



*The Garden Classroom*

**IMPACT REPORT**  
**2021-22**

# Welcome from the Chair

2021-22 has been an extraordinary year for The Garden Classroom. Emerging from the global pandemic, we have found ourselves facing unprecedented demand for our services from schools, local councils and the general public. At the same time, we were in the middle of a significant cost-of-living crisis, which is still increasing as we write this report. This has led, on the one hand, to a great demand for access to free green spaces and the low-cost, fun educational activities TGC provides and, on the other hand, significant squeeze on public and private finances. We have more children, young families and schools than ever wanting to take part in our programmes. However, the funding for such activities has been far from reliable as local councils and schools struggle to pay for our work and corporate fundraising has become more difficult due to inflationary pressures.

We would not have been able to meet these twin challenges of growing demand and falling funding without the unwavering dedication and commitment of our fantastic team: our staff, our freelancers and volunteers. Our small staff team welcomed 30,000 participants to our programmes, more than double the amount we received during 2018-19 (the last pre-Covid year). Our core staff were supported by a superb team of freelance outdoor education specialists and trained volunteers, who continue to generously give their time supporting TGC. I would like to give my sincere

thanks to all our staff in what has been a very busy but rewarding year.

I also want to thank our supporters and funders, who have helped us step up to meet the growing demand:

- Islington and Hackney Council who continue to provide free space and support as well as direct funding.
- All our Corporate Partners but, in particular, our long-standing relationships with Pinsent Masons and Vexour Farm.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Trustees for providing constructive challenge and oversight and, of course, our CEO and Founder Marnie Rose, who stepped back into the role of CEO following some difficult times for TGC. Together we have delivered an extraordinary number of positive outdoor learning experiences, from story circles in the local park to week-long residentials in the countryside. We now look forward, hopefully, to a more predictable period of programme delivery.



**Robbie Burns,**  
*Chair of Trustees*



# Introduction from the CEO

**The past year has shown our TGC team at its very best:** we have been creative, proactive, engaging, flexible and resilient. As a result, we have been able to deliver a record number of outdoor learning experiences to more local children, schools, families, individuals and partner organisations than ever in our 12-year history.

These successes have not come without a cost. Our small team of staff, freelancers and volunteers has worked at the limits, and sometimes beyond the limits, of our capacity. Every single week that TGC was operational in 2021-22 we delivered 28 sessions for almost 700 visitors. As CEO, my focus in the past year has had to be on our post-pandemic resilience and the long-term sustainability of our operations against this backdrop of growing demand and insecure funding.

During the year, my attention has therefore been on developing and supporting our senior leadership team and putting into place robust financial and reporting structures to underpin our work. At the same time, we have all been focused on fundraising and growing our network of supporters, partners and funders.

It has been striking how the cost-of-living crisis is highlighting the importance of green spaces: they are free to access, provide a vast range of learning and engagement activities and are on our doorstep. Much work has gone into supporting those hardest hit by poverty, from ensuring that we provide healthy snacks during our sessions, to offering heavily subsidised termly education sessions for local schools.

As we all know, Climate Change remains the burning issue of the day. We are working with local schools on innovative and creative ways to integrate climate change and sustainability not just as a separate subject, but across the entire curriculum. We are also providing a wide range of opportunities for local communities to engage with nature, through training, learning, playing and planting. In this way, we remain hopeful that we continue to sow the seeds of help to educate a new generation to enjoy and protect our natural world.



*Marnie Rose, CEO  
The Garden Classroom*

# Who We Are

## OUR VISION AND HISTORY

The Garden Classroom (TGC) exists to provide high quality programmes that cultivate an interest in the natural world in order to understand and protect it and to benefit from all that an appreciation and connection with nature brings.

TGC was set up in 2008 by founder Marnie Rose. Together with founder Trustee Rosey Lyall they have grown the charity steadily and carefully since then, diversifying our range and depth of programmes.

TGC is headquartered in a tiny park keeper's hut on Newington Green, in Islington, and has classroom facilities in nearby King Henry's Walk Garden and across North London. From here, we deliver a wide range of educational activities, programmes for the general public and outdoor education training across London and the South East.

## OUR AIMS

- To advance education, particularly amongst children, young people and families from inner city areas, by providing creative outdoor experiences that inspire and educate while nurturing a respect for the natural environment.
- To provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation or other leisure time occupation for such children, young people and families with the object of improving their mental health and well-being and enabling them to enjoy the physical, emotional and social benefits that come from having a connection with nature.



# Our Volunteers

We would not be able to do our work without our group of impressive and dedicated local volunteers. They support a wide range of activities that range from helping with our Trustee work to setting up site for our countryside residences, with everything else in between: setting up education sessions, cleaning up after a session, looking after small groups of children during outdoor activities, and supporting our training programmes.

All TGC volunteers are DBS checked and receive training before they support our programmes.

# Impact Highlights

**1,244**  
SESSIONS  
DELIVERED!

**30,000**  
VISITS!

**13,320**  
UNIQUE  
BENEFICIARIES!



AN AVERAGE OF **68** VISITS  
TO **28** SESSIONS EVERY WEEK!



'Sessions' are counted as a half day of activity. 'Beneficiaries' are unique beneficiaries i.e. one individual counted once regardless of repeat visits. 'Visits' refers to all individuals attending any one sessions.

# Impact: Education

Our education programmes provide curriculum-linked learning to primary school groups in hyper-local parks and gardens. They are delivered by a team of former teachers and volunteers passionate about nature and tackling climate change, with lesson plans and activities carefully designed by our own educational specialists and constantly adapted as educational contexts and requirements change.

360  
HALF DAY  
SESSIONS  
DELIVERED

## *The story last year:*

- The education department continued to deliver our curriculum-linked programme for primary and early years classes in local green spaces. At the same time, we have been increasingly designing and delivering whole school programmes such as our innovative “Climate Change for Kids” and our “Clean Air Day” programmes.
- We continue to deliver a programme specifically linked to the science curriculum for the London Borough of Islington at the Islington Ecology Centre, Gillespie Park.
- Other programmes include our popular bee education sessions, and our Special Educational Needs (SEN) programmes including accredited Plant Care and Land Maintenance courses at King Henry’s Walk Garden.



9,800  
PARTICIPANTS



8,400  
UNIQUE  
BENEFICIARIES



“The children and staff LOVED their Recovery and Wellness Days ...Being immersed in nature and having the opportunity to explore and learn through play outdoors was wonderful for the children. I lost count of how many said “I love this” or “this is so much fun” throughout the day... The staff too enjoyed the luxury of having time and space to talk with each child from their class and nurture bonds which are fundamental in primary school. Such a positive way to start a school year, particularly following the national lockdown this year. “When can we do this again?”

*Kirstie Stroud, Deputy Head,  
Duncombe Primary School*



# Impact: Urban Forest School

Delivered as weekly sessions throughout the year, Urban Forest School enables children to have regular immersion in nature and to establish a deep connection with a green space local to their school through exploration, play and activities such as tool use and fire making.



## *The story last year:*

- 2021/22 was an exciting year for the programme as it was our first full year of delivery. Working with children across every season for a full 30 sessions enabled us to build strong relationships with children and teachers and gave an opportunity to witness the positive impact long term, regular connection could have with the young people we work with. The year enabled the team to work on creating a seminal, meaningful, full-class Forest School model that brings the approach to urban children who otherwise would not have the opportunity.
- The possibility of an uninterrupted year paved the way for the development of more robust and consistent approaches to monitoring the programme's impact. This included the recording of weekly facilitator reflections and the opportunity for in-depth interviews with participant teachers which gave an enlightening insight into how the sessions positively impacted on children's well-being. Research was also carried out on our sessions as part of a PHD thesis looking at the impact of Forest School on urban children.

DELIVERED  
**436**  
SESSIONS  
ACROSS THE  
SEASONS

TO  
**626**  
UNIQUE  
BENEFICIARIES

CREATING  
**9,463**  
EXPERIENCES



## *Impact: Urban Forest School*



- As the programme expanded we had the opportunity to grow and develop a fantastic team of facilitators and volunteers. We forged strong links with TGC's Forest School trainees who went on to become volunteers and freelancers on our UFS programme.

**“The children had the freedom, time and space to learn and demonstrate independence that they don't always have time for in school. They also gained an increased awareness of their actions through team activities”.**

*Year 3 teacher, Robert Blair*



- As we expanded into new sites across Islington and Hackney we faced logistical challenges such as how to make sites suitable for Forest School activities and how to ensure facilitators had access to the necessary resources. In response to this, the department developed 'UFS kit boxes' which are stored at each site and we worked with landowners to improve sites - for example by working with Islington Council to leave some areas left to grow wild for the benefit of biodiversity and as a learning example.

# Impact: Training and Events

In the second year of existence, TGC's Training department focused on establishing a year-round programme of accredited training including CPD for schools and individuals and responding to commissions for bespoke courses and events, building a growing reputation for high quality training experiences in London and Kent.

*Our training activities had 1,634 visits to 102 half days sessions for 638 unique beneficiaries during the year.*

## *The story last year:*

- The Training department delivered both accredited training in Forest School and Outdoor First Aid and was delighted to qualify a first cohort of Level 3 Forest School leaders through TGC's ITC First accredited training centre. We also supported Bright Start Islington in their mission to train all employees in Level 1 Forest School, and key staff members as Forest School Leaders as a commitment to embedding outdoor approaches to traditional under-5s services in the borough.
- In addition to accredited training, the department delivered staff INSET for Islington-based schools to introduce LiNE (Learning in Natural Environments) and piloted Workplace Wellbeing days in nature for companies and organisations leading to commissioned staff activation training to be delivered in 22-23.
- Guest practitioners and speakers Jon Cree and Alison Kriel from the environment and education sectors added a wealth of experience and a range of voices to short courses and a sold-out 'Reimagining Education' event co-hosted by London Wildlife Trust at Camley Street Nature Park.





"I learned lots of useful skills! which opened up lots of new possibilities in terms of what we're able to do in a given time frame. We've just used a lot of our new skills on camp, and I loved feeling at ease introducing even very small children to sharp tools, and establishing that calm space we'd enjoyed during the training session, too. But for me, just knowing a few good knots feels a bit like knowing how to do magic! Especially when time is tight, suddenly being able to very quickly realise an idea, have it work brilliantly, and then very rapidly dismantling it again without leaving a trace (and ropes intact and ready for the next thing) is so immensely satisfying!"

*Steph, Grasmere Primary School.*



# Impact: Community

For TGC's Community department, 21-22 was a year of great growth; of reaching more people, particularly those from harder to reach groups, building partnerships and relationships to strengthen our offers and developing new nature connection programmes to meet the needs of the community.

*The Community activities had a total of 6,667 visits to 236 half day sessions for 3,366 unique beneficiaries, representing 25% of all TGC's beneficiaries for the year and just under 20% of all the charity's activities for the year.*



## The story last year:

- We delivered a wide range of activities for ages 0-80 including Wellbeing Walks, Nature Art & Craft, Festivals, Events & Holiday Clubs and Community Gardening sessions as well as year-round 'Little Explorers', TGC's popular drop in nature play activity for under-5s
- Key to the department is TGC's ongoing formal seven year partnership with Islington Council's Parks Department, from which much of our activity and innovation flows. Additionally, in 21-22 we developed several key relationships and partners, including the Parks for Health initiative with Islington and Camden councils, Bright Start, Islington-based Tall Stories Theatre Company and Hackney Council's Parks team.

## Impact: Community

- We created social prescribing programmes, supported by link workers from Age UK and other local grassroots charities and looking ahead, we see social prescribing, and particularly green social prescribing as a rich vein of potential for TGC, keying into preventative health agendas and contributing to the national picture.
- Through feedback and anecdotes we know the value and the need for TGC's outreach activities which demonstrate a sizeable shift in attitude towards understanding of the need for connection between communities and nature. With a changing funding landscape on the horizon, there is apprehension over the sustainability of our community programmes and we will need to remain flexible and responsive in order to meet the demand for services.

“For new mums we need this, a purpose - to get out and connect to the world again. It allows my days to be filled with a purpose, I couldn't recommend it enough for new parents and all the trauma that comes with our babies being born in the pandemic - they need this too!”

*Little Explorers parent*





# Impact: Countryside

TGC's countryside programmes offer camping residentials at our flagship site in Hobbs Hill, Chiddingstone and day visits at The Quadrangle in Shoreham, Kent for London primary schools. Last year, we were delighted to offer a pilot programme for wild camping in Ryewell Woods and explore exciting new countryside venues in the South Downs.



## The story last year:

- Our countryside programme of camping residentials and day visits continues to grow and thrive, with further new projects in the pipeline
- Our programmes are focused on giving a unique opportunity to children from areas of multiple deprivation to experience the countryside
- Our specialised staff and volunteers are trained in child-focused and trauma-informed practice, and are able to support and engage children from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences
- We develop and nurture very special local partnerships with farmers and landowners including the South Downs National Park, Vexour Farm, The Bellhurst Conservation Trust and The Quadrangle Trust



**DELIVERED**  
**106**  
**HALF-DAY**  
**SESSIONS**

**311**  
**UNIQUE**  
**BENEFICIARIES**



## KINGS ON THE HILL

*A Poem collab by Zehkaari (age 11) with academic mentor Roderick and five other year 6 Kingsmead Primary School, Hackney children*

Trees swaying, fire dancing, water flowing, flowers blooming, smile on me.

Our young innocent faces, running round, carefree.

Soft warm breeze, stroking our faces, the forest so calm, bugs on our palms saying hi.

Our wishes, there under the sky forever.

Skipping jumping, oh what fun, as a youth I too would run.

Our love for the forest weighs a tonne.

Quietly leaving, Children's laughter, the happy ever after.

