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Triangle Community Garden

Created and cultivated by people of all ages and abilities at Ransom's Rec Hitchin, Herts

Annual Review 2022-23

Welcome to our Annual Review for 2022–23

Our financial year runs from 1st September to 31st August and this review deals with that period.

During this time the Triangle Garden has seen some massive changes – primarily in staff but also in new projects and a renewed determination to reach as many people as possible with our work. We've said goodbye to two longstanding members of staff and welcomed five exceptional new people to our staff team. We've also initiated productive relationships with organisations such as CultureWood forest school practitioners, Ivel Valley School, and NHS Talking Therapies.

For those new to the Triangle Community Garden (TCG) and its work, here's our vision:

'A community where people feel happier and more fulfilled through a connection with the natural world and an understanding of our place in it.'

Our aim is to help people of all ages and abilities to **'connect, grow enjoy!'**, through gardening and contact with the natural world. We do this through:

- Supporting physical and mental health using social and therapeutic horticulture, arts and crafts, cooking and a focus on healthy living
- Providing volunteering opportunities,
- Running skills workshops and
- Holding community events.

We're active in three areas within Ransom's Rec (a small informal park near Hitchin station): the allotments, the Community Garden, and our Forest Garden alongside the River Hiz. The areas vary in character and each has different challenges and rewards. All three sites have thrived under the loving care of Friday Garden Club, New Shoots and Growing Ability, our three green care projects.

Growing Ability works long-term with adults with learning disabilities and chronic mental health concerns, focusing on the goals, abilities and support needs of each individual, and using horticulture and engagement in nature to increase the health. wellbeing, self-esteem and selfconfidence of our 'gardeners'.

New Shoots is a 6-week project for people struggling with stress, anxiety and depression. It uses the five ways to wellbeing and the benefits of working in nature to bring about improved physical health and mental wellbeing. Many New Shoots participants go on to join our **Friday Garden Club** (pic left), made up of loyal volunteers who tend and nurture all our sites and help at our events.

New projects we introduced last year include our **Family Forest School** and **Triangle Tribe** activities (pic top left), introducing bushcraft for wellbeing to families with children aged 3-12 and 12-16 respectively, and our new **Sunday Garden Club.** More inside...

Vicky Wyer, Chair of Trustees

Find out more at www.trianglegarden.org

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We currently have spaces at Growing Ability! Please contact Alice for details: alice@trianglegarden.org

Growing Ability

Growing Ability is our social therapeutic horticulture project where people with learning disabilities and other support needs gain training and experience all in aspects of horticulture, gardening and food growing.

Our Growing Ability 'gardeners' regularly take part in activities such as nature conservation, mindful exercise, food preparation/cooking, healthy eating, making art and crafts, selling produce and taking orders/making refreshments.

Through supported learning and meaningful activities in the community Growing Ability helps people build confidence and selfworth, grow in independence, and develop and reinforce important skills.

Growing Ability is a lovely friendly outdoor project and we welcome new people including those transitioning from school or college.

We provide a safe, caring and stimulating environment where sessions are structured in a personcentred way. This allows us to focus on the goals that each individual wants to achieve, while also incorporating key training and life skills experience.

The project is primarily based at our allotments but also incorporates the Pavilion, Triangle Garden, Forest Garden and Ransom's Recreation Ground. Each session taps into the healing and restorative powers of nature to embed a culture of wellbeing, personal growth and connection.

Our staff and volunteers understand the reciprocal benefits of working with nature: you plant and nurture a seed, and it grows into a seedling while you've been away. Give a little, gain a lot. The rewards are shared and enjoyed, and the challenges borne and overcome together.

Running a successful vegetable plot requires planning and organisational skills, decision making and fine-motor skills as well as the application of literacy and numeracy. And that's before you've even harvested anything! food Growing and harvesting it involves our gardeners in shared goals and responsibilities, as well as shared creativity, enterprise and experimentation when that food is cooked and enjoyed together.

At Growing Ability we work with adults with a range of abilities and support needs including learning disabilities, autism, brain injury and chronic or severe mental ill health.

Sessions are 2.5 hours long and are chargeable (from $\pounds12.80$ /hr). They run Tuesday-Thursday with a capacity of 6-8 gardeners per session, depending on the support need of each individual. Each session is run by two experienced care professionals, and at least one trained volunteer.

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Growing Ability continued

Across 2022-23. 20 individuals attended Growing Ability, five of whom attended two sessions per week. During that period we said goodbye to five gardeners and two key members of staff, Rachel Cottey and Liz McElroy, who moved to full time roles elsewhere. We also said a sad farewell to Judith, one of our longstanding volunteers. We wish them all well. We also welcomed two new gardeners and four new staff members. A massive change!

Alice Woodward took over as Project Manager in July 2023 and Steve Granger took on the new role of Site and Horticulture Manager. Liz Millbank, Karenanne Haye, Gail Halliday (June-Sept 2023) and Dulcie Buckenham joined Steve as care professionals supporting sessions.

Of the five gardeners who left, one moved away and several felt confident enough to move on to become volunteers at local free-toattend horticulture projects. We see this progression as a testament to the power of Growing Ability in promoting independence, confidence and resilience in all those who attend.

We know the need is out there locally for the sort of empowerment we can provide and we're building stronger relationships with local commissioners and special schools to reach new people. We want Growing Ability to be widely known as a welcoming place for young adults transitioning from school or college into the wider world and we've made a new video* (now on our website) to show this.

Here are some of the things people say about Growing Ability:

'The main thing about being here is you've got people you can talk to. Doesn't matter if you're young or old, you've always got someone you can connect with. I find the staff are really really good, and the volunteers. They make me feel that I belong here ... I really enjoy coming here and look forward to it.'

'I'd definitely recommend Growing Ability because it really helps with mindfulness and friendship...'

'My son was quite worried about the changes and I was quite concerned because he sometimes has difficulty coping with change but I have been very impressed with how smooth the transition has been and how well he has coped. He is very happy with how GA is organised and run following the transition.' parent

'Growing Ability is now an integral part of my son's life. It provides twice weekly support for him, it's a group that he's comfortable with and a place where he can share his ideas and interests and know that he is accepted and listened to. I know that he looks forward to attending each session, and misses those sessions greatly [when] unable to attend. The staff support and encourage him in every possible way and I firmly believe that he gains immeasurably from this, mentally, emotionally and physically.' parent

Alice Woodward, Project Manager *funded by Cllr Ian Albert's HCC Locality Budget





184 sessions 20 individuals 451 volunteer hours 2 joiners 5 leavers 4 off site trips

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We currently have spaces at our Branching Out Easter Scheme! Please contact Alice for details:

alice@trianglegarden.org







Branching Out

Branching Out is a new initiative consisting of a series of projects **offering opportunities for young people aged 16-25** with additional needs, to gain horticultural skills and work/life experience in a supported therapeutic environment.

From this year we're running a scheme for young people with a learning disability to come and try out gardening as a group activity, as part of our social therapeutic horticulture programme. This will take the form of a **three day Easter Scheme** open to all young people in Herts and Beds (with funding from Bedfordshire Charitable Trust to subsidise places for Bedfordshire residents).

The scheme runs from 9-11th April 2024, from 9.30am to 3pm at our allotment site.

We also hope to run one in the summer (funding permitting).

As well as creating opportunities for young people to experience what we do, we've been forging links with schools and colleges for young people with additional needs.

Last May we visited Ivel Valley School in Biggelswade and in June some of their students visited us to experience a Growing Ability session. We hope this sort of exchange will become a regular fixture.

Please contact us for more information if you are or know of a young person who may be interested in Branching Out.

Alice Woodward Project Manager

Community events, walks & workshops

Each year we put on a number of workshops and community events to engage and connect people with the natural world, spread the word about what we do and raise funds for our work.

October 2022 saw another successful Apple Day in Hitchin town centre – our 18th since the first in 2003. A celebration of English apples, local food and sustainability, with new stalls including Apple Cottage Cider and Plastic Free Hitchin's very popular Halloween costume swap. The event raised £620 for our work.

In May 2023 members of Garden Club ran a very successful stall at Hitchin farmers' market selling plants they had raised themselves which made around £350. And in July we had an outreach stall at Plastic Free Hitchin's Eco-Fair which was very well-attended despite the rain!

Once again our Seasonal Foraging Walks have proved very popular, led by Jane Simmons, The Hitchin Forager, around Ransom's Rec and at Oughtonhead Common. Last summer we also ran a 'Fairy Doors' craft workshop, and two Veg Growing workshops run by Steve Granger. Feedback for all our workshops has been excellent, thanks to our fantastic tutors.

We held our Summer Garden Fete in September for the first time last year and although outside this reporting period, it makes sense to mention it now. Building on the previous July's Summer Garden Party we expanded the event to include more stalls, activities and entertainments headlined by Garden City Samba and Imajica Theatre. The aim was to raise awareness of the community garden and our work and showcase local collaborators like jewellery tutor Tuuli Parker, dyeplant experts Nature's Rainbow, and Tai Chi practitioner Three Treasures Chris. A really well-attended day!

Thanks to all who helped at our events and of course to our hardworking band of events organisers:

Gemma, Mel, Vicky, Gill and Karenanne

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Forest School and Triangle Tribe

After a false start scuppered by covid in 2019, we were very excited to host our first family forest school session at the Triangle Garden in October 2022, run by Tanya Dickson of CultureWood CiC. Shortly afterwards we heard we'd been successful in getting funding from Herts Community Foundation to run a year's worth of forest school activities for families with children and young people.

Both initiatives focus on engaging young people in exploration, crafting, learning skills and play, in a natural therapeutic setting. Inspired by nature, young people and their parents/carers collaborate to learn bushcraft, fire skills and traditional green crafting, creating ephemeral nature art together. Outdoor play and discovery builds confidence, allows risk taking and encourages team building skills. Studies show that spending time in nature reduces stress, improves mental well-being, boosts immune functions, increases creativity and leaves people feeling refreshed.

These are the outcomes we set out to achieve:

- An increase in the engagement of young people and families in looking after the local environment
 outcome: over 250 people have engaged with these two projects in 2023
- Young people are educated about the environment/climate, outcome: feedback shows that the projects increased participants' connection with / understanding of nature and natural processes.

Improved wellbeing for young people/families through creating new social support networks outcome: feedback shows families appreciated the social connection elements of these initiatives, and new friendships and stronger connections have been made through both projects.

Triangle Tribe participants reported: 'Was very pleased to have this sort of thing offered to teens. There is so much aimed at young children but hardly anything for teens to do. My girls ... are very reluctant to do anything with strangers, but they were surprisingly keen on doing Triangle Tribe and rated the last session 9 out of 10!''

'We persevered and overcame challenges to feel proud' '**We had an excellent time each week'** 'Felt peaceful after being outside'

'Family time – it was really fun to try new things' 'It was fun – I felt happy and excited for the next one!'

"We all really enjoyed the first week even though the kids were reluctant to go as it meant missing their normal youth club. However, they loved it so much they were happy to skip this week's. ... I'd definitely recommend this to others!"

Family Forest School meets monthly, every fourth Sunday morning 11am-12.30 and Triangle Tribe meets every third Friday evening 6.30-8.30pm. Sessions need to be booked in advance as placed are limited. Both initiatives are neurodivergent-friendly.









To book your place at Family Forest School or Triangle Tribe please visit trianglegarden.org/events

Find out more at www.trianglegarden.org







"Lovely to connect with nature and do something useful with lovely people"

"1 arrived stressed and tired and left relaxed and happy"

To find out more about New Shoots contact alice@trianglegarden.org

New Shoots

New Shoots is a project that we set up to respond to the high levels anxiety, stress and depression brought on by the pandemic and exacerbated by the cost of living crisis.

New Shoots uses community gardening to reduce social isolation and promote mental wellbeing. Last year thanks to funding from Herts County Council, we were able to run the second of two fullyfunded 15-week blocks of weekly half-day New Shoots sessions, based around the five ways to wellbeing:

- Be active
- Connect
- Give
- Learn
- Notice

For both our 15-week New Shoots blocks, weekly feedback showed participants

- enjoyed the sessions,
- · learnt something new in most sessions,
- engaged with others in almost all sessions,
- were physically active at the majority of sessions,
- felt less anxious after sessions
- felt more engaged after sessions
- felt more positive after sessions.

The WEMWBS (Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scores) at the beginning and end of each block, showed participants feeling more confident, more useful and more able to make up their minds about things over the block period.

This is what one participant had to say:

"When I came to the Triangle Garden my mental health was poor, I constantly felt tired and anxious and felt I had no time or motivation to do anything about it.

"Initially, just meeting the staff and volunteers was reassuring, as they were all friendly and calm with a passion for the project that was contagious.

"Steve spent time showing me around the forest garden and sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm about the different plants, their purpose within the garden, what they produced and how this was used. It was fascinating and inspiring, a magical place to forget the stresses of daily life and feel at one with nature.

"I joined the New Shoots programme and started to look forward to this time every week when I could feel calm and energised. As someone with a sedentary lifestyle these sessions provided a good variety of activity to improve my physical as well as my mental health. I learn something new each week about gardening and nature, which has motivated me to get out walking more in nature and grow my own food this year."

Several of those who attended New Shoots went on to become members of our Friday Garden Club and help at our community events, extending their positive experience.

From September 2023 we decided to move forward with a 6-week version of New Shoots to align with a standardlength counselling block and allow us to seek referrals from NHS Talking Therapies (previously IAPT) for people on the waiting list for counselling.

We are embarking on our second block in January and **actively seeking funding** to continue the programme.

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Our Garden Clubs

Friday Garden Club meets every Friday morning from 10am for some gentle guided social gardening. It is open to anyone, and its purpose is to maintain and develop the Triangle Garden and Forest Garden for the benefit of people and nature. Members enjoy learning new gardening skills, meeting new friends and being active in the fresh air, while making a positive contribution to the community and biodiversity. There are also regular trips and outings.

A very important part of the Garden Club experience is the cuppa, cake and chat at the end of each session! Thanks go to Lesley for her homemade cakes at coffee time, often using produce from our sites.

Friday Garden Club has met most weeks throughout the year, excluding holidays and extreme weather. Volunteer numbers have increased this year, with 20 volunteers overall, and an average of 9 people coming each week, giving a total of 728 volunteer hours, up 20% on last year.

Allotment plot 6A continues to be a productive space in both what is grown and produced there, alongside the benefits to those working on it. The polytunnel has given the Garden Club a dedicated space to raise plants for the Farmer's Market plant stall and for the Forest and Community Gardens.

Garden Club continue to make steady progress in their dedicated nurturing of our community spaces for biodiversity and people. The ongoing task of removing the 'weed suppressing' membrane continues slowly but surely, allowing the planting of а new herbaceous layer to the Forest Garden. We have had many positive comments from those using the park about the improved paths through this area. As the Forest Garden plants mature, we are getting larger and larger harvests. This year we harvested our first Mashua tubers. Time away from the garden plays a valuable role in providing inspiration and a change of scene. Last year we enjoyed a trip to Jordans Mill to admire their planting areas and to Cambridge Botanic Garden. Many Garden Club volunteers staffed our plant stalls at Apple Day and the Farmers Market in town, bringing in valuable income to support our work.

Local building company Crane BSU have continued to attend regularly, as volunteers, carrying out various tasks including building new compost bins and fixing shelves in the lock up.

The pond had a bit of a dredge out early in the season and volunteers cut back some of the encroaching branches around it to let more light in. We are still looking for a contractor willing to carry out a clean out and replacement of the damaged liner. Once that is done and the pond is returned to a better state we can reintroduce pond-dipping and autumn pond maintenance sessions to our calendar of activities.

We collaborated with Groundwork once again this year to run a six-week GOGA (Go Outside, Get Active) block of nature conservation sessions with volunteers from various places including the Living Room. They carried out many tasks including replanting pollinator plants in the raised beds which are doing well. They also removed the Dogwood from the willow maze area, opening the site up in preparation for improvement.

Garden Committee have been active over the last year, meeting more regularly and making plans for the revitalisation of our monthly volunteer mornings, now known as **Sunday Garden Club** on the second Sunday of every month. Look out for them and book yourself a free place. All ages and abilities welcome!

Steve Granger, Garden Club Leader









To find out more about joining Friday Garden Club please contact Steve Granger via steve@trianglegarden.org

To book your free place at Sunday Garden Club visit trianglegarden.org/events

Find out more at www.trianglegarden.org







3 community events 5 local food stalls 5 sustainability stalls 35 event volunteers 6 foraging walks 9 dye workshops 18 jewellery workshops

People

This year has seen a lot of fond farewells and many more 'welcome aboard's!

A massive thank you goes to staff members Liz McElroy and Rachel Cottey (top left) for their dedicated work from 2013-2023 as Project Manager and GA Support Worker. Also to Margaret Byrne longstanding longsuffering our and Accounts Assistant and trustee Fiona Dolman who both stepped down last year. We're delighted that Margaret continues to assist with Pavilion hires and Fiona continues to co-chair Garden Committee and volunteer at Friday Garden Club. We also said a sad goodbye to GA volunteer Judith and several of our GA gardeners who have moved on to pastures new.

A warm welcome goes to the many new staff members and volunteers who have joined us over the last year:

Ed Harkness joined us as Business
Development Manager in Dec 2022

- Funmi Daramola started in the spring as volunteer Accounts Assistant
- Liz Millbank, Karenanne Hay and Gail Halliday joined us as GA horticultural support workers last spring-summer
- Alice Woodward, our new Project Manager, joined us in July (pic left)
- **Dulcie Buckenham** joined us in September, replacing Gail who had to leave at the end of the summer
- Steve Granger was promoted to the role of Site and Horticulture Manager.

As always we say a big thank you to our wonderful Garden Club volunteers who help to keep our sites so biodiverse and beautiful, to our Growing Ability and New Shoots volunteers and gardeners and their supportive parents and carers, our events team, our trustees, our accounts volunteer, our webmaster, and all our collaborators, supporters and funders. A special thank you also to jam making supremo Chris, ably supported by her creative assistant Gill.

Pavilion hires and Tai Chi in the park

It's great to see our Pavilion continuing to be hired by external arts tutors for creative workshops such as <u>Tuuli Parker's</u> silver clay and glass fusion jewellery classes, and <u>Kim Raymont's</u> art workshops which last year focused on screen printing.

Nature's Rainbow have also been regular hirers of the pavilion and our outdoor classroom space on the allotment. Last year they hosted several visits to their small but abundant dye plant garden on Ransoms' allotments and ran workshops on 'How to plan and plant a dye garden' to groups from across the country. Their demonstration dye plot at Groundswell Regenerative Agriculture Festival drew lots of attention last year and they continue to run practical workshops teaching people how to dye with natural plant materials throughout the growing season, including a two day workshop on working with Japanese Indigo and an inspiring day of Botanical Printing.

These hires provide welcome income to help fund our Friday Garden Club and Sunday volunteer mornings, and make good use of our little community facility.

We've also been trying to introduce more community activities to Ransoms Rec, to make better active use of the space and fill it with positivity. Our first foray has been to persuade Chris Nutley of <u>Ihree</u> <u>Ireasures Tai Chi</u> to run a weekly outdoor Tai Chi class on the Rec (bottom left). This now happens every Friday 11.15am-12.15, whatever the weather and is slowly building a following. Come along and give it a try! Beginners welcome!

Find out more at www.trianglegarden.org

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Treasurer's Report

Similar to last year, this financial year to 31 August 2023 saw the charity make a surplus, though more modest than in 2022.

In the absence of an Open Day for this period (2023's event was held in September), our main fundraising events were our annual Apple Day in October 2022 which made a profit of £600, and plant stall run by Garden Club volunteers in May at Hitchin Market which made £350. Along with our other sources of income, the pavilion continues to be an important source of funds – generating fees from use by local community groups and classes, and providing facilities for TCG activities and projects.

We also received a small income from our Forest School and Triangle Tribe activities which we will be using to continue them across the current financial year now that their funding has come to an end.

Whilst we are very pleased to see that TCG's combined activities, have delivered a surplus this year of over £2,000, we remain very aware of the hard truth that without other sources of income, the charity would certainly have made a deficit if it had to solely rely on fees from Growing Ability gardeners.

This serves to highlight how important these other sources are, and how grateful we remain to those that provide them. In this year this includes very kind donations (such as those from Crane, Waitrose, Hitchin Nature Network, St Marks Church and private individuals via our People's Fundraising website, amongst others) or the grants awarded to us (such as those provided by Herts Community Fund and our local Councillors). It also shows the hard work undertaken by the team in submitting robust and convincing

Unrestricted

Funds

f

12,401

6,239

3,435

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

Income from:

Investments

Donations and Legacies

Other Trading Activities

Charitable Activities

grant applications – their efforts this year have yet again been vital. This year we would also like to thank McCarthy & Stone for becoming Platinum Sponsors.

Income from client fees has again shown a modest increase during the year, but under the new fee structure introduced by Hertfordshire County Council, the level of this income is precarious going forward as new rates represent a reduction on those paid previously.

This uncertainty over future fee levels, and a desire to ensure that TCG runs a full programme of fully-attended sessions led to the decision to create a new role of Business Development Manager this year, and we were very pleased to appoint Ed Harkness (below right) into the role. Currently, this role is being funded from our reserves but the intention is that the additional income that is brought in will make the role self-sustaining.

Finally, from a financial management perspective, we thank our previous volunteer bookkeeper Margaret (bottom right) for her many years of hard work, dedication and commitment, and welcome our new bookkeeper Funmi who has quickly and effectively taken up the reins. We would also like to thank Deniz Brown who has been our Independent Examiner for many years and to welcome our new IE, Charles Osei ACIE.

Abbreviated accounts are shown below. The full accounts in the format required by the Charities Commission are available on our website.

2021-22

Total

£

12,304

6,245

32,696

51,245

3,171

38,623

41,794

Andrew Green, Treasurer

2022-23

Total

£

21,958

7,311

36,953

Endowment

Funds

£

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Find out more at www.trianglegarden.org

Total Income 22,075 44,147 66,222 Expenditure on: **Raising Funds** 2,745 3,331 6,076 **Charitable Expenditure** 16,900 41,220 58,120 44,551 64,196 **Total Expenditure** 19,645

Restricted

Income Funds

£

9,557

1,072

33,518

2,430 -	404	-	2,026	9,451	
-	-	-	-	-	
			1977 - Lo Color I, destalativ II, fatilita (Later		
2,430 -	404	-	2,026	9,451	
27,412	22,982	-	50,394	40,943	
29,842	22,578	-	52,420	50,394	
	2,430 - 27,412	2,430 - 404 27,412 22,982	2,430 - 404 - 27,412 22,982 -	2,430 - 404 - 2,026 27,412 22,982 - 50,394	

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Future plans

Over the course of the last year, we have been looking at ways to make the Triangle Community Garden more financially sustainable. Our organisation is a valuable community asset and we want to safeguard its future. The first step in doing so has been to identify how to build financial resilience in the face of current and future economic challenges. With our community feeling the effects of the cost of living crisis it is critically important that we can continue to provide access to meaningful nature-based activities. Across the board budgets are tightening fundina becoming and is more competitive so ensuring that we have consistent and sustainable revenue streams is critical. We are looking for ways to achieve this across all of our activities:

Growing Ability: We want to run more Growing Ability sessions each week including some full day sessions. This will ensure that we are making the best use of our gardens, allotments and pavilion. It will mean that we can offer social and therapeutic horticulture sessions to more adults with support needs, making our green spaces more accessible. It will also give us further secure, regular income.

Branching Out: Our newest project aims to introduce young people (16-25) to our social and therapeutic horticulture offer.

When it comes time for these young people to leave further education and choose a future path, we hope they will feel more confident and comfortable joining our Growing Ability sessions.

New Shoots: Having run two pilot programmes for our 6-week mental health course we are confident that it can have a significant impact on people living with common mental health issues. We have been working closely with NHS Talking Therapies in Hertfordshire to generate referrals and are looking at ways to start offering this as a funded service.

Workshops and Public Events: Our public events are always immensely popular and allow people to engage with us in more ad hoc ways. They also offer us opportunities for face-to-face fundraising activities through plant and produce sales. We aim to build on the successes of our 2023 activities by continuing to provide an eclectic mix of events and workshops for our community.

Fundraising Activities: Our work this year would not have been possible without the support of our generous funders to whom we are very grateful.

Ed Harkness Business Development Manager





Find out more at www.trianglegarden.org