



## **Project Report for Dominic Beer Memorial Trust Trust Links – Growing Together Westcliff**

The Growing Together Westcliff social and therapeutic community garden project supports the wellbeing, recovery and employment opportunities of people experiencing mental health problems, with learning disabilities and other disabilities. Over the last year the project supported more than 95 adults, most of whom have severe mental health problems.

Members and volunteers work together in the award winning one acre garden, which includes a vegetable plot, wildlife area, herbaceous border and sensory garden. The garden continues to develop well and the chickens are well loved by members. We have extended the pond and improved signage around the site and installed a waterless composting toilet as an additional facility at the garden.

We provide practical, emotional and listening help and support to project members in a holistic person-centred way. In partnership with Southend Adult Community College we provide accredited training in horticulture and vocational skills including first aid, food hygiene, manual handling and health and safety. A variety of other positive activities are organised including weekly yoga classes, music, art, football, creative writing and woodwork as well as a weekly Job Club to help members find suitable employment. Over the course of the year, the project supported 95 adults, the majority of whom have mental health problems.

Our community events continued to thrive over the year and we had an incredibly successful May Fayre, Christmas Open Day and Seed Potato Day in partnership with SEEORG.





*The May Fayre is a popular community event*

The vegetable garden at Growing Together Westcliff has been rebuilt with brick paving, arches and fencing in a Victorian style, with funding from Tesco's Bags of Help scheme. A new decking path, platform and arbour have been built on the route to the orchard and beehive area with funding from Scope, enabling the area to be fully accessible to those with mobility issues.

We have successfully obtained planning permission to develop the site to include a new training room as a side extension to the main building, replace the polytunnels and sales hut with a Victorian Greenhouse and replace the various outbuildings with a multipurpose outbuilding. This is all subject to further detailed planning and funding.

In the Autumn 2016 and Spring 2017 we delivered a Gardening for Wildlife Course funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund at Growing Together Westcliff. This course was thoroughly enjoyed by twelve learners and included building wildlife habitats, bird feeders and identifying insects.

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As part of the Channel 4 programme 'Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast', Jamie Oliver and Jimmy Doherty came to film the launch of the Community Fridge scheme at Growing Together Westcliff. The programme was broadcast in February 2017 and resulted in a lot of positive publicity for the project.

Growing Together Westcliff has played a key role in turning around the lives of many adults with mental illness in the local area. Please see the press cutting below, which gives an example of one of our beneficiaries.

We are most grateful to the Dominic Beer Memorial Trust for a grant of £1,000 towards our project costs. This grant helped pay for tools and seeds for the garden and for staff to support members attending the project. Growing Together provides a crucial lifeline for some of the most vulnerable people in society and grants such as these are essential to keep the project going.

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## Charity's 15 years of offering much-needed support for people with mental health issues



Charity's 15 years of offering much-needed support for people with mental health issues  
24 Mar 2017 / [Robyn Pierce](#)

WITH mental health issues becoming an increasing problem, one south Essex charity has been hard at work over the last 15 years offering much-needed support.

Trust Links was formed in 2002 after churches pointed out that there was nothing for people suffering with mental health issues to do in the daytime.

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As well as training, counselling and support, its biggest project is the Growing Together Gardens. The therapeutic gardens get people out in the great outdoors, help them make friends and gain new skills,

Chief executive Matt King said: “It has taken years to get to where we are now and it has evolved and developed from there.

“There are such benefits of the garden, we help a variety of people ranging from people with issues of anxiety, depression and stress to those suffering with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and those with learning disabilities.

“It has a social side to it where individuals can meet other people and make friends but also has physical elements – people are out gardening.

“It also improves individual’s mental health, from their self-esteem and confidence. They get to feel part of the community and feel valued.”

The charity currently supports 90 people and gets about five referrals every week.

Jason Gloster, 34, of Southchurch Road, Southend has been using the service for two years and knows first hand how vital it is. He said: “I never thought I would get this far. It was a slippery slope downhill for me and I couldn’t see things changing, but Trust Links really opened a door for me.

“I help with the chickens and in the garden and I love it. It gives me a sense of purpose and makes me feel human again. I go three days a week and there are lots of lovely people there. They have really helped me build my confidence and make me feel like I am achieving something – the alternative was sitting indoors doing nothing. I have even started my own business – Green and Tidy – which is gardening and litter picking. It is nice to give back and feel proud of the area.”

There are therapeutic gardens in [Westcliff](#), [Shoebury](#), Thundersley and soon to be [Rochford](#). visit [trustlinks.org](http://trustlinks.org)

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