religious events	Pollinator plants and insects
Geography and topography of location	Recycled and re-use of objects
History links	Companion planting
Seasonality of produce	Safe use of tools
Eating from the hedgerow	
Dyeing with plants	
Water conservation	

Linking with the rest of the school

The extent to which the activities link in with the rest of the school varies depending upon the group of children we are working with and the school's targets but we aim to maximise the amount of cascading back to the rest of the class and school.

- We ensure that where required we adhere to the school codes of conduct, health and safety preparation and behaviour as well as to the East Sussex equal opportunities policy, and the school and county insurance policies.
- We link closely with National curriculum aims and teaching and learning objectives and the Learning Outside the Classroom manifesto.
- We send each school a yearly overview and termly teaching and learning objectives as well as detailed lesson plans for each session. These are discussed on site and tailored to suit individual experiences from the weeks before, needs, learning styles, site conditions and planning for the term. They are written and advised by our record keeping.
- The children can share their morning with the rest of the class, enabling all children to see a continuum and be fully involved in the progress of their work.
- Regular contact with class teacher(s) ensures good communication about what the project is covering and any specific issues. We email each lesson plan in advance and invite input from staff members, we copy a lesson plan to the TA on site and talk through any requirements for her, and to meet needs of individual children.
- We discuss any issues or benefits with the TA on site and ask for and reply to teacher comments about how each session went after each session by email and telephone.



Top Pumpkin seeds jumping in the pan over an open fire

Above Children's own pictures taken using one of a range of camera types

Project values

The project follows Common Cause's aims to make locally-produced, sustainably-grown foods more widely available to all. We source local fair trade or organic ingredients for craft and cooking activities, we are committed to promoting equality and community cohesion. Our key principles are that we are all of equal value, we will seek to improve the access, participation, achievements and life chances of all.

Below The children are encouraged to look at wider environmental issues and tell their stories

Bottom right Using locally sourced chestnut edging to make a new growing beds

Bottom left The children are sanding large wooden plant labels

Adapting to individual child's needs

We develop and foster respect, independence, and a have a go approach. Our ethos is to reach as many children as possible, but we can see that specific learners need more time than others. We are able to adapt the activities, aims and safety considerations of the course according to children's needs.

Project growing methods

The project is run organically and we draw upon a number of permaculture methods and other growing techniques from around the world to reduce wastage and improve the soil.

For example we:

- Work with not against the natural soil and landscape conditions.
- Use crop rotation, companion planting, green manures and mulching.
- Respect and encourage wildlife and native plants.
- Run a wide range of composting methods and use compost made on site.
- Use local resources such as spent hops, manure and municipal wood chippings.
- Show children how to re-use objects that are seen as rubbish.
- Save water by using rain water collected on site.



Example age groups we work with

The sessions are predominately run as a fortnightly ongoing session offered to a whole class, working in groups of 10-12 pupils for each session. The sessions are designed around the seasons and allow sufficient time for children to look and observe and not feel too rushed.

- **Reception class as a one off**

Come with an accompanying teacher ultimately responsible for children's behaviour, teaching assistant and parent helpers who all needed to be given supervision guidance and tasks for their groups. Activities were kept relatively short and the children were unable to go back and see changes.

- **Year 4 in groups of 12**

Working with the whole class, in a rota system. The children attend for one, two or three terms. Mixed ability and needs.

- **Year 4, small group**

Selected as a group with a high proportion of children who find working in a class based environment challenging.

- **Year 6 group of 12 children**

A group specifically sent to improve their ability to work as a team.

- **12-16 year olds, small group**

A group of children with learning difficulties with a ratio of 4 adults to 5 children.

- **15-26 year olds, small group**

A group of Duke of Edinburgh students given guidance and focus only.



Top Picking peppermint to make mint tea back at school



Above Learning how to work clay with local potter, Mo Hamid



Left Collecting leaf mulch stored in an old rabbit hutch to improve the soil structure

Feedback

Over the years we have received a lot of comments and feedback from the pupils and school staff that we have worked with. All of it has been very positive.

Children's quotes

"I ate nasturtiums and they tasted like black pepper, it's strange because they're orange."

"I like seeing the lizard and slowworms best."

"A giant toad moved into the pond."

"We made carrot cakes, it was so fun."

"There was lots of stuff lying about at the allotment, so we used it for gardening."

"The best part of the day was the weeding, we found out that one of the plants had roots that were half a metre long, we had to dig down."

"When I got to the allotment I felt really excited, we had a safety talk and then we looked around to see what was growing."

"We made bird scarers to keep the birds away from the seeds."

"I wrote this piece of writing to the smell of fried onions."

Parent quotes

"Enthusiastic about squash soup, managed to get three servings and all he wanted to do when he got home was make some for dinner!"

School fruit co-ordinator

"...we've been joining in recycling, collecting the fruit and vegetable and paper waste and adding it to the compost bins in the wild garden, growing, harvesting and cooking your own food, what could be better...."

Governor quote

"Very positive impact on the school. Governors and school management feel a great sense of pride in being part of all your projects..... Individual children have benefited and increased their understanding of sustainable eco friendly lifestyles and activities"

Budget and funding

This project has only been possible as a result of subsidies initially from Common Cause and subsequently from a number of local and national grant funders and the kind help and support of many local suppliers.

So far we have run the project by using a mixture of funding. We secure funds to pay at least half the costs of the activities and any materials and ask schools to contribute the other half.

We would especially like to thank:

Lewes Town Council, East Sussex County Council, Lewes Little Gardens, The Mettyear Trust, Sussex Downs and Weald PCT, East Sussex Food and Health Partnership, Lewes District Council, Seasons of Lewes, Rotary, RG Greens, Rother/Lewes and Wealden Health Improvement Partnership Working Group, Home Office, Awards for All, chances4change programme, Big Lottery Fund.

Breakdown of costs

As at 2009 costs per workshop roughly work out at:

- Two facilitators @ £100 each per session.
- Equipment and materials costs – around £20-£25 per session which allows for 'extra' costs during the term such as replacement gloves etc.

There were initial start up costs to cover tools, gloves and materials for raised beds.

The facilitator costs cover preparation time as well as the workshop delivery. A substantial amount of time is put in behind the scenes to ensure that the growing beds are maintained, health and safety requirements are being met, plants and seedlings are nurtured so that the children arrive at a site suitable for a safe and productive workshop.

The costs of any training to keep up to date with first aid, health and safety and child protection for example has either been covered by the facilitators themselves or by Common Cause.



Top One proud new grower

Above Picking kale in early spring

Appendix 1

Example of workshop annual plan

Ongoing

Health and safety on site - use of tools
Food technology – health and safety in the kitchen
Developing recipe book
Photography of work in progress
Record keeping
Planting care
Harvest
Pond
Mini beasts – friend or foe
Hedgerow
Elemental changes

Autumn term

Assessment of site
Aspect - sun, wind, soil, water
Location – compass use and mapping
Composting
Geography – links to inner-city schools in UK and in other countries, exchanging ideas, concerns, plans and 'fun things about our site'
Build fire pit/make safe

Winter term

Hedgehogs
Structures on site – making raised beds, checking water collection systems
New beds
Art on site – clay
Stories
Archaeology
Local history
Plan seed buying – individual catalogues

Spring term

Wild animals- their role and needs and what can be done to encourage them
Edible flowers – HDRA experiment, planning, planting and monitoring growth
Art – willow sculptures

Summer term

Water conservation – storage and use of water
Edible flowers – recording experiment data

Appendix II

Example of detailed workshop plan

Activities and group number	Time allowed	Activity description	Learning intentions *continuous	Outcome
All	20 mins	Introductory safety talk. Ethos of project and expectations outlined. Previous group to show new children around.	*Site safety awareness for self and others, listening to and abiding by rules.	
Group 1	20 mins x 3 groups rotating	Make the shelter windproof by creating a hurdle fence around it using hazel and willow. Knocking in posts and beginning weaving.	Structures – forming, jointing, strength, support. Use of traditional methods, natural resources, children to be shown source.	
Group 2		Plant strawberry runners, in with garlic, lettuce seeds, tomatoes, hollyhocks and marigolds in round beds. Discuss companion planting, needs of plants and planting potatoes in tyres. Water peas, pick lettuce leaves and lovage.	Planning to plant. Preparation of seeds and tubers, correct way of planting i.e. enough depth, right way up, tamping down. Aftercare of seed, 1st stage of growth, type of plant growth, i.e. tall, bushy. Companion planting, attraction of insects and watering in.	
Group 3		Take photos in pairs, selecting one flower to monitor through to fruiting, i.e. strawberries, raspberries, apples, broad beans. Choose 3 shots over 6 weeks recording progress of plant. Explain growth stages of plant.	Using different types of camera: SLR, digital and phone. Setting the shot, focusing, speed of shutter. Monitoring and charting growth, close observation of changes from flower to fruit.	
Back at school	30 mins x 2 groups rotating			
Group 1		Cook lettuce and lovage soup. Eat hot, leave some to try cold.	*Weighing and measuring, hygiene, use of kitchen implements i.e. knife. Flavour affected by temperature.	
Group 2		Diary.	*Record keeping.	

Specific risk awareness:

Willow and hazel posts; eyes, splinters.

Appendix III

Behavioural policy

The behavioural policy is discussed, agreed and acknowledged as a code of practice with all staff, volunteers and children working on the Lottie project.

Project 'Golden Rules'

- No running.
- Tools only to be used with adult supervision.
- Wear gloves when handling soil.
- Awareness of pond and other water, such as the water butts.
- Listen to instructions and ask if you do not understand.

Rewards system we use

- Acknowledge individual and group efforts, even if below perceived targets.
- Praise.
- Encouragements.
- Use fun activities as a reward to balance the harder work elements.
- We stop and show things that children have done to others on site.
- We work with the school system of rewards to recognise a child who has shone at achievement, good behaviour, kindness and/ or team work.

Punishments we impose

There is a 3 point system:

1. Verbal warning: Tell the child what they have done wrong, why it is unacceptable and that they are on a warning. (At this point if the action is very serious a Golden time minute can be taken away and the school informed.)
2. Time out : 5 minutes calm down time in a safe space where they can not be disturbed, can be seen and may not be in a position of danger to themselves or to others. If necessary an adult should stand with the child.
3. The child may be walked back to school and taken out of the session. If this is not possible the child will be warned that they will miss the following session. The class teacher will be informed. If the behaviour is very serious it may be agreed between staff that the child be excluded from site altogether.

At the point of stage 3 the school Head teacher and parents will be written to and informed of reasons for and action taken by the Lottie Project.

Appendix IV

Policies

The project uses its own and Common Cause's policies to ensure that staff and children are protected. The policies that we use and are trained on are:

- Equal opportunities
- Child Protection
- Volunteer Policy
- Health and safety
- First Aid
- Project management Policy

Your nearest Council for Voluntary Services can be a useful source for model policies.



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