



2024-25

# Moulsecoomb Forest Garden & Wildlife Project

Annual Charity Report



Registered charity number 1120073



## Moulsecoomb Forest Garden & Wildlife Project

### CHARITY REPORT 2024-25

There's been plenty to celebrate during Moulsecoomb Forest Garden's 30th anniversary year. Our little garden oasis has grown from a half-abandoned allotment site into a wildlife haven that supports adults with learning disabilities and children struggling in mainstream education. And it's home for an abundance of wildlife who have taken up residence.



Highlights of the year included our annual open day, which turned into a special Forest Garden Birthday celebration in July. We were selected to be part of the Brighton Photo Fringe festival, involving our volunteers in all stages of this brilliant photography project, with our pictures exhibited on the seafront and at Moulsecoomb train station alongside our revamped bee and butterfly bank. Our new compost bins, courtesy of Brighton & Hove Food Partnership 'Food Use Places' are almost too good to put waste in.



Our regular workdays are Tuesdays and Fridays, where we support around 65 people a week, as well as working in schools, and in smaller sessions in the garden supporting over 80 pupils a week.

Lioncare children are making Tuesdays very busy, on top of all our regular activities and sessions, with our new trainee chef Theo cooking up a storm with Jo. Lioncare cares for children with complex needs, and their head told us that our work with their pupils has "exceeded my expectations."

One of the students said "I've been coming up here since September. I like it because it's calm, it helps me forget some things that are going on. If I didn't come here, I probably would have been excluded from school. There are nice views. I do lots of things here that make me feel good. I enjoy pond dipping and looking at the newts. I like doing the work in the garden, and I also help sometimes with the cooking. The people are all nice and the food is amazing"



Another Lioncare student said *"I don't like being in care, but I've realised I've got to make the most out of the situation because I spent my whole life caring for other people and for the first time I am being cared for."*

In the Easter and summer holidays, Moulsecoomb Primary children had great fun at the Forest Garden holiday club doing everything from archery to building camps in the woods; cooking pizzas, making natural art, and generally running around - until Jools calmed everyone down with her silent disco.



Being an AQA centre means we can support pupils working towards formally recognised records of achievement. Our outdoor education is led by Pat, and this year we awarded AQA certificates to 14 pupils for a range of achievements including:

- Litter Picking
- Bushcraft- Firelighting
- Bushcraft as a Life Skill
- Introduction to Bushcraft & Survival skills
- Horticulture
- Carving - Mallet Making; and
- Outdoor Cooking.

For many of the pupils we work with, the only qualifications they will gain during their school years will be from us. And being around for so long, we have built up relationships with families that go back years – one mum who recently came up to the Forest Garden with school said she was happy to see her child doing the same things she was doing 22 years ago! These connections mean we can contact those families who might get overlooked, to make sure their children don't miss out, and that we can step in when there are crises.

We are always looking to do 'more things better', and this year we have been fundraising for a new cooking area to enable more people to learn cooking skills. We have won some funding from the National Lottery – watch this space for an update in our next year's report!







Jo has cooked around 3,000 lunches this year, including a festive Christmas lunch for around 50 people. Jo cooks pretty much everything from scratch, and we are grateful to FareShare for their ongoing support.



Pupils and volunteers learn about every aspect of food, from sowing, growing, harvesting and cooking. They learn about seasonality, nutrition and food hygiene, and Jo shows everyone how to cook great meals on a shoestring!

Thanks to Brighton Permaculture Trust, we now have a blossoming orchard of pear, plum and cherry trees, as well as apricot and mulberry. Stephan brought his endless patience and skill, involving everyone in planting and learning to care for the trees.



While Warren oversees most of the food production, often using heritage seed varieties to promote diversity and flavour, Daisy continues to make the garden attractive to both people and wildlife. This year she has planted mainly plants for pollinators, and as well as working with Moulsecoomb Primary, she has supported The Bevy in their plant sales.

We are part of the team that has helped transform Moulsecoomb Primary school's grounds, where we've planted hundreds of trees. There's an orchard, fairytale forest, wildlife ponds, a rain garden, chickens, veg gardens and replica prehistoric houses. It's a place for children to thrive, learn and play, at a school where 65% get free school dinners. The school is one of only three South Downs National Park Ambassador schools.

In the most recent glowing OFSTED report inspectors said: *"Gardening activities boost pupils' mental health and well-being, giving pupils opportunities to proudly develop their impressive school grounds further."*

This year we have had a good population of slow worms (although not as many as previous years), toads, frogs, newts, a lovely family of lizards, as well as the multiple types of bees, dragonflies, butterflies, moths and birds including woodpeckers and jays.



While the idea of the garden is to grow food, for our volunteers - adults with disabilities - who come along, we know it's much more than just that.

*"I don't get out much, coming to the garden helps me get new friends."*

*"Coming here is therapeutic. If I didn't come here, I would feel more alone."*

*"I have been coming 20 years I really like the people. I like being out in the community even though there's not a lot I can do because of my disability."*

*"I get bored at home. It's easier working with other people and getting to meet people. People can get jobs like gardening, cooking and woodwork."*

It's good to hear one person mentioning work!



We always welcome visitors and this year we were happy to welcome Baroness Jenny Jones of Moulsecoomb from the House of Lords! What's really clear is that a big part of what we do is getting people to meet new people. Sure, they might do the occasional bit of graft but never underestimate the massive benefits of the social side, and getting out in the fresh air, whatever the weather.

So our work helps to tackle social isolation, and the garden provides a valuable space to meet and socialise. We also get out and about with our volunteers. We were lucky to be given 12 tickets to a show in the Brighton Festival in May by one of our local councillors, as part of the 'Our Place Moulsecoomb and Bevendean' project. And the disability disco and karaoke at The Bevy is always a hit.







That's not to say our little haven isn't immune from the outside world. Money is always tight, and we can't help but notice fewer bees, butterflies and insects.

We know our small community garden can have a big impact on people's lives, to make them feel part of something. But it's also important that we work with others, ensuring that our roots reach out across the area – like regular litter picking and collecting all the fallen leaves for composting – while also creating a magical space for people and wildlife to thrive.



Moulsecoomb Forest Garden  
and Wildlife Project

# Friends of the Forest Garden

We need £8750 a month to keep the Forest Garden going. We provide:

- Two work days a week at the garden for over 50 people, and everyone gets a nutritious lunch
- One-to-one education for pupils struggling in school as well as outdoor education for 80 pupils a week, and also supporting BACA pupils with their Duke of Edinburgh qualifications
- Easter and summer holiday schemes

These numbers are about individual people, and all have their story. If there is one thing we are really proud of, it is the garden giving opportunities to people who often find doors slammed in their faces.

Support our work!  
You can become a Friend  
by signing up here

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Friend of the Forest  
Garden or ask us for a form

[www.moulsecoombforestgarden.org](http://www.moulsecoombforestgarden.org)