



Gardens of Sanctuary

Martineau Gardens

Birmingham



Gardens of Sanctuary Case Study

Community growing spaces welcoming, supporting and working alongside refugees and asylum seekers

Martineau Gardens at a Glance

Established in:	1997
Location:	Birmingham
Website:	https://martineau-gardens.org.uk/
Structure:	Charity
Staff:	9 part time
Volunteers:	97

Project History

Martineau Gardens is located just 2 miles from Birmingham city Centre and has been a community garden since 1997, when volunteers took over the running of a 2.5 acre garden to save it from commercial development.

The garden is open to all, free of charge, 6 days per week and is run according to organic principles. The gardens are managed by volunteers participating in a Therapeutic Horticulture Project, supported by Martineau Gardens Staff. They also have volunteers who act as Greeters for new visitors and volunteers.

As of November 2018 they had 7 trustees, 9 members of part time staff and almost 100 volunteers who participate in a variety of ways.

Current Services

In addition to their main activities, Martineau Gardens also has a partnership with the charity Freedom from Torture, who provide specialist rehabilitation and support to survivors of torture. They now bring a men's group to the gardens every 2 weeks between the months of March and October to take part in 2 hours of volunteering in the gardens.

These gardening sessions are led by a member of the Martineau Gardens team, but are also always attended by at least one Freedom from Torture staff member (usually a psychotherapist) and sometimes also by translators who come to support the

participants. At the end of each session the group typically share a meal, which is prepared by one of the Martineau Gardens trustees.

Freedom from Torture have been able to raise funds to pay for the use of the space and to cover the staff time from Martineau Gardens.

In addition to this specialist group, Martineau Gardens has also had a number of sanctuary seekers volunteer with them through their Therapeutic Horticulture and Greeting teams. Typically they have found these volunteers to be highly educated and are interested in volunteering in order to improve their English and be part of a community. Many of them have had a background in horticulture, agriculture or forestry, and they have typically stayed with the project as volunteers until their circumstances changed, either by moving away or because they received refugee status and got a job.

From time-to-time Martineau Gardens have also hosted activities for volunteers from Kushinga Community Garden, another Birmingham based group who work exclusively with sanctuary seekers. This has meant they have been able to welcome people to the garden that they may have struggled to reach without this partnership.

Outcomes

The group who attend through Freedom from Torture have found the sessions to be valuable in terms of therapeutic benefit, with one participant also observing that it was one of the very few times they left the house.

Improvements in mental health have been observed, as have improvements in socialisation and participants feeling that they are part of a community.

For sanctuary seekers who have taken part in the regular Martineau Gardens volunteer programme, staff have observed improvements in their spoken English, and participants report feeling that they have found a way to “return to who they are as people”, where their training, education and experience was valued by those around them and useful to their community.

Community Impact

There have been some very positive impacts on the rest of the volunteer team as a result of their partnership with Freedom from Torture. Some volunteers were shocked to learn of the experiences some people had been through, and were very empathetic. They stopped seeing this group of people as “other”.

In contrast to this Martineau Gardens staff observed that some volunteers and visitors initially viewed the group with suspicion, although this was overcome with time.

Case Study: K.

K. is an Iranian refugee who first came to Martineau Gardens in 2015. At that time he was very unhappy as he had been separated from his wife and children, who were still in Iran, for an extended period of time. He was studying English, and found out about the gardens through his involvement with a local church. He volunteered once a week as a Greeter, welcoming visitors, making drinks and generally helping out. He was very enthusiastic and chatty, and always very welcoming to new people.

After he had been volunteering at the gardens for a while he asked if he could grow saffron, as he had experience of growing this on a commercial scale when he was living in Iran. He brought in his own bulbs, which had come all the way from Iran, and once the garden staff had cleared this with the Food and Environment Research Agency (who stipulated that the bulbs did not leave the gardens once planted), K. was able to plant them and eventually harvest his own saffron, which he shared with the team.

Since then K’s family have been able to join him, and he now works locally as a gardener. He still visits the gardens with his family, and will sometimes pop in to buy a bag of compost too.



Problems and Barriers

The staff at Martineau Gardens have sometimes experienced confusion and/misunderstandings that have arisen as a result of cultural differences in the people attending with Freedom from Torture. This has often related to gender and understanding what is or isn't appropriate to say to people.

They also know that sanctuary seekers sometimes struggle to attend the garden because they can't afford to pay for public transport when they are on very restricted incomes, and have found promoting their activities to people who speak little English, or who only have infrequent access to the

internet to be challenging. In these instances partnership working has been key to engaging people that they would otherwise have been unable to reach.

Future Plans

Martineau Gardens would like to continue with their work with Freedom from Torture, and are open to other partnerships. They prefer to work in this way, rather than putting a project together in isolation as it gives them access to a far greater range of expertise and experience. Project work of this nature is also dependent on funding and so, much of their future work will be dependent on securing grant funding.

Compiled by Sophie Antonelli and Ben Margolis

For more information about Gardens of Sanctuary go to <https://gardens.cityofsanctuary.org/>

Gardens of Sanctuary is a partnership between [Social Farms & Gardens](#), [City of Sanctuary](#) and the [Permaculture Association](#). We have a shared vision of a network of green spaces with a culture of welcome, in which asylum seekers and refugees feel safe and appreciated as valued contributors and co-creators of community gardens and environmental projects across the UK.

For those who arrive to seek asylum in the UK, community gardens, city farms and other community growing spaces can offer vital and unique opportunities to find community, improve mental and physical health and to learn and share skills.

Our case studies and report are intended as useful resources for any community growing space who is working with refugees and asylum seekers, or who would like to welcome them in the future. Find all our resources on our website [here](#).