

Connecting Communities with Nature

2023 Grant Awards

With thanks to ongoing support and funding from Oxfordshire County Council, we have awarded grants OF £500 to five groups around Oxfordshire to deliver project that deepen people's connection to nature.

International Trees Foundation (ITF) with partner Refugee Resource

This collaborative project is running a series of visits for Refugees and Asylum seekers to local nature sites in Oxfordshire, working with Refugee Resource. The project is working with adults, children and young people who are currently receiving psychological, social or practical support from the organisation, to engage them in a series of woodland activity sessions. This is with a view to improving their physical and mental wellbeing, building their confidence and social interactions and giving them the opportunity to immerse themselves in nature and all the positive benefits that brings.



The project builds on a very successful series of taster sessions held during the summer of 2022 when Refugee Resource and ITF organised several family days out to local woodlands and farms in Oxfordshire; the days were well attended and greatly appreciated by the group and they left with an enthusiasm for more.

The first 'Healing in the Outdoors' event at the Oxford Botanic Gardens was a beautiful day to launch the project and the group really enjoyed themselves and left excited for more! Additional events are planned in part because ITF secured additional funding for a further programme of 10 visits thanks in part to this initial funding.

HomeStart Oxford

This project will provide a fun day during school half term on a particularly deprived estate in Witney. HomeStart plans to provide nature activities for the families - nature hunt, bug houses, bird feeders, planting and vegetable planters. Local organisations are bringing owls, gardening equipment, and making seed bombs and the group will also promote local parks, woods and free nature activities.

Banbury CAG/Bridge Street Community Garden (BSCG)

The garden partnered with the Sunrise Multicultural Project, who were already engaging a group of 11 female refugees and asylum seekers of various ages (3 - 55 years old) and nationalities (Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Brazil). Sunrise Multicultural Project realised the women would benefit from growing their vegetables locally, as they need access to more fresh food. They expressed a strong interest in spending time outdoors in our green space with others to combat a sense of isolation. The people in the group currently live in hotels, and would benefit from the opportunity to integrate more with the local community.

The image shows two versions of a flyer for 'FREE GARDENING SESSIONS AT BRIDGE ST. GARDEN IN COLLABORATION WITH SUNRISE MULTICULTURAL'. The left flyer is multilingual, with text in English, Urdu, Arabic, and French. The right flyer is in English and includes a map of the garden location at Bridge St. Garden, OX16 5QF. Both flyers mention 'PLANT VEGETABLE SEEDS AND MAKE NEW FRIENDS', 'CHILDREN ACCOMPANIED BY PARENTS WELCOME', and 'FREE REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE' on Monday 8th May and Monday 29th May, from 11 AM to 1 PM. The flyers also mention the 'CONNECTED COMMUNITIES GROUP' and the 'BANBURY COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP'.

Though challenging to establish, the Garden Coordinator developed a way of passing information on to as many people as possible within the hotels. There was a great turn out in part because they created a flyer that was translated into 11 languages by various multicultural volunteers involved in the garden. Additional events are scheduled including free gardening workshops inviting people from the hotels and more stabilised community members alike. The Garden Coordinator visited the group of women a couple of times, and held conversations with various participants from different parts of the world about the types of vegetables they would like to grow at the community garden. She is now in the process of preparing their own hexagonal planter for them to use when they come to the garden next. Additional funding was secured to purchase the soil needed as well as future programming.

Oxfordshire African Caribbean Mutual Association (OACMA)

OACMA are looking to set up and run a community garden in the Blackbird Leys area for social and mindfulness wellbeing. The garden will include a sensory area, bee hives, high raised flower beds and vegetable and herb patches. It would also give teenagers the opportunity to connect with nature by learning about bees, benefits of using herbs and how to set up a sensory garden. The sensory garden will be a space for people experiencing loneliness, isolation, anxiety or depression so their mood, physical fitness and health may be improved. Initial site planning is underway.

Oxford Community Action (OCA)

OCA wanted to continue organising family-friendly hikes to help address the ongoing health inequalities in certain demographics in Oxford. By organising a car sharing scheme and a hike led by experienced people from within the diverse communities of Oxford, a sense of community and fun is established! The hikes are open to everyone, offering support for novices via an established local hiking network. In May, the group took 21 people to Winnats Pass.



The Communities and Nature grants programme was made possible with support and funding from Oxfordshire County Council