

# The Ted Green Award Memorial Cup



## **Project description: *Sowing Seeds Project***

### **Overview**

Pointalls and District Allotment Society have hosted Barnet Refugee Service *Sowing Seeds Project* since its inception in April 2015. We have seen a neglected 5.5 poles plot become alive with beds of flowers and vegetables, each section assigned to different refugees.

The participants, referred to as clients, not only have a chance to enjoy the benefits and wellbeing of gardening, but they also use this as an opportunity to learn English, picnic and socialise.

Importantly, the Royal Horticultural Society is currently stressing the mental health benefits of gardening - and we (Pointalls) are privileged to host this project and to see this in practice.

### **Barnet Refugee Service *Sowing Seeds Project***

In April 2015, Barnet Refugee Service, under its Eco therapy program established a new project called *Sowing Seeds Therapy/Allotment Project* to promote good mental and physical wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers (clients) through outdoor activity in a green environment (Eco therapy). Specifically tackling social isolation, encouraging integration and improving community cohesion with an emphasis on those with mental health issues.

The clients' ages range from 20-70 years and they originate from Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Congo, Iran, Pakistan, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Some of these clients are at the end of the asylum process with no recourse to public funds or live on £40 per week. Many of these clients experience isolation and boredom as a result of the asylum system.

Clients have benefitted from the project by being outdoors, learning new skills and socialising with other clients as well as project staff and members of Pointalls Allotments. Clients have told us “they have enjoyed classes and being outdoors, socialising with other people instead of being isolated at home”.

Like other BRS activities, this is a volunteer lead project. With the support of the volunteer Operations Manager, the volunteers have been running and co-ordinating the project and have so far managed to create five volunteer placements. The skills the volunteers offer contribute to create a project that is varied and holistic. For example one volunteer is an experienced gardener, having been a farmer in his country of origin. He has supervised the gardening sessions and has also run practical training sessions on the plot. The other volunteers help with the day-to-day running of the project, supporting and interacting with clients, providing interpreting and organising facilities and refreshments.

Most of BRS clients are on low income and live below the poverty line. It is important they increase their knowledge of nutritious food especially for families with young children. An experienced volunteer nutritionist has run a series of nutrition workshops where they can also enjoy their allotment crops.

This project has already achieved much within one year and demonstrates high interest amongst the client group. They are amongst the most vulnerable and marginalised group in society. This project has enabled them to connect with nature, to be more active in green environments, to boost their mood and self-esteem and to improve their mental health wellbeing.



**P** POINTAULS  
ALLOTMENTS