



FOOD DURHAM - COUNTY DURHAM'S FOOD PARTNERSHIP

SCHOOL FOOD AND GROWING PROJECTS

Over the years there has been support from a variety of organisations for food and growing projects in schools and many excellent examples of schools delivering areas of the curriculum through gardening and food-related activities. This case study looks at some past and current projects that OASES, REfUSE and the NHS Youth Practitioner Team have supported in schools across County Durham (and beyond), often delivering food and growing activities influenced by different drivers such as the climate emergency, the escalating biodiversity crisis, food insecurity and health and wellbeing.

It can be useful to re-visit projects that have come to end to ensure that some of the tools of engagement, activities and curriculum resources are not forgotten and the lessons learned are used to strengthen future programmes in support of a food system that is good for people, the planet and the economy. This case study has been produced by Food Durham, the County Durham Food Partnership, based on work by Food Durham partners, with the aim of giving a flavour of how schools are involved with food and growing activities.

SUPPORTING AND DELIVERING SCHOOL FOOD AND GROWING ACTIVITIES IN COUNTY DURHAM

OASES

OASES, Outdoor and Sustainability Education Specialists, have been successfully delivering and promoting outdoor learning and global sustainability education for nearly 30 years. The charity's vision is to create a more sustainable world where all children can thrive. OASES seeks to engage young people with the natural world, helping them to understand and appreciate the planet that supports them.

OASES use their wealth of experience to deliver food and growing programmes using a range of approaches and techniques from planting and managing edible school grounds and orchards, developing growing areas with school communities so that food and growing is embedded into the curriculum, to projects that are focussed on food and growing to improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Much of the work has included wider community growing either within school grounds or in other community venues.

The different programmes delivered by OASES have focussed on themes. Growing Together, funded by Children in Need, delivered benefits for both family health and food security. Family-learning after-school clubs were delivered over a two-year period, creating growing areas in schools where families were encouraged to grow collectively or in family plots. Families responded positively, taking great pride in their home-grown vegetables and learning easy cooking skills. Edible Playgrounds, funded through Trees for Cities, focussed on designing edible school grounds, including the use of fruit trees, bushes and edible flowers, creating biodiversity benefits as well as promoting food and growing activities.



Growing Healthy, funded by Durham County Council's Public Health team, had health and wellbeing at its core. The programme was designed to provide access to and tasting of fresh food, encourage physical activity and promote the benefits of being outdoors. OASES also worked with the school kitchen staff and Durham County Council catering team to ensure that the produce grown in the school garden was used in the kitchen.

More recently, the OMEGA project - Olfactory, Mindful Eating and Gardening Activities - was delivered in partnership with Sunderland City Council and Together for Children. This exciting and innovative project connected people to their food through the practical hands-on experience of gardening and growing, cooking from scratch, slowing down and taking the time to taste and smell what they grew and ate. It put into practice the latest research (Burgess Watson, D.L. & Cooper, C.M., 2021. Visceral geographic insight through a 'source to senses' approach to food flavour. *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(1), pp.111-135) around smell training to build up positive associations with healthy food. Appreciation of food is more about smell than taste - olfactory primacy - and so engaging activities were used throughout the delivery of this project to promote the use of smell when discussing and eating food. The overarching aim of this work was to improve the health of families in Sunderland. The project included work with both schools and communities and the link with community groups, for example through the Warm Spaces programme, was vital to ensure harder to engage families were involved.



Growing Healthy was funded through Durham County Council's Public Health team. The focus was on health and wellbeing through providing access to and tasting of fresh food, encouraging physical activity and promoting the benefits of being outdoors. The project engaged the whole school community in the design, development, use and maintenance of a school growing space. A Growing Healthy Team was set up in each school to design or revamp a growing area and recruit volunteers from the community. The OASES team supported the work in the school through assemblies, staff training, running sessions with different year groups, establishing after-school growing clubs and sharing good practice between schools. OASES also worked with the school kitchen staff and Durham County Council catering team to ensure that the produce grown in the school garden was used in the kitchen.

The experience gained from delivering a diverse range of food and growing programmes in schools over many years has resulted in OASES' successful Get Growing programme and the incorporation of food, growing, edible school grounds and food waste into the organisation's Climate Friendly School initiative. Get Growing is helping schools to design, create and use growing areas. How Get Growing is delivered is unique to each school, but often encompasses:

- Garden design
- Garden creation
- Planting plans
- Curriculum-linked activities
- Gardening clubs
- Teacher and volunteer training

The most useful part of the project was "being guided by experience and being able to see how it's done."

Class Teacher, Witton Gilbert Primary





“Through seeking to become a Climate Friendly School, pupils have already become more aware of the climate crisis and are excited to see, and be part of, the school taking action to become more climate friendly.”

Neville's Cross Primary School

The Climate Friendly Schools initiative aims to help all schools to act more sustainably. It helps schools to make more informed decisions; ensuring the school estate, grounds, governance and systems do not damage the planet and staff can confidently integrate sustainability messages into their teaching. The programme enables pupils to understand the implications of the choices that they make. Growing, food and food choices are a big part of the programme.

School can gain Climate Friendly School Status by taking steps to become more climate literate and take climate action. Using the free website tool, schools audit their campus, curriculum, community, culture and futures, create a 'Climate Friendly Action Team' to engage their whole school community and produce a 'Climate Action Plan'. More information at www.climatefriendlyschoools.org.uk.

OASES support is available to all schools, either self-funded or as part of a grant from other funders. Schools can also choose to become a 'Climate Friendly Schools Enhanced Member' and receive access to additional online resources as well as virtual support and access to the Climate Friendly Schools Member Network.

More information:

Get Growing - Joshua Radner Joshua.Radner@oases.org.uk

Climate Friendly Schools - Emma Hawthorne emma.hawthorne@oases.org.uk

REFUSE

REfUSE's vision is to show the value in things, places and people that are unjustly wasted or overlooked. Each month REfUSE intercepts around 12 tonnes of food that would otherwise go to waste from retailers around the northeast and redistributes it. They are passionate about educating the next generation about the value of food and do this through their education project "Eat Smart". REfUSE deliver the 'Eat Smart' programme with schools in County Durham, which has a clear focus on tackling food waste in primary schools. Eat Smart was developed and trialled by BIND in Newcastle and is funded by the Kavli Trust.

Eat Smart is a student-led, climate-focused educational programme which looks at food waste created in schools, helps children to understand the importance of reducing food waste from a young age, and encourages the children themselves to make decisions about how to affect change. It is designed to engage pupils in the causes of and solutions to food waste.

The schools involved work alongside REfUSE over a full half term, forming a Waste Warrior team, which collects data from the entire school estate, including detailed measuring of food waste. This data feeds into an Action Plan. A second audit is used to measure the effectiveness of their interventions and signposts the next steps for waste reduction. Waste Warriors have encompassed children from Year 1 to Year 6, selected in differing ways from School Councils, Rights Respecting Groups to a single Year 4 group.

Highlights of Eat Smart have included the leading role children have taken in decision making, the value of information dissemination in school, the opportunity created for children to challenge decision makers about their motivations and seeing the potential to reduce plate waste over a short period of time. Schools have reduced food waste by up to 29%, with one year group reducing their plate waste by 48%. CO2 emissions saved in one school alone added up to 3520kg/year. These messages have also been heard and acted upon by families at home.

The greatest impact has been in schools where the catering company has a close relationship with the school and kitchen staff have been fully engaged in the project. The challenge now is to work with larger catering contractors.

“The children are making conscious decisions regarding their food choices. There is also lots of talk about the children being proactive at home too.”

Lead Teacher Cestria Primary School

“Thank you so much! The project has been extremely valuable and has certainly changed our thinking in school. The figures were eye-opening and it has been wonderful to work collaboratively to improve these.”

Head teacher, Burnside Primary School



More information:

**www.refusedurham.org.uk/outreach/
Naomi Priestley naomirefuse@gmail.com**

THE NHS YOUTH PRACTITIONER TEAM

The NHS Youth Practitioner Team works across County Durham with young people aged 11-19 years (up to age 25 for young people with SEND). Their Growing Healthy project promotes healthy eating and uses food and growing activities to tackle social isolation and loneliness in young people. The Youth Practitioner team are part of 0-25 Family Health Service. The team was developed in 2021 and is made up of 5 Youth Practitioners who deliver a person-centred service across County Durham with Young People aged 11-19 years (up to age 25 for young people with SEND). The team work on a 1:1 basis and develop group sessions based on the needs of the individual communities they work in. Referrals for the service come from schools, CAMHS, within the 0-25 Family Health Service or the Local Authority. The work is aimed at young people who are socially vulnerable, experience loneliness and isolation, have low level mental health issues or additional special needs that impact on their wellbeing. The intervention helps young people improve their emotional wellbeing, encourages healthy lifestyles, develops confidence, and promotes key life skills including problem solving, teamwork, social and communication skills and resilience.

The gardening aspects of the service are often based around community allotments, where the Youth Practitioners can engage the young people in growing fruit and vegetables, creating sensory gardens, encouraging wildlife friendly gardening and Forest School activities. Being based in community settings provides opportunities for intergenerational work and enables the young people to take part in the John Muir Award.

More information: HDFT.11-25youthpractitioners@nhs.net

SUMMARY

This is just a selection of school-based food and growing projects that have and are running across County Durham. There are many lessons to be learned about how we continue to support schools, ensure food and growing is embedded within the curriculum and how we make the most of school/community links to mutual benefit.

More information: Jill Essam, jill.essam@oases.org.uk, 03000 260535, www.fooddurham.net

