Growing Together Project

Home-grown food is made easy and fun with the Growing Together Project run by the South Riverside Community Development Centre. The project began in January 2020, funded by the Landfill Disposal Tax Community Scheme. Riverside is one of the most built-up and congested areas in Wales. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation shows areas of Riverside as the fifth worst area in terms of green spaces. To help increase biodiversity in Riverside the volunteers and participants of the Growing Together Project grow flowers, herbs and veg at home and in community spaces. This has become exceedingly popular during the pandemic as the diverse communities in Riverside help each other learn how to grow. We spoke with the lead of the Growing Together Project, Louise Gray, to find out more about this thriving Project:

When asked about how the start of the pandemic in March of 2020 affected the project, Louise commented how "It has completely transformed what is possible. The project has needed to respond to the huge challenge faced by people living in cramped, inner city terraced housing during Lockdown. The focus has been on wellbeing and the pleasure and relaxation gained from growing at home. This has in turned started to address the issues of lack of biodiversity in the area with an emphasis on promoting pollinators." During COVID-19, the Growing Together Project has brought the community at Riverside closer through a series of plant Give-Aways throughout the summer and autumn where over 650 households attended. Follow-on growing skills were nurture through fortnightly Zoom sessions with the support of Sophie from Cardiff Salad City along with a 90-member self-help group on WhatsApp for informal ongoing support. The prospect of growing your own produce is made far less daunting and more exciting when successes as well as struggles are shared.

Louise went on to say how the pandemic has been difficult for Riverside residents with, on average of 4.4 people per household, often three generations who have been locked down with very small front and back gardens. Being able to grow something in your garden has brought families together, and it has encouraged a bit of lightness, fun and inter-generational learning into a really difficult situation." Growing your own food has many advantages, it is fresher than buying at supermarkets, it is more cost-effective, and it is better for the environment.

Over 600 households in the Riverside area have benefitted from the Project, and the next phase is to encourage residents to remove a few paving stones from their front gardens. Rather than high-maintenance pots, planting directly into the soil is more sustainable, it will help create pollinator corridors through the streets of Riverside as well as potentially mitigate flash flooding. Louise is planning how she can help facilitate the capture and dissemination of the broad and impressive growing knowledge of residents who are originally from other parts of the world. "Some people are adapting that knowledge to the climate here and learning how to grow their traditional crops here in the Welsh capital," Louise explains. As well as growing edible plants, the Growing Together Project also aids in beautifying the local area with plants and herbs in hanging baskets, street planters, and mini garden boxes, made by volunteers. If you live in South Riverside and think your street needs some greenery or you would like a mini garden box of your own, or want more information about volunteering for the Growing Together Project, you can get in contact with Louise Gray, the lead of the Growing Together Project, via: louisegray@srcdc.org.uk : 07951353511.

The Growing Together Project aids in "changing our lifestyles and to tread more lightly on the earth, to participate in doing our bit to live greener lives and address climate change." Louise joyfully welcomes anyone to "come on down and join the fun! There is no sense of you need skills to join, this is all about complete beginners and rolling up their sleeves and getting involved."