

The Pat Murphy Community Garden Programme

“He who cultivates a garden, cultivates and advances at the same time his own nature”

Introduction

The Pat Murphy Community Garden Programme is a new initiative and forms part of an ongoing strategy by the Larkin Centre, that seeks to widen the engagement of disengaged groups in the North Inner City, in learning activities, specifically targeting men. To date €10,000 has been secured and this has enabled the programme to commence and significant progress to be achieved, however, a further **€15,550** is required to realise phase 1 of the programme. The concept, background and the ongoing budget requirements along with some images of the work already completed are set out in the following pages.



Site before work started

The site for the project is located at Newcomen Court, off the North Strand. The objective that the programme is working towards is the establishment of a community garden that respects organic principles of growing, is environmentally friendly, utilises renewal resources and over time is fully sustainable and self funding. The timeframe for the realisation of all elements will be 5 years. The focus in this, the first year of the programme, is on the design plan including layout of site, planting structures, construction of potting shed, glasshouse and training facility. Additional programme activities will include the development of a water harvesting system, composting and research on renewal energy sources, e.g. solar power.

The site at Newcomen Court has been provided by Dublin City Council and issued under licence to the Larkin Centre, the managing agent for the programme. The operational ethos of the programme is based on community development principles, community led and community based. The programme also benefits from the technical support of the Botanic Gardens, who have agreed to collaborate as partners in this programme.

Background

The idea for the establishment of this community garden programme evolved from the Larkin Centre's Men's Health & Wellbeing Programme. This Programme, which encourages men to take better care of themselves, highlighted that a significant number of these men were unemployed and wanted to do something purposeful and stay active. Furthermore, the cookery component of this programme has promoted a strong interest in food and the benefits of eating fresh produce. Having learned how to cook the next step was to grow this food. A combination of circumstances, the support of Dublin City Council, who provided the site, alongside the enthusiastic response from a number of the men to the idea of a gardening initiative for the area, provided the impetus to pursue this programme.

The concept of community gardening is understood as the use of a garden or the process of working on the land to enhance or improve communities. It can create opportunities for learning and growth that can support the needs and aspirations of people in their local area. Community gardening provides a context for people to come together, be involved in purposeful, cooperative activity and through the process of this engagement, derive a number of benefits that will enhance their quality of life. It informs and fosters new understandings of living in harmony with the local environment and how our actions impact on nature. Community gardens facilitate a highly experiential and collaborative model of learning as participants interact with each other and the local environment, leading to the development of skills, understanding and attributes that are equally relevant to other areas of their lives. The very practical hands on focus of gardening, encourages active participation in the learning process, something that may not be as successfully achieved in a traditional classroom setting. Community gardens provide a social space for people to meet, experience a sense of belonging and satisfy those human needs of affiliation, physical activity and enjoyment of the open air.

In addition to the personal development gains, this garden will provide an abundance of food and transform what is currently a derelict space into a fruitful area and in so doing enhance the local environment. It is also hoped that the experience of the programme will encourage more to grow their own. The location of this community garden is in an area designated as disadvantaged, but fundamental to the programme's ethos and approach, is the intention to harness local skills and expertise and in so doing utilise the capacity of this community to make a difference in its own area. These ideas encapsulate the development of The Pat Murphy Community Garden

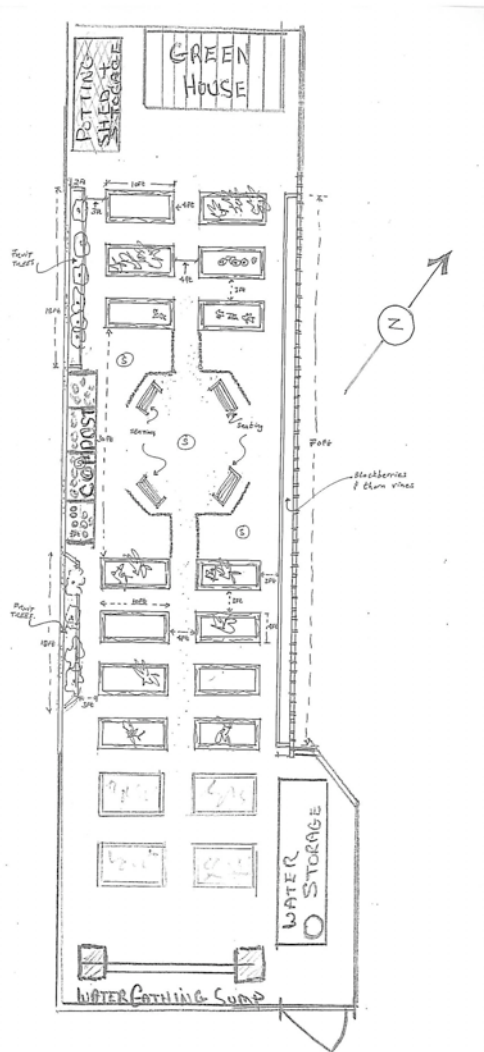
Progress to date

The task of transforming a disused site into a place of productive activity has been an evolving process and one that is still in progress. At each stage, it has involved overcoming a number of challenges, difficulties relating to design and other structural concerns have, through collective problem solving and sharing of ideas, been resolved. The programme has provided a vehicle for the creativity, resourcefulness and technical skills that resides in the community to be utilised.

Through the Men's Health & Wellbeing Programme a core of men willing to take on leadership roles in the implementation of this programme were identified. Since the commencement of this initiative approximately 14 men have been involved, some on an ongoing basis, others on a less regular basis. The informal nature of the programme gives participants flexibility around how much time they can give, but all contributions are valued. The community garden has drawn on the practical skills of local men, many of whom are unemployed, but their prior knowledge and work experience in the building and construction sector is now being put to good use in the programme.

To inform the concept and design of the programme, a number of study visits to other gardening projects were undertaken during June to August 2010 including the Botanic Gardens, Walled Gardens in the Phoenix Park, Street Garden Summer St and private Organic garden in Stillorgan. The opportunity to meet and see wonderful examples of organic gardening in practice has inspired the plan.

Original Design Plan



The community garden site is a twelfth of an acre in size and is south facing. The design plan, which has gone through a number of revisions, is intended to maximise use this space. The design comprises 18 rectangular planter boxes or raised beds, 10' x 14' x 27". These boxes have been constructed from organically treated 9" x 3" white deal bolted together with half inch threaded bar and are secured in position.

Within the current phase of implementation and, subject to the securing of funding, elements essential to the programme will include:

- the construction of a lean-to glasshouse, dimensions 16' x 12', with an apex roof, using all natural products
- multi-purpose secured building that will comprise the following facilities, a potting shed, dimensions 16' x 12', storage area for tools and equipment and a meeting/ classroom, dimensions 16' x 16', the later will be insulated
- installation of water harvesting system
- materials for the construction of a compost box
- generator
- procurement of topsoil, estimated amount required 70 tonnes

Cost requirements

The programme has sought to keep costs to a minimum and wherever possible reuse and recycle material. The recent General Election afforded an unexpected cost saving opportunity for the programme. The disused election posters have been used to line the raised beds in place of visqueen. Also some local businesses have contributed in kind to the programme. However, in order to progress the current work, as noted earlier, additional material is required, details as follows:

Community Garden Budget		
Item	Description	Est Cost
1	Potting Shed	€2,000
2	Glasshouse	€2,500
3	Training/Meeting facility	€5,500
4	Insulation for above	€1,000
5	Water harvesting system	€2,500
6	Generator	€500
7	Compost box	€350
8	Topsoil x 70 tonnes	€1,200
	Total	€15,550

Conclusion

A hallmark of the programme's operation to date is the strong sense of local ownership, belief in and responsibility for the development of this community garden. All involved are fully committed to achieving the very best for the community. It is a positive example of men being motivated to action less by any self serving interest but rather by a desire to contribute to the development of their community.

Some of the images capturing activity on the Programme are shown below:

Site as it was in June 2010



Field Trip in June 2010 to the Botanic Gardens



Site clearance work Nov 2010



Levelling site



Work Shop activity, construction of raised beds



Positioning of Raised Beds



Community Garden as of March 2011

