

# The Urban Roots Initiative

training *for* better



greenspace and  
job opportunities

## 06 Urban Roots: The Urban Roots Initiative

Urban Roots is a social enterprise based in Toryglen in the Southside of Glasgow. It encourages people to connect with nature and to take practical action to tackle the root causes of climate change. In addition to improving the skills and employability of local residents, the training activities have resulted in a better local environment.

### Introduction

The Urban Roots Initiative is committed to working with local people on projects that improve their employment prospects, physical health and mental well-being through a range of activities that improve the local environment including community gardening, conservation and biodiversity. It aims to inspire people to connect with nature and to take practical action to tackle the root causes of climate change.



*Bringing change to life*



Central Scotland Green Network

## Inputs

The cost to run each scheme was £23,500 excluding any office overheads and the per trainee placement cost was £875.

## Background

Toryglen, in Glasgow's Southside, is one of the most severely deprived areas of Scotland with high incidence of residents suffering from poor health, unemployment issues, and high crime rates. Additionally, nearly all local residents live within 500m of a derelict site.

Urban Roots evolved out of the Toryglen Gardening Club which was founded in 2004 by local residents who shared a desire to improve the area. During the early days it held bulb planting events and gardeners picnics, established a Children's Orchard in the grounds of a local school and held plant sales.

Securing funding through the Fairshare Trust in 2007 was key in helping the group to progress. It was able to employ a Development Officer, which greatly helped to inspire more people to join the group and carry out more activities including a training programme which undertakes community gardening, bee-keeping, renewable energy, active travel, biodiversity improvements and conservation work. Toryglen Gardening Club became Urban Roots in December 2008.

## The Project

The Urban Roots Initiative is an innovative approach offering training opportunities for a wide range of individuals; the only key requirement being that they are local to the area.

Many trainees are long term unemployed, some of whom are referred to the initiative by organisations such as ENABLE, Jobs & Business Glasgow and Job Centre Plus.

Those participating in the scheme are all volunteers and are not paid to undertake the work. They come from a variety of backgrounds with differing characteristics. Most are unemployed, some have learning disabilities and others have mental health or addiction issues. They are all offered the opportunity to undertake a wide range of training activities, all of which are related in some way to achieving positive environmental outcomes.

Each volunteer participates for a minimum of two months. However, a unique feature to this initiative is that there is no time limit to involvement and volunteers can stay as long as they wish after their initial two months.

Early stages of the scheme focus on confidence building and the development of soft skills, as well as involvement in practical work to develop a wide range of outdoor skills.



The practical nature of the training has resulted in important environmental and habitat improvements to an area which has suffered from economic decline and is blighted by evidence of urban deprivation. Key activities have included gardening and horticulture with related landscaping and construction tasks, woodland and habitat management and also pathway creation.

As well as developing on-the-job skills, trainees had an opportunity to take part in formal training courses, for example in leadership skills, strimming and chainsaw use.

In addition to practical work opportunities, the initiative has offered one-to-one mentoring support with regular meetings to discuss the benefits of the training and any additional training requirements. This has then enabled trainees to pursue activities of specific interest to them.

## Inputs

To fund various elements of the training activities, Urban Roots has been successful in accessing funds from organisations such as the Central Scotland Green Network, People and Communities Fund and the Robertson Trust.

The cost to run each scheme is £23,500 excluding any office overheads and the per trainee placement cost is £875.

## Outputs

In the 2012 calendar year, a total of 22 volunteers were recruited to this scheme. Positive outcomes were recorded for all who undertook training: 4 trainees gained employment, 6 enrolled in further education and 12 went into volunteering.

Vocational skills gained by trainees in 2012 included practical horticulture, footpath improvements, litter removal, woodland management, landscaping, fencing, boundary improvements, built infrastructure & signage, habitat enhancement, risk assessment and health & safety.

Qualifications achieved by trainees progressing through the scheme have included Lantra Brushcutter & Trimmers, REHIS Elementary Food Hygiene, Health & Safety, Risk Assessments, and NPTC Chainsaw.

As well as learning new practical skills, trainees also learned 'soft skills' such as team work, communication skills and timekeeping. This has resulted in significant improvement in self-esteem and confidence to engage in other positive activities, compete for jobs or move into education or undertake more volunteering.

Other training undertaken was geared towards improving nutritional habits, physical health, mental well-being, and generating a more positive attitude towards, and greater interest in, the environment.

## Outcomes

Urban Roots maintain that the nature of the work, the team based approach and the formal recognition of skills acquired all contribute towards improving levels of confidence and self-esteem. This has resulted in the positive outcomes achieved by each trainee.

To date, the project has cleaned up two acres of vacant and derelict land in Glasgow, improving the aesthetic of Toryglen and also the biodiversity potential of the area. In this way, the wider community has benefited from the work undertaken. Residents can also be inspired by the fact that local people are making a positive difference to their own physical environment. Therefore, the Initiative has helped to foster pride and community spirit.

## Keys to Success

There are two key factors that have contributed to the success of this Initiative. Firstly, the adoption of a

*"It's hard to put into words just how beneficial this has been for me. I just feel so much happier and healthier"*

**Toryglen Community Market Garden Volunteer.**

*"This course has been brilliant – the best training I've ever been on!"*

**Teacher commenting on a course held within the Market Garden.**

collaborative approach, working with as many other agencies as possible, including the local college. This has greatly increased the skills-base and helped to engage with a wider pool of local people.

Secondly, Urban Roots adopted a person centred flexible approach which has suited the characteristics and backgrounds of the trainees. Each volunteer was assigned a nominated mentor who was able to offer one to one support. Frequent meetings took place to discuss the benefits of what they were doing and any additional training requirements. This helped the volunteers to achieve the goals which they had set for themselves.

## Future

The Initiative has continued to grow since its inception and currently has funding in place until March 2015.

The organisation hopes to be able to offer an SVQ in Horticulture in the near future.



## Outputs

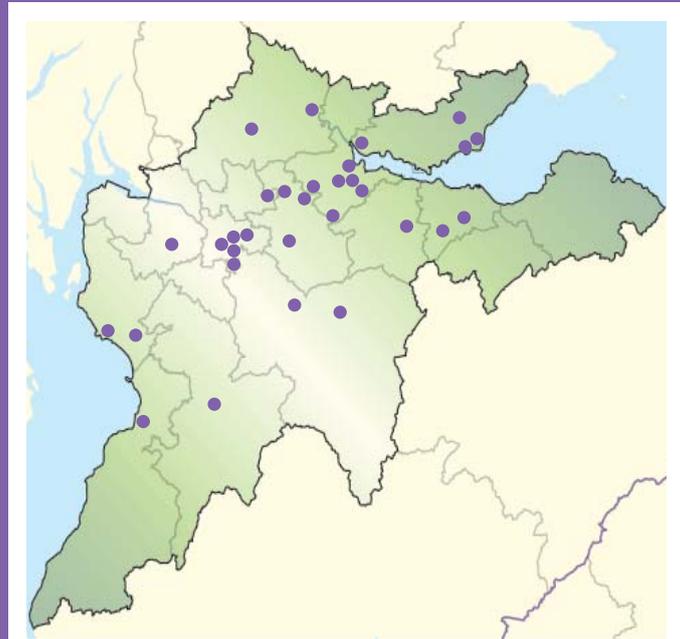
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## Outdoor training in the CSGN area

### Key Facts

- In 2012, there were a total of 677 trainees, on 57 separate courses - 12 trainees per course.
- Courses were delivered through from 31 programmes which were administered by 24 separate organisations.
- Programmes lasted an average of 24 weeks and most schemes ran at least twice during the year.
- Of the 297 individual trainees for which we have additional data, 135 (or 46%) went directly into employment, 27% returned to unemployment, 20% went into volunteering, 5% went into education and 1% undertook a further course.
- The mean average cost per trainee was circa £6,225 (though this varies widely)

### Location of outdoor training schemes in the CSGN area in 2012



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*The CSGN will change the face of Central Scotland by restoring and improving the rural and urban landscape of the area.*

### What is the CSGN?

The CSGN is one of the 14 national developments in the National Planning Framework 2. It is the biggest greenspace project in Europe and will help to make Central Scotland a more attractive and distinctive place to live, to visit and to do business. The CSGN has wide political and partner support and an all encompassing remit, far beyond just a 'green' initiative, with economic development central on the agenda.

### Why are we interested in training?

The prosperity of Central Scotland is fundamentally linked to the skills of its workforce and we believe that the environmental sector can play a positive role in enhancing the employment prospects for everyone – especially young people. This will help to deliver not only career orientated skills but also those transferable 'soft' skills which a wide

variety of employers require. Under the 'A Place for Growth' theme, the CSGN aims to increase employment and training in land based 'green' and 'low carbon' industries with the objective of not only providing meaningful work experience and support for young people but also to improve local greenspace for everyone to enjoy.

### What are these Case Studies for?

This report is one in a series of six case studies which demonstrate that for a relatively modest investment, outdoor based training and employment projects can have profound and far reaching impacts on the lives of people furthest from the labour market. The reports are intended to inspire other organisations to take similar approaches and to inform interested parties, such as Local Authorities, in order to encourage a supportive environment for such initiatives.

### Getting in Touch

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For further information on the CSGN and other case studies please visit: [www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org](http://www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org)

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