



Gardens of Sanctuary

The Grange

Great Cressingham, Norfolk



Gardens of Sanctuary Case Study

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

The Grange at a Glance

Established in:	2012
Location:	Great Cressingham, Norfolk
Website:	www.thegrangenorfolk.org.uk
Structure:	Company limited by guarantee (not-for-profit)
Staff:	1 part time
Volunteers:	20+

Project History

The Grange was founded by Ben Margolis and Sophie North after they moved to the site in 2011. The Grange is a large, former rectory with 9 bedrooms, which can sleep up to 15 guests. The building is situated on a 10 acre smallholding in rural Norfolk, which also has outbuildings and space for temporary structures such as yurts.

Ben and Sophie (who was a GP specialising in refugee health) began offering residential breaks for asylum seekers, and particularly survivors of torture. During this period up to 12 groups of asylum seekers would visit every year for anything from 3-10 days, with all visits organised through partner charities such as Room to Heal, Freedom From Torture, Migrants Organise, Catholic Workers, New Routes, English Plus and Bridge Plus.

The project gradually expanded to involve large numbers of volunteers, an internship programme, work with other vulnerable groups and the development smallholding to include a permaculture garden, orchard and craft studios. In order to involve local members of the community The Grange also began running Workday Wednesdays, which attracted asylum seekers from a charity partner in Norwich, and also a number of local people.

Ben and Sophie moved out of The Grange in 2016, and the project is now run by live-in coordinator Chris McGaw.

Current Services

Workday Wednesdays continue at The Grange, are very popular and are open to anyone. All first time volunteers must complete an application form and be assessed by a staff member. All volunteers receive training in the asylum system and how to work with asylum seekers, as well as how to be aware of the signs of vicarious trauma. A key part of the training is identifying boundaries to ensure volunteers are not offering well-meaning, but potentially damaging, advice on practical or psychological challenges.

The Grange is able to signpost participants to other organisations and arrange for them to get specific support particularly at times of crisis. All Grange staff and interns receive mandatory monthly supervision from a counsellor which is also available to volunteers if needed.

The Grange no longer runs residential visits, despite there still being demand for these, as the building would require substantial alterations before these could continue.

The project has also started running a range of workshops and craft based courses in partnership with local artists. These help bring income in to the project and also raise awareness about the work they are doing with sanctuary seekers.

Outcomes

The Grange sees both formal and informal therapeutic outcomes. One psychotherapist who brought groups to The Grange described his weeks there as being like a ‘turbo charger’ for his therapeutic process. He said he could accomplish as much with some people in a week at The Grange as with 6 months in weekly group sessions in London. Feedback from group members shows that some of the key reasons for this are:

- The trust shown to be welcomed in to a family home and to be made welcome
- The space and beauty of The Grange and the surrounding area
- Working alongside local volunteers and feeling valued as part of the group

The skills sharing aspect of work at The Grange also has very beneficial outcomes. The Grange works with local craftspeople to offer art, pottery, weaving, woodwork, music and other learning opportunities. They also identify skills that asylum seekers and refugees have and find ways for them to explore those at The Grange, and to share them with others. This is a fun way of providing a therapeutic environment where people can regain confidence in their own abilities and be part of a safe learning environment which can support them to find their way into more formal learning spaces like English classes, college etc.

Case Study: E.

E. has been to The Grange several times, and each time has become more comfortable being there, especially as she now acts as a guide for those coming for the first time. Emily has suffered extreme trauma and was brought to the UK as a domestic slave. The first time Emily used the pottery wheel there was a marked change in her appearance and she later explained to her psychotherapist that it brought back happy memories of helping her father on a wheel when she was young. Emily further explored this through art and discussion and this has had a marked effect on her mental health and wellbeing.



Community Impact

The Grange is in a small village in rural West Norfolk. There was some initial concern about how the local community, which is typically quite conservative, would respond to large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers visiting The Grange, but people in the village and surrounding communities have been supportive and become actively involved in the project. Several people have donated food, money and clothing and have volunteers at workdays and events. When people visit The Grange, they now feel welcome and safe in the whole community rather than just at The Grange itself.

Many local people say that The Grange has challenged some of their assumptions about asylum seekers and that they feel proud to be part of making them feel welcome. Key to this has been gradually developed a growing

number of opportunities for the local community to become involved in the project.

Challenges and Barriers

As a project working with sometimes very vulnerable and traumatised people, one key challenge has been about identifying what they can and can't offer. Often, local volunteers in particular, want to offer support to people which they are in a position to give or do not have the necessary training for. The Grange is also aware that they cannot provide support for serious mental health challenges or drug and alcohol dependency. This is why working with partners to identify participants who are in the right place to come to The Grange is vital, as well as to link with other agencies that they can refer people to.

Some people, understandably, do not want to leave The Grange at the end of a visit as many

Case Study: M.

M. from Sudan fled his home country and survived a traumatic journey to the UK. He was dispersed to Norwich by the Home Office and bought to The Grange for regular volunteer days by New Routes – an integration charity. Moussa spent quite a lot of time in the woodwork shop and one day made himself an instrument called a 'rababa' (African harp) which he had played at home. Since then Moussa has written a number of songs about his life and finding sanctuary in the UK and has performed with a theatre company in Norwich and at many events in and around the city.



live in very poor housing or are destitute and homeless. Here The Grange's relationship with partners is key, as it is their responsibility to make it very clear to those coming what they can and can't expect from The Grange and when they are expected to leave.

It has been very hard to develop a programme of support for individuals as their lives are often very chaotic and they can be moved by the Home Office at very short notice (if any notice at all). The Grange tries to view their time with people 'in the moment' and make sure that all of the work they do can be

beneficial for individuals however their situation develops.

Future Plans

Asylum seekers continue to be welcomed to The Grange, and to the village, on volunteer days and the project is developing a programme of events and activities. Chris has a background in ecology and so has also been developing work with local wildlife groups.

The Grange is also building on its work with adults with additional needs through developing partnership with charities in the local area.

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](#).