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Introduction

Global Generation: Co-creating Gardens of a 1000 Hands

From our biodiverse spaces in Kings Cross and Canada Water, we grow people, food and communities for a just world. We create transformative spaces where all forms of life can flourish and from where we strengthen our connections to ourselves, each other, our communities and the planet.

This year we have seen our roots go deeper as we make greater connections with our local communities in Camden, Islington and Southwark and welcome even more families, young people, local residents of all ages and school children into our gardens. One of our biggest strengths is that we work with local people, particularly young people, over many years, building trusting relationships with them. This allows us to work in depth, supporting them on their personal journeys whilst exploring the soil, fungi and animals beneath our feet, the stars in the sky and the diatoms in the water.

With this depth, has also come steady growth and the start of new shoots, as we prepare for life in a new corner of Islington. Whilst our history has been one of movement and embracing change, we have remained committed and connected to the communities we have worked with for almost 20 years. We are excited about the possibilities of our new permanent home, taking forward the many learnings and reflections from our work to date. We remain rooted with local communities, youth-led, explorative yet reflective and guided by the rhythms of nature on a local and global dimension.

This year in the Story Garden we embraced the dramatic changes to the seasons, moving from the sunny spring to the intense dry heat of the summer, the vibrant growth period in the Autumn and then into the darkness, stillness and snow of winter. Throughout, the garden has remained a space of nourishment and respite, where people made connections with each other and learnt to appreciate the rhythms of nature in all its extremes.

"I can hear the chirping of urban birds over the metallic hum of the overground, heralding the arrival of Spring. It feels like a special place, an oasis of hope in a concrete desert. A waste dumping ground, reborn as a garden, a place where plants and children grow together".

Andras, Green Ambassador.





Through our weekly programmes, activities, workshops, conversations and shared lunches, we inspire creativity and offer nature connection and outdoor learning opportunities in the middle of the city, keeping nature at the heart of everything we do.

"Winter is one of my favourite times in the Garden. I love spending wet afternoons in the cosy back office rifling through leftover seeds, misty mornings pruning soft fruit bushes and cold but sunny days turning the steaming(!!) compost."

Holly, Story Garden Manager

Our work in and around the Story Garden in Somers Town provides local residents, families, children and young people with the opportunity to get outside in nature, develop practical hands-on and creative skills and connect to their local community and area. It bridges relationships between businesses and local people of all ages, creating a space for people from different backgrounds to find common ground, slow down, appreciate nature in the middle of the city and to imagine their futures differently.

We aim to create healthy ecosystems where people, communities and nature can thrive and the Story Garden has become a local oasis that showcases what's possible through dialogue, reflection, positive action and coming together as a community to create a new vision for the area and beyond.

Community Growing and Sharing

- 75 community growers have growing bed space in the Story Garden. They live in the housing estates in Somers Town and have no access to growing space. Community Growers produced a huge volume of fresh, culturally appropriate fruit and vegetables that they took home and shared with members of their communities and cooked shared lunches with.
- We ran 33 drop in sessions for practical growing support, which over 100 local residents attended.
- 73% of our community growers are from BAME communities and 100% have no access to growing space at home.

Coming Together through Twilight Gardening

Our weekly Twilight Gardening sessions bring together those who live and work in the area. This year we facilitated 43 Twilight Gardening volunteering sessions which brought over 150 people together through food growing, gardening, conversations and celebrations.

"Twilight Gardening is a highlight of my week. I like coming to the Story Garden and meeting new people and helping out".

Tamera, Twilight volunteer.

"This is wonderful, I have learnt so much in such a short space of time, I loved pruning and singing to the trees!"

Lara, Twilight volunteer

Developing our Social and Emotional Skills

Our partnership with the Harington Scheme to facilitate work experience opportunities for young people with special educational needs continued to flourish. We supported 8 young people as we developed our social and emotional skills, as well as practical gardening skills through informal weekly gardening sessions.

"Friday is my favourite day because I get to come to the Story Garden." Joe, Participant.

"I love the Story Garden and I love spending time in nature and being outdoors. It makes me feel calm and happy. I've learnt lots of practical gardening skills and really enjoyed sowing seeds and planting." KM, Participant.

The After school club in collaboration with Edith Neville Primary School has welcomed 20 children who live locally to the garden weekly during term time. The children come to play, build, drill, dig for worms and get dirty. This year their main project was the co-creation of the children's play space in the garden.

'People say worms are scary but they really are not if you get to know them.' Rhiana, Year 4

'When I come to the garden I feel free and joyful. When I come to the garden I feel cheerful. When I'm gardening I feel happy.

Zakirah Year 5

"I am most proud of the quiet space and the table and chair and the deadhedge. I am proud because I have never done anything with drills and wood, also other people can play and do something in our creations."

Anesa, Year 5



'When I do some gardening I feel calm and happy because helping the environment is fun and relaxing. Plants make me feel normal. Activities outside and inside are fun. I love plants, they help us, we help them". Maihadi Year 5

The Healing Power of Being Together in Nature

We welcomed 95 refugee families and isolated residents from Somers Town into the garden for cooking and crafting, including 20 young children. By bringing two communities together, old and new, through gardening, cooking, crafting and storytelling, these sessions allowed us to find common ground, make new friends, laugh together and learn from each other and nature. The sessions were in collaboration with the Family Centre at Edith Neville Primary School and the Make Space.

"We love coming to the garden, it's good to get outdoors and we learn so much from each other." Laura, Family Liaison Worker, Edith Neville Primary School

In June 2022 we supported an Afghan Men's Wellbeing Group for 8 men living in temporary accommodation locally. We supported them to integrate and connect outside the hotels, slowly meeting new groups and communities and venturing out with greater confidence.

With cultural confusion, depression and issues of inclusion and integration a big factor, the sessions evolved over time to wider spheres of orientation - with trips to the river Thames, or to Tate Modern, Hampstead Heath, Museums and other places, finding public spots to sit and talk or write about the stimulus of the day. Then back to the Story Garden for poems, cooking, and integrating the experiences around a fire.

"Do you remember or not when you would pass me the yogurt after it touched your lips?

This old love poem is to honour bringing us to a bright place, that in my life I have not seen and will never forget."

Participant, July 2022.

We welcomed 30 16-18 year old ESOL students from a local college who are refugees and asylum seekers. They came weekly for 12 weeks to harvest food and develop their woodwork and ceramics skills by making plant pots for the Floating Garden, chestnut shakes and handmade bricks for the structures at our new permanent site. The sessions developed their practical and communication skills and gave them the opportunity to leave their mark on our new permanent site, ensuring a lasting connection to the space wherever they may find themselves in the future!

"We are one big family"
Abadullah, ESOL student

From November 2022, the Story Garden hosted monthly bread making sessions between a group of local Jewish ladies and Afghan ladies in temporary accommodation in Camden. The Afghan ladies had not been able to cook for their families since arriving in 2020, with food being provided by the hotels they were in.

With daily life still being a challenge for many in the group, these monthly sessions of up to 16 ladies, would be a rare opportunity for the Afghan ladies to come together and breathe fresh air. With the Jewish ladies they shared stories and cultures whilst kneading and baking bread. The Jewish ladies demonstrated their challah baking traditions and the Afghan women would shape delicious naan breads. In the process they found common ground and warm hearts in the nourishing space of the Story Garden.

"When was the last time you baked bread with Afghan refugees in a Kings Cross urban garden? Come to think of it, when was the last time you baked challot in a pizza oven? It was a first for all sixteen of us as we gathered around an outdoor oven on a sunny June morning in the Global Generation Story Garden. We were there to share baking traditions, compare stories and – maybe most importantly – extend a warming hand to each other in the spirit of 'v'achavta l'raicha k'mocha', in other words, to 'love our neighbour as we would love ourselves."

"As the kneading and stretching progressed, the women's voices – at first shy and inhibited – grew to be joyously confident. There was no way not to marvel at their skill and expertise, honed out of years of practice. We parted ways brimming with respect for these women, for their resilience and their skills." Jane, Loaves of Love.

We have supported 3 local schools to set up and develop wellbeing gardens in their school grounds. From the wellbeing gardens we run weekly Nature and Nurture sessions, working with 50 children with Special Educational Needs and/or audism to grow food, explore local wildlife and get outside of the classroom. The focus is on wellbeing and healing traumatic experiences with priority given to the invisible learning that takes place through focusing on using our hands, working as a team and being guided by the seasons for food growing.

'We have worked with the Story Garden for several years now. Our school is in an area of high deprivation. Somers Town is classed as one of the most deprived wards in the UK in terms of child poverty and our school community reflects this. The wellbeing nurture groups have given our children space to reflect and have time gardening. We have seen definite improvements in their confidence and willingness to engage with other activities. The children have really loved the sessions.'

Ruby Nasser - Headteacher, Edith Neville Primary School



Family Saturday Feasting, Exploring and Crafting

This year we hosted 10 Monthly Family Feasts where children learnt to cook over the fire, use the pizza oven and honed their knife skills as well as picking produce from the garden for the meal.

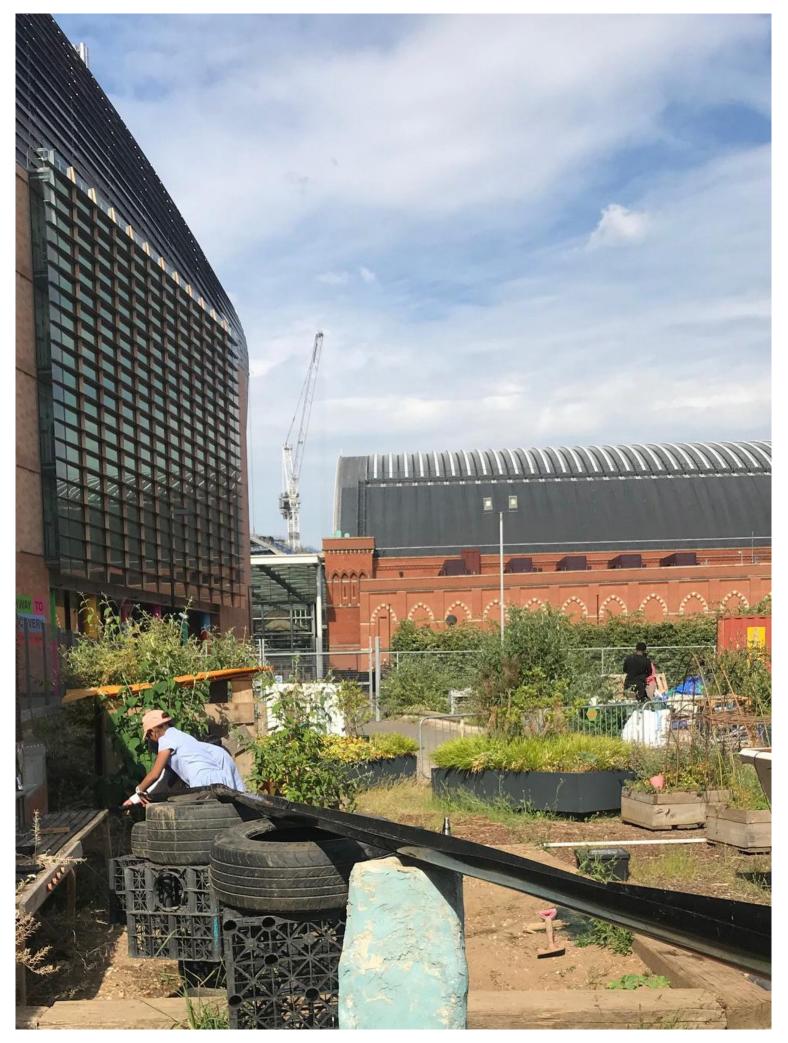
These ran alongside 47 Family Saturday sessions taking place weekly on a Saturday, which 110 families attended - over 250 participants. These sessions give local families the opportunity to be outdoors and connect to nature by exploring nature and wildlife, free play, getting hands dirty with gardening, carpentry and other practical activities. Shared cooking and eating ensures the sessions are intimate and we get to know each other and socialise.

Many of the children who join us on a Saturday then continue to stay with us for our youth Generator programme, continuing to gain experience, life long skills, a deeper connection to the world around them and inviting them to create positive change in their communities.

"We love it! It is an amazing space for families to connect and for children to learn and participate in the activities! The activities are fantastic and the staff are amazing"

Parent participant, July 2022





"The children love getting their hands dirty. They have loved the cooking sessions, mud wall building, making fire and gardening."

A Dragon Emerges and Gently Flicks its Tail

The spirit of the ancient River Fleet flows through our environment, connecting and weaving threads of experience from across the community, calling along the banks to bridge distant shores and differences, bringing people together through the sharing of stories. As the sun starts to warm the earth in spring, the sleeping dragon awakens and roars life into our tales and mysteries, and the world comes into life and light.

Our Heritage Lottery Funded programme - Voices of the Water - launched at the end of July 2022 with a water inspired summer school programme for 4 weeks. Our Voices of the Water programme takes inspiration from the hidden River Fleet which runs through Somers Town and under the Story Garden. On the banks of the hidden river many people now flourish and grow and stories are told and shared around lunches, log fires, community gatherings and in homes.

The Māori mythological story of Taniwha has become the dragon of the river Fleet - now central in the Voices of the Water project, providing a doorway into local history and an exploration of our relationship with the land and its resources.

Weaving old myths, modern science and storytelling, the Voices of the Water programme explores cultural memories of water and changing experiences as we consider the importance of water in a climate changing world.

"Can stories save the world? Are stories the best way to help humans understand what's going on? Are stories the best way to describe the invisible connections between all the beings? Taniwha the dragon inspired me.... the Dragon who lived in the River Fleet - a river which now passes under our feet in the story garden - many centuries ago, before human civilization and our greed had such destructive effects on the planet."

Lucy, Research Fellow.





Voices of the Water in a snapshot

To date we have:

Completed Phase 2 and 3 of a 2 year project to animate a dark blue hoarding at Phoenix Court. The canvas acts as a place for local people to document and explore their own stories, connections, myths and ideas around water, working with artists and facilitators and collectively creating a mural to transform a blank corner spot into a vibrant and evolving artwork. To date we have worked with 50 local children, Maria Fidelis Art department and 19 of their art students, The Mexican Gallery, 5 Bengali ladies who are residents of Somers Town and 8 Research Fellows who are young people that have graduated from our youth programmes and are now working with us as Action Researchers.

Worked with 50 local children over 4 weeks in the summer holidays exploring water stories and myths. This included: a water moon ritual, a trip to Camley Street Natural Park and to the Somers Town History Museum, and the opportunity to work with the artist Bryony Benge-Abbott to add to the Phoenix Court Mural, looking at sea creatures that were part of different cultural stories.

Engaged over 500 families with children under 5 in weekly water inspired storytelling in collaboration with Kindle Corner. Kindle Corner's Stories in Action, as part of the Voices of the Water programme created a space through storytelling where local children asked questions about saving water, recycling and not throwing items in the seas and rivers. The sessions sparked curious minds and ensured a greater range of local families were able to take part in the programme.

Trained 8 young people as Research Fellows, guiding them to become Action Researchers. As part of their training the young people became familiar with the local history of the area and its waterways through trips to the British Museum and the Canal Museum; created an exhibition of lost water species to mark Day of the Dead; took part in UCL Culture Performing Planet Activism; and produced a series of maps around the theme 'What does Water mean to you' taking inspiration from their cultures and experiences and guided by the local area of Kings Cross and the River Fleet. These maps will be used to visually depict the local area through a young person's eyes.

Collaborated with 5 local primary schools in Camden and Islington reaching 50 children. We journeyed to meet the River Fleet and find inspiration in forgotten history by visiting Hampstead Heath, Camley Street and the canal. We went pond dipping and found a newt hidden amongst the logs in the Camley Street woodlands. Life in our local water inspired us to learn about the herons, blood worms and the water boatman (insect found in our ponds). We used leaf rubbing, printing and magnifying glasses to witness the intricate patterns found in nature. We explored life in and around the canal. We told the story of Taniwa, making a stop start animation inclusive for non hearing children

Focusing the power of water to heal our bodies and minds and the planet through sessions with two GP Practices in Camden and Islington and Hopscotch Women's Centre working with 10 people. We explored memories of water from Bangladesh, which led to stories told and songs sung and tapestries woven.

"Like a river I have gone on a journey. I like swimming and in one month I am going to the water fountain and I went to the barge and saw a baby duckling. It was so fun."

Mikalya, young person.

"The fleet has asked me to widen my perspective and although at times I have missed the soil, the magic of the fleet and a hidden river under the pavement has captured my inspiration."

Charlotte, Education and Community Gardener.







Guiding Creative Activism for People and the Planet

Our Flagship youth programme the Generator programme guides young people between the ages of 9-16 to find their voice and self esteem and become responsible stewards towards the earth. We worked with 40 young people supporting them to connect to themselves, each other and nature.

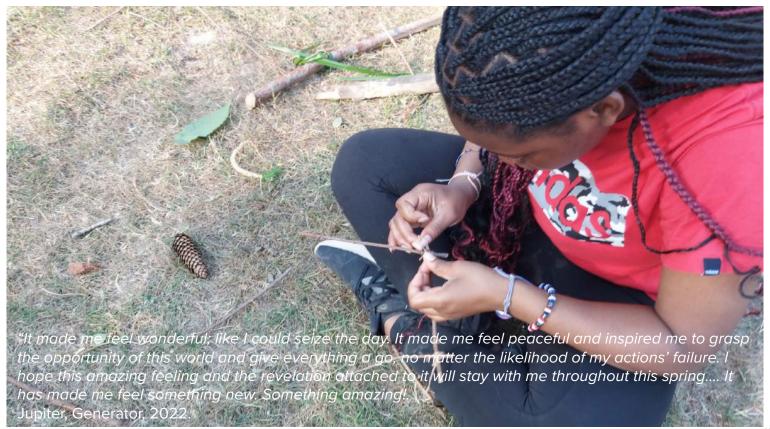
This year we focused our programme on the understanding of what it means to be stewards for the Earth and change makers in our community, creating opportunities for connection with the natural world and what we can learn from it.

We have woven with recycled textiles, we have created a mini food forest in the garden, supported our well being with yoga and silent walks, we have worked with wood and clay to make products for a sustainable winter market, we have explored the local history of Somers Town and the Regent's Canal as well design canopy for our floating garden. We made sure there was also space for spontaneous conversations and play.

In the light of climate change, we have learnt about young activists of the world and have been inspired by different ways of knowing, exploring values and writing journals to reflect on our time together and what it means to be part of this planet.

Our aim is to guide young people to find their voices, in whatever shape and form they come. Sometimes this comes through reflection and stillness and other times through performance or song. Our approach is based on creative and gentle activism - "Knowing where you are by knowing where you've been" guides our work, so that young people are equipped to navigate the local and the global, through immersing ourselves in the past and envisioning a better future.

Our work with young people culminates every year with a camping trip out of London, taking young people into the wilderness, disconnecting them from the city (and their phones!), sharing unique experiences and creating lots of opportunities for song, food, laughter, stories and fun.





Deepening our roots with Islington Communities

Despite the Story Garden being based in Camden, we continue to support and collaborate with Islington young people, children and adults through a number of programmes directly targeting Islington residents of all ages. This reach reflects our history on the King's Cross estate and will become increasingly more important as we work to deepen our relationships in Islington for the community co-creation of our new permanent home.

Our Friday Night Out sessions run fortnightly on Fridays in the Story Garden, offering cooking, gardening and making activities to 7-14 year olds, most of whom live in the Cally area of Islington. This year we worked with 23 young people from 'the Cally'. We meet them at the Bird Cage structure outside King's Cross station and walk down with the children to the Story Garden together. This walk might not seem like much, but for the children it is an opportunity to get to know the King's Cross area better and feel confident to walk around their neighbourhood.

The project's underlying theme is food education with a focus on healthy sustainable eating and learning about the cultural and environmental stories behind food. As well as cooking a nutritious vegetarian meal together, we offer gardening activities that teach the children about seasonality, how to grow their own food and when to harvest the food we eat.

"Thank you for teaching our children about real food and how to use a knife." Sabine, parent

For older residents in Islington we facilitate fortnightly Feel Good Fridays, reaching 11 people. There is a focus on wellbeing and garden therapy- bringing together embodied movement and mindfulness techniques with gardening, cooking, arts and crafts and learning about herbal remedies.

"It's good to be with nature. That's why I like to come here, to get out of my flat and away from the concrete jungle."

Nana, participant

"We have all the good things in life- beauty, music, good company, good food and making art together." Sherry, participant

In May 2022 we launched our Nurture with Nature sessions engaging isolated families with young children from Islington during the term times. The focus of these sessions was on connections - bringing parents with young children into the Story Garden to connect with each other through nature, gardening, cooking and crafts.

I love bringing Ysolde here, we love the Story Garden! We don't have a garden at home so it's so nice being in this amazing space in busy London".

Hannah, Parent and Participant



Our Community Plant Nursery

Our thriving plant nursery is full of life and colour. We have held 17 Community Plant sale days where local residents can come and pay what they can (or nothing at all). These sales support our wider work in the resident-led greening of Somers Town. We have gifted or taken small donations for plants to 250 local Somers Town residents so that they can start growing in their homes or areas.

"Thank you for the wonderful plants I collected today, they're great. I really enjoyed speaking with Emma, to very knowledgeable and welcoming. Thank you."

Johanna. Somers Town Resident

Community-led Growing and Greening

Alongside a busy year in the Story Garden, we worked with residents from the local housing estates in Somers Town to make the area greener, with a longer term aim to build a legacy of skills, knowledge and resources for the benefit of the Somers Town community.

Throughout the year we have provided opportunities for young people and local residents to become involved in shaping the local landscape. This is particularly important in Somers Town where access to green space is low, poverty levels are high, and local people often feel disconnected from the changes taking place in their area.

We have worked with local residents on 4 housing estates in Somers Town, identifying and developing greening and growing areas with 90 local residents who have no access to a garden.

We've supplied over 100 terracotta pots and starter growing kits to get people growing on their balconies, run drop-in workshops about composting or gardening skills, and have held on-site sessions supporting local food growers. Creating new wildlife habitats, planting fruit trees and revitalising tired ornamental planting have also added to urban greening.

We worked with residents to create a show garden for the Hampton Court Flower Show in July 2022, taking residents along to help install, and also later to see the whole show. The development of the garden was featured as part of Gardeners World 2022

We are present at local events run by partner organisations such as the Careers Fair at the Francis Crick Institute, where we were able to share our new role of Green Mentor, paid work experience supporting the Somers Town Garden team.







Celebrations

Our outreach work in Somers Town is supported by our community celebrations and events, marking seasons and cultural celebrations. This year we hosted 8 community events marking EID, the summer and winter solstices, and Day of the Dead and Nowroze- the Persian New Year. Through our celebration events, workshops and skill sharing sessions we have seen over 4000 people of all ages come together in the Story Garden to share food, stories, poetry, fun and laughter.







"I think I heard the Barge speaking to me...like a metal old whale whispering". Silvia, Senior Youth Programmes Coordinator

In October 2022 we launched the opening of our Floating Garden, moored off Granary Square, after a period of co-creation with local young people during the summer of 2022. We worked with young people to experiment with different building techniques and materials, including using reclaimed materials. Thanks to this approach an old bench that had been sitting in the Story Garden for years originally from Granary Square, has now been turned into planters on the Floating Garden.

As part of the summer making programme we worked with Copenhagen Youth Project and 55 young people to make herb planters using old scaffold boards. In the workshop we all found ourselves drawn to the boards with distinctive marks, imprints from their days on a building site.

In the final days before the launch, local construction companies stepped in to help; Wates organised scaffolders to finish the trellis structure and install our woven frames, Woodlands adorned the boat with festoon lighting whilst Fellows, Generators and Ambassadors eagerly dug in more plants.

Floating Garden reminded us of the importance of giving value to the process of co-creating. Sometimes this process requires us to slow down, and remember that value is not always in the end product but in the stories that are told and shared by all the hands that come together to create and make. We take these reflections forward as we start the co-creation process of our new permanent site.

"There is joy in breathing life back into something discarded, although there is nothing revolutionary about it; the core values of a circular economy are rooted in our ancestral past."





Respecting the Rhythm of Nature

As the winter sets in, the garden slows down; trees lose their leaves, plants hunker down or die back, there's a crispness to the air, a glow to the sun, new birds appear and some start for the south. In respect of the slowness and darkness that winter brings, this year saw us introduce reduced working hours for staff for 2 months over January and February. The gardens we work from teach us that winter is naturally a quieter time, the shorter and colder days lend themselves to slowing down and to building up our energy stores for the busyness of spring, summer and autumn. These winter months were spent doing less delivery and more reflections and learning, and more celebratory events with the local community focusing on wellbeing and people gathering around the warmth of our fires.

"At the end of this winter period I appreciate having been able to work with the seasons more - reduced hours has meant slower starts on dark days, and finishing earlier as the dark encloses again. I've searched for small signs to keep me going - cracks of blue sky on a cold day, frost patterns and anything warm and comforting."

Sue, Head of Gardens



Our Legacy In Somers Town and our new permanent home

Over the next five years we will be looking to develop our legacy in Somers Town by creating sustainable green spaces on underused pieces of land in local housing estates which will bring local people together, develop their skills and knowledge, support their health and wellbeing and improve the environment. This will take place whilst we initially continue to run our programmes in the Story Garden, and then eventually wind down our activities and move to our permanent site - 'The Triangle' (working name) - in the Caledonian Ward of Islington.

The new, permanent, garden will be built by the community and last for generations to come. Through community and youth workshops and programmes which started in March 2023 in the Story Garden, we will offer local people from Camden and Islington the opportunity to co-build the three structures on the site, each with a focus on a different type of sustainable construction. We feel it is important to offer residents, young people, children and families in Somers Town the opportunity to become involved in the early stages of this co-creation, so they have a connection to the new site as well as the opportunity to develop their skills by being a part of its early creation.

There will be a deliberate focus on 'slow architecture', emphasising the process of organic community creation, rather than a fast finished product. One of our key reflections as we move forward is an appreciation of this slowness and an understanding that learning from communities and nature in a genuine way requires a different approach.

Our gardens have and always will be spaces for people to reflect, connect with others and rediscover nature as home. They offer a different pace of life, stillness, song and togetherness, in which people find common ground across differences, in which we sit around fires and tell stories, in which we have our hands in the soil and exchange seeds, in which we make, create and see each other for all that we are, and from this space to imagine and build a more just world. This process takes time and we are excited about the possibilities of having this time to grow relationships with different people and nature with a 1000 year lease for our new site.





Finances and supporters

This year was a milestone year for Global Generation with our annual turnover being just over £1,000,000. We also worked on diversifying our income streams to ensure balance between our earned income and fundraised income and to develop new areas in our fundraised income streams.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank all of our supporters, many of whom have supported us over many years and are committed to our ways of working. We look forward to deepening our relationships with you as we raise the funds needed for our future plans.

"Global Generation produces havens that bring people together and inspire a feeling of peace in busy and chaotic urban environments. Since we've moved into the Somers Town neighbourhood, we've loved collaborating on projects that bring schools and school enterprises together and been inspired to unearth the voices of the water from the hidden Fleet River and bring a new green thread across the community. The Story Garden is a place of instant karma, and we can't wait to work on other neighborhood projects together in coming years"

Saul Klein, Phoenix Court.

