

Working with Corporate Volunteers

Tower Hamlets



Two volunteers from State Street bank with partly constructed raised beds.

Corporate Volunteers

Mulberry school needed to build raised beds due to possible contamination on the grounds. Building and filling these raised beds was going to be a challenge for the school to do alone.

Therefore, in March 2015 they attended 'Schools Big Dig' ⁽¹⁾, an event organised by Food Growing Schools London partner, Capital Growth. This event aimed to match corporate volunteering groups with schools who need help to set up or improve their school food growing space.

With thanks to Food Growing Schools London, Capital Growth and East London Business Alliance (ELBA), the school was matched to a corporate team from State Street bank who spent a day building raised beds, compost bins and benches, as well as helping to move soil and compost.

Shortly before, the school had a corporate group from Australian bank, Westpac, who built 10 raised beds and moved 10 tonnes of compost. What an achievement!

Westpac bank also raised over £700 by holding a cake sale in their office! This was a huge boost to the project and paid for all the wood and compost.

The School...

Mulberry School for Girls is a comprehensive secondary school in Tower Hamlets, a densely populated area of London. The borough is regularly cited as one of the most economically deprived local authorities in the country.

For Mulberry School, this makes it all the more important to treasure areas of under-used land within school grounds, and to recognise their potential as places of outdoor learning and food education.



The Project...

In autumn 2014, several of the teachers identified an area of land within the school grounds that was under-used and neglected, but that might be ideal for a school food garden as it was a sunny spot with access to an outdoor tap.

They came up with the idea of creating a market garden of the kind that used to be prevalent in London between the 17th and 19th centuries.

As well as offering an abundance of fresh salads, vegetables and fruit for sale, the garden would also act as an outdoor classroom, playing a key role in food education within the school.

Produce could be grown and sold by pupils, used by school kitchens in cooking lessons, and by student catering.



This case study has been developed as part of the Food Growing Schools London project, a partnership initiative led by Garden Organic.

Garden Organic is the UK's leading organic growing charity, with over 20 years experience bringing the benefits of growing food to schools.

Food Growing Schools London is funded by the Big Lottery and Mayor of London to bring together the very best of London's food growing expertise, information and support, with the ambition to inspire and equip every school in London to grow their own food.





Useful resources

For more information on the Food Growing Schools: London project and to access a wide range of resources on how to get your community and local businesses involved, please visit:

www.foodgrowingschools.org/community/

If you are struggling with space in your growing area we have a range of factsheets to help you, including, how to build a raised bed, creating a square foot garden, making the most of your space. Visit the Garden Organic website for these and many more:

www.gardenorganic.org.uk/schools

What's next?

The school hope to enlist the help of more corporate teams to help put up their new polytunnel, and help dig a pond. This will mean that pupils can spend more time planning the space, sowing seeds, thinning and transplanting crops, and learning in the garden.

Future plans include inviting classes to take responsibility for the beds, choosing what to grow. There are also plans to get the parents involved with regular gardening sessions, and to grow the renowned Asian gourd, kodu, which is very popular in the area.



School surroundings.

Challenges...

The biggest challenge for Mulberry School was physically constructing the garden. A soil test revealed potential contamination in the school ground, so the decision was made to build raised beds, line these and fill with uncontaminated compost.

This meant a significant increase in costs, but the project would have been impossible otherwise. The size of the space also presented a challenge. Measuring roughly 15 metres by 50 metres, it was a sizeable area to develop, and school staff had limited time they could contribute. Luckily, due to the help from Westpac and other corporate volunteer groups, these challenges were soon overcome.

Highlights...

Working with corporate volunteers has allowed the school to get others to complete a lot of tasks in a single day, in particular the heavy manual tasks that pupils are unable to manage. It also meant that staff time could be used more effectively for planning and supervising the corporate team on the day, rather than having to carry out the manual work themselves over several weeks or even months.

For Mulberry, creating the school garden without corporate teams would have been almost impossible. The school celebrated the volunteer days afterwards with write-ups and photos in the school newsletter so that parents could read about the changes to the school growing space and recognise the help from the corporate volunteers.



Raised bed building in progress.

