

Sustainable Living Initiative

Annual Report 2008-2009



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Background

This is the fourth annual report of Sustainable Living Initiative (SLI), covering the period from October 2008 to September 2009. This report documents activities undertaken, progress made so far and plans for the future.

Sustainable Living Initiative is a not-for-profit social enterprise based in Norwich. It is registered as a “company limited by guarantee”. It has five Directors and a Secretary (please see Annex 1), all of whom do not receive any payment for their services to the organisation. With generous help from SLI members and a growing number of volunteers, the Secretary manages the day-to-day operation of the organisation.

Aims and objectives

We aim to promote a sustainable way of living through collective practical action. We believe that small-scale action, such as growing some fruit, vegetables and herbs on allotments and in our own back gardens, recycling and reusing, avoiding car journeys and promoting a sense of community can have a far-reaching effect on natural, as well as on human, environments. The main focus of SLI’s work, at present, is on an allotment project called Grow-Our-Own in Norwich. The project provides support and encouragement to people to grow vegetables, soft fruit and herbs on the allotment and in their own gardens.

Profile of activities and achievements

The Grow-Our-Own scheme has completed five long years. It was a novel approach when we set up the scheme five years ago. Now, “grow your own” has become a fashionable term and a number of initiatives have started across cities, towns and villages. However, what makes GO² different from other initiatives is our emphasis on sharing resources including land, tools and other inputs, helping each other and promoting a sense of community through collective action. Moreover, by offering small, manageable sized plots, our project helps novice growers to overcome the fear that only an experienced gardener can grow fruit and vegetables. This confidence-building exercise is key to our success in attracting a large number of young growers and families:

Claire, Ian & James’ story

“On a damp, grey Sunday morning in March 2009, myself and husband Ian came along to start digging our way through our very overgrown plot that Mahesh had allocated us (we had requested this particular plot I hasten to add!) James, our 7 year old son, also began digging over and tidying his metre square plot...and we haven’t looked back since!

Just to backtrack, we were really inspired to get involved with the Sustainable Living project as told to us by our friend Brigid, as an allotment is something we had been thinking about for quite a long time. We are relative novices at growing fruit and vegetables, so thought this would be a wonderful way to get to learn more in a very practical, uncomplicated way, with the added bonus of having information, advice and all manner of tools and supplies on site.

We have been committed to growing produce on our plot ever since and have had success with lettuces of all kinds, beetroot, spring onions, courgettes, sweet corn, runner beans and French beans. James has grown strawberries, lettuces and chives in his metre square plot successfully too.

Part of the enjoyment of maintaining our allotment has been the generosity of others involved in the project, either volunteering advice, having a general chat, sharing the communal workdays etc. This sense of community is integral to the project's success, identity and appeal. It sets a great example for children as well, and one of the reasons we wanted to get ourselves involved for the benefit of our son.

Overall, all our experiences have been good ones, and would like to take this opportunity to thank all the regular volunteers who give their time and Mahesh of course, who had the vision and know-how to get the project off the ground in the first place and his continued dedication to it.” Claire

Details of our activities and achievements are discussed in the following sections.

Grow-Our-Own Scheme

As a practical action project of Sustainable Living Initiative, the Grow -Our- Own (GO²) scheme started in the autumn of 2004. The main aim of GO² scheme is to help those who are interested but have little or no experience in growing fruit and vegetables. Apart from growing fruit and vegetables of their own choice and maintaining the plot, growers are reminded of the importance of collective action. We are also trying our best to use organic practices wherever possible and do not use insecticide, pesticide and chemical fertiliser.

The standard 10 rod¹ size allotment plots are divided into mini-plots of varying sizes depending on the need and experience of individual growers. The plot holders get all the tools, seeds and seedlings, manure and hands-on practical advice. When the scheme started in 2004, we had one 10 rod size allotment plot. During the year 2008-2009, we had a total of 17.5 allotment plots.

It is a common practice amongst many growers to start with one strip and gradually move on to two or more strips once they gain confidence. The large size plot in our scheme, which is about a third of the standard 250 square meters allotment plot, is good for those aiming at greater self-sufficiency in vegetables and soft fruit production.

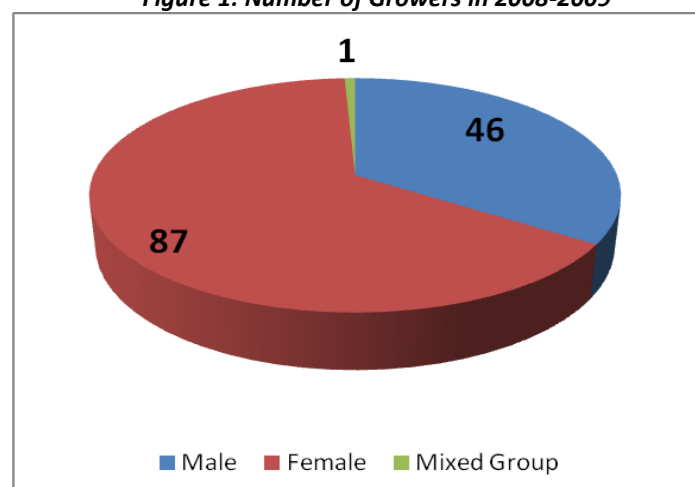
The progress of GO² Scheme

Since the start of the pilot scheme in the autumn of 2004 with eight growers, GO² has grown steadily. Likewise, the composition of growers has changed from mainly retired/semi-retired women to more young people and men as well. With the development of specially designed growing areas for children and wheelchair users, thanks to the grant from Norfolk Community Foundation, we now have children and disabled people taking part in the scheme as well.

How many joined the scheme in 2008-2009?

During the year 2008-2009, a total 134 growers took part in the scheme, of whom the majority (87) were women (see figure1). Ever since the start of the scheme, GO² has attracted more women than men and the last year was

Figure 1: Number of Growers in 2008-2009



Note: A mixed group from a mental health charity Rethink.

¹ Equivalent to 250 square metres.

no exception. The provision of facilities such as a meeting hall, picnic area, toilet and above all a family-friendly approach may have encouraged more women to join the group.

With regard to the composition of growers, while the majority (114 out of 134) were adults, this is the first time that the project had adults with disability taking part in the scheme (see Figure 2).

Instead of developing a separate project for children and people with disabilities, we developed some facilities so as to meet the need of specific groups of people including children and wheel-chair users. We have achieved encouraging results in the first year of this new initiative.

How many people managed to grow fruit and vegetables?

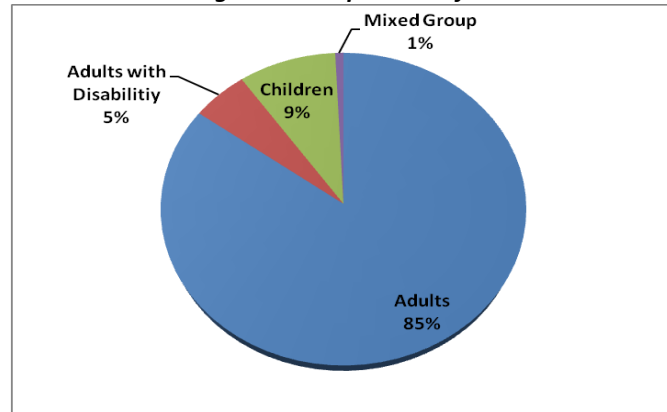
Of the total 134 growers taking part in the GO² scheme during 2008-2009, the majority (71%) managed to grow fruit and vegetables of their choice. This is encouraging given the fact that for a significant number of growers, this was their first experience in growing fruit and vegetables.

Of those who completed successfully, 75% of the total 87 women and girls did well compared to 63% of the total 46 men and boys (see figure 4).

It is difficult to ascertain exactly why some people either left in between or

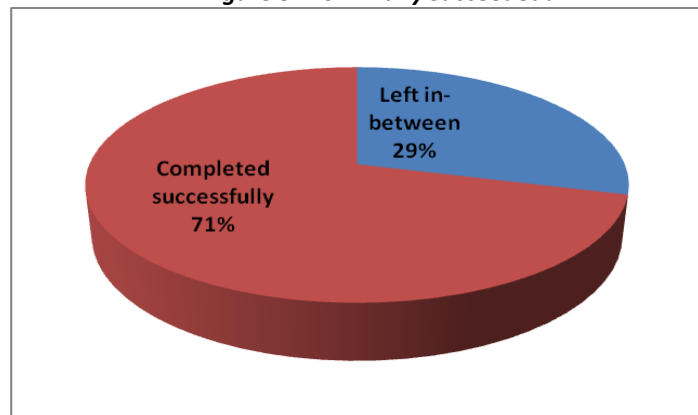
did not manage to grow fruit and vegetables, after paying the rent and doing a bit of hard work. Based on the earlier communications we had with these growers, it was due to a change in family circumstances, job relocation or work stress. For some, it was a good learning

Figure 2: Composition of Growers



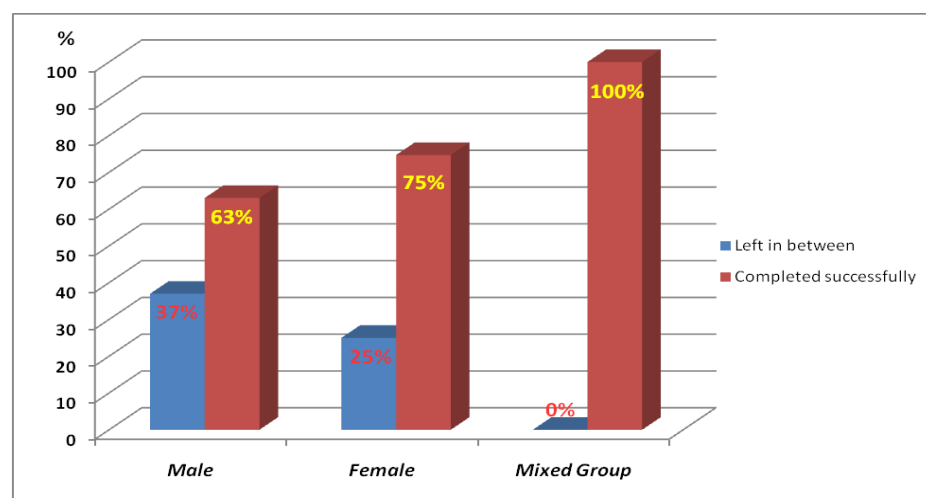
Note: A mixed group from a mental health charity Rethink.

Figure 3: How many succeeded?



Note: A mixed group from a mental health charity Rethink.

Figure 4: How many succeeded: A comparison between male and female grower?



Note: A mixed group from a mental health charity Rethink.

experience to realise that “grow your own” needed much more commitment than previously envisaged.

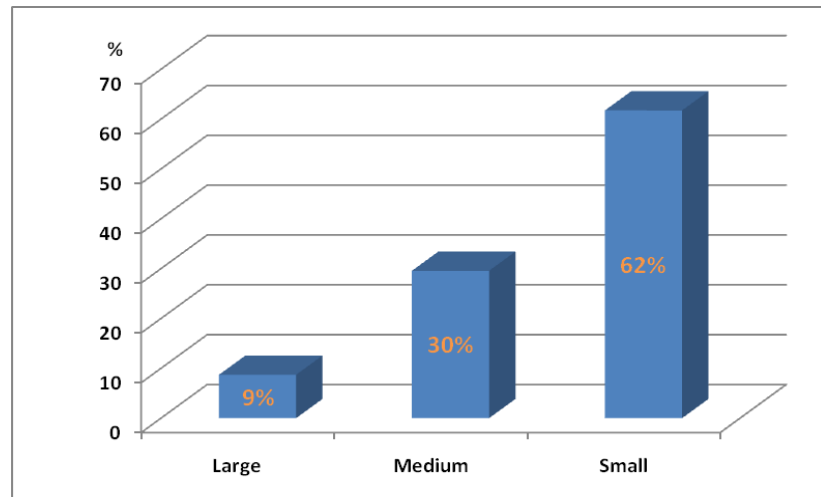
Distribution of growers by plot size

As in the previous years, the majority of the growers (62%) had only one strip measuring 6 x 1.3 meters; only 9% of the total 84 adult growers had a large size plot (see figure 5) which is about a third of the standard size allotment plot.

These results confirm our view that the “new generation” of allotment enthusiasts are quite happy with the small strip of land. In fact, so many of our growers have joined the GO² scheme because the size of plots we offer are

manageable and they do not need to find their own tools, manure, seeds, etc. We do hope that these results will convince Norwich City Council of the merit of sub-dividing allotment plots to meet the growing demand for allotments.

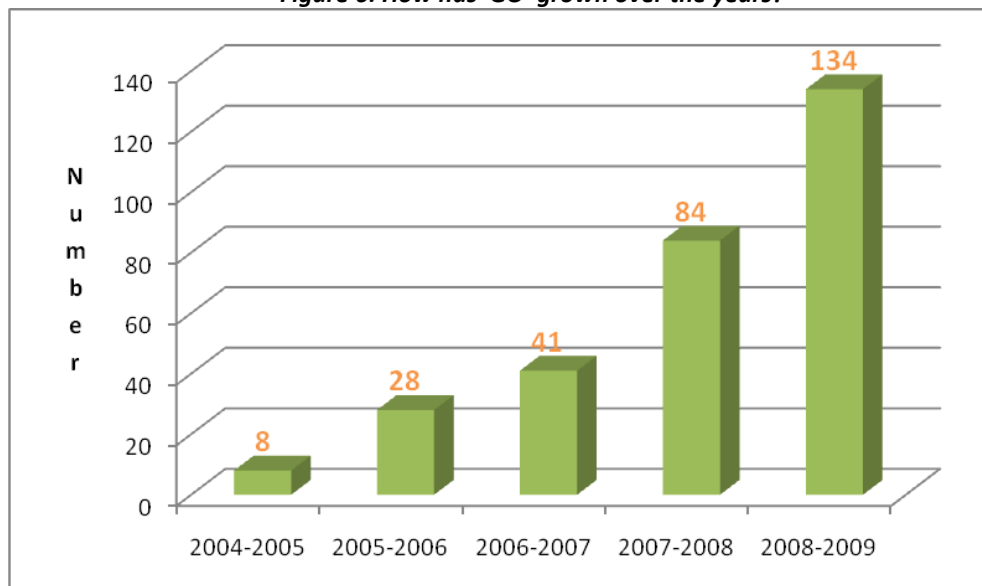
Figure 5: Number of growers with different plot size



Five years of GO²

The GO² scheme has grown steadily over the past five years (see figure 6). Apart from a large number of new growers joining each year, we also have a very high retention rate. Moreover, nine out of ten new growers who have joined the scheme had heard about it

Figure 6: How has GO² grown over the years?



through their friends. Those growers who have stayed on are not only growing fruit and vegetables more successfully but are also helping fellow growers and taking responsibility for the

management of the group. So alongside the rapid growth of the GO² group, a sense of community has developed as well (see our growers' accounts below).

Moira Froud: My thoughts about the Grow Our Own scheme at Bluebell allotments.

"I have been able to enjoy the opportunity to grow my own produce and benefitted from the practical help and advice from fellow growers. The small size of the plots is ideal and easier to manage for many of us who would be daunted by coping with a full size plot.

Having grown a range of fruit and vegetables, I feel much more confident as a novice grower. When in doubt, there is always help at hand or current information in the barn. I am in my second year as a member and have seen how the scheme has developed and expanded.

This year has seen significant improvements with the establishment of the raised beds for disabled growers and the purchase of suitable tools for those with disabilities.

The scheme provides a great opportunity for all to enjoy gardening in a friendly environment with the health benefits of fresh air and exercise. " Moira

Sian Jones, Gabriel Moore (4) and Joseph Moore (1): An account of our allotment at the Grow Our Own Scheme.

"Our first child was born around full moon on one of those dank Dickensian days you get in English Winters. As my newborn started to piece his mother's face together, just up the road, a new kind of co-operative allotment was taking shape for people with little or no experience of growing food.

Clutching my new life in a sling, under jumpers and umbrellas, I set out to meet the father of this new project. Not only was it raining sheets, but thunder drummed hard on the roof of the only shelter on the shared plots. My newborn snuffled and lightening gave very occasional illumination to the black afternoon as Mahesh described his vision - a space for everyone to learn to grow their own food, organically, easily and cheaply. I was hooked.

Years of work had removed me from the muck and untidiness of the nature that stood before us. And, although much of my job as a documentary film maker had been dealing with the muck and untidiness of people's lives, its theatre was mostly suburban interiors and the straight lines of office walls. Here, all around, even in deepest winter, stretched a crisp forest of Brussels sprouts and a bountiful crop of outsize velvety cabbages.

The scheme offered several levels of entry into its muddy cult. The hard core option was to work on several fields with about 6 other people. Both the work and fruits of your labour would be shared. Or, you could take on your own tiny strip of land but still share seeds, manure and knowledge with the rest of the community. Finally, the "allotment lite" option...which involved little effort except donning your wellie boots and simply turning up once a week to buy whatever was ready to harvest. And it was with this, the daintiest option, that I was lured into this scheme. But after a month or so of visits, I started to envy the growers their muddy pleasures. It looked strangely satisfying to watch your seeds grow and blossom. So I asked to be admitted to the inner circle.

Soon, I was digging a tiny strip of land next to the manure heap. It was barely bigger than our bed, but my husband said I was crazy. A sickly newborn and a mother recovering from a complicated caesarean working a sodden frozen field. Didn't I know we could still afford to go to the shops even on one salary? Why wasn't I planting potatoes? What does a broad bean taste like anyhow?

I planted 3 rows of broad beans. 2 each of onion and garlic. I hadn't a clue. Did as I was mentored by Mahesh. Dug, weeded, planted and waited.

By February, ironed out by lack of sleep, I needed some encouragement from my little strip of land. From a distance, I marvelled at my green fingers...The lushest crop of couch grass you'd ever set eyes on! But even as I lost heart at the weeds, I could see the first shoots of my early planting coming through.

By summer, I had discovered the joys of perpetual crops like chard and spinach - fairy tale plants - that just keep on growing back as often as you pick their leaves. And then there were the smells, more impressive even than the touch of the earth... the suggestion of curry as I pulled up the self-seeded coriander, the lusty smell of garlic as I lifted our first bulb and the ever present pong of manure steaming in the now vibrant sun.

I was dazzled by the bounty of my small strip. Even with my total inability to grow anything in my own garden, I appeared, under Mahesh's guidance, to be making food and good food that had no chemicals and was free! I was feeling evangelical. I told lots of friends. Most took one look and politely disappeared. A few dug enthusiastically for a season and bowed out, leaving their crops and their efforts to wilt and wither. I decided to keep my enthusiasm to myself. It's a long-term thing this growing business. It's got seasons and distant horizons - a bit like growing children and not something you want to press-gang anyone into doing.

By the time the autumn came round, I had a new challenge. My son had discovered movement and that meant over our plot. Did I have the patience? Well, quite often not. But a lovely white-bearded man on the neighbouring plot, the kind of man who used to be the staple of the British allotment, would offer words of encouragement and proffer little acts of kindness. One afternoon, Keith heaved a huge sheet of plate glass over to show my son...covered in hundreds of slimy snail bodies. Another time, he showed us where we could find the juiciest blackberries on his plot. In fact, that was half the delight of visiting the allotment - the small and very diverse community of people who worked with Mahesh to grow the scheme. All lovely and engaging, it was always one of my greatest pleasures to share 5 minutes and a cup of tea under the apple tree.

4 years on, my son, Gabriel, is about to turn 5 and could tell you more about food than most adults. He'll carefully save the young fat hen from being weeded because it tastes good - well to just eat, there in the allotment, with your hands a bit manurey. Cinnamon basil is also one of his favourites as are the amazing Autumn Bliss raspberries that make you feel glad that summer is ending.

Now, pupil has turned teacher as Gabriel mentors his little one year old brother, Joseph, in the dark arts of finding the fattest blackberries and how to get sodden wet from the water butt before your mother has noticed.

Allotments in general are magic places: sacred islands of life and community in the urban creep. But this particular project has its own magic. Wisdom is shared, small acts of kindness gifted. Gabriel and I are, now, the longest surviving members of the original scheme. It has grown enormously since we started. Sheds have been built, some of the wilderness lost to paths - but I still find solace in the magic tricks of the earth and it is a tribute to people who work so hard that it has been such a success." Sian

Joanna Cole – a member of the Rethink Group, who has her own plot now

"I started coming to the allotment as part of the Bridges day centre group. I had been a Bridges member for many years and had no confidence. Most of those I meet at the allotment are friendly positive people. After 1 summer I got my own allotment space. This has helped my confidence. Even though I learn new skills slowly I have learnt a bit. Preparing soil and planting. I very much enjoy growing the food and it has saved me money. I don't have a garden at home so this space is important to me. I like being outside in fresh air. I am grateful for the help offered from Mahesh and others". Joanna

Sustainable Living Initiative – A beginner's experience by Roger Rowe who joined GO² in April, 2009.

"Having heard about Sustainable Living from friends of friends I went up to Bluebell allotments one Wednesday to make a tentative enquiry about the arrangements. whoosh – I met Mahesh and within the hour was digging over my first wild strip and in a fit of enthusiasm took over another. That was in the spring and I have learnt so much in the intervening months.

Although I have a very small garden in the city, this was my first experience of growing vegetables and I went at it like an elephant amongst ripe mangos. I planted everything that Mahesh gave me and every seed I could find in the hut – setting them out as neatly as I could in rows and thinking I would easily remember what was what. The result was that I kept having to ask nearby plot owners what they thought might be coming through. I planted what seemed like hundreds of lettuces which all matured at the same time – the runner beans came on suddenly and grew faster than I seemed to be able to put up the bean poles and the squash tendrils sped forth invading other people's plots without asking permission.

Over my first summer there have been many rewards. I have discovered what amazing stuff chard is, the quality and quantity of the French beans was breathtaking, the gooseberries from a bush I inherited seemed to go on forever and made me open my recipe book. The lessons? – well I will mark all my labels for a start and I won't plant all my lettuces at the same time and I promise that I won't put my couch grass on the compost heap! Sustainable Living is a real discovery – an understated haven and my fellow plot holders are friendly and helpful – and then of course there is Mahesh – but that's another story!" Roger

Hannah Weinstein, who joined GO² in July 2009

Gardening is not known to give instant gratification. However, when I started my allotment strip this July, I was thrilled to see that, what seemed a short time after planting I was able to harvest my salad crops.

The attractions of an allotment strip for me has been the brilliant guidance given to the novice vegetable gardener, where you learn what to put in when, how deep and far apart!, the community camaraderie and working outside.

As I work full time (indoors!) I have limited time available. But a couple of hours on a Sunday morning of light hoeing and lots of watering mean that I am able, literally, to see and eat the fruits of my labour. It's also fantastic to be able to eat what you grow instead of what the supermarket has shipped in from Europe.

I have just recently planted garlic, onions and beans and have even committed myself to plant rhubarb which I won't harvest for a year.

If you "get!" my enthusiasm when reading this it means that you too should sign yourself up for an allotment strip!

Happy hoeing!" Hannah

Story of Dev and Champa from Nepal, who joined GO² in May 2009

"We are living in Norwich since December 2008. In May, 2009, I was introduced to Mahesh by a friend of mine. During our meeting, Mahesh told me that he was one of the executive members of the group running a community allotment scheme in Norwich and asked me to visit the site and get involved if interested.

We went to the allotment site and met Mahesh and other members of the team in Bluebell South Allotments in the last week of May. He showed us around and explained how it worked. He said, if we were interested, he could offer us a strip (1.5m X 6m in size). We immediately took the offer.

Although it was late to start some of the exciting summer vegetables but we worked hard to dig and prepare the soil for planting the same day. Mahesh suggested us to plant some courgette, lettuce, French bean, runner bean, chard (a type of spinach) etc. After a couple of weeks, we planted tomato, chilli and sweet corn.

We both work long and odd hours but we always manage to go to the allotment, which is a good 25 minutes walk, two to three times a week. Last week of June, we had our first harvest of courgette for our dinner. We were so proud of having our own grown vegetables. Since then, there is hardly any day we have not eaten our own produce. We had surplus produce of courgette, runner beans and chard which we shared with our friends. It is unbelievable the amount of produce you can get from such a small strip of land. On top of that, it is 100 percent organic and not to mention the taste of fresh vegetables.

In September 2009, we took another strip and we are planning to grow strawberry, raspberry, rhubarb, flowers, more vegetables and herbs next year." Dev

The future of GO²

When the GO² scheme started five years ago, getting an additional plot of land from the Norwich City Council was straightforward. In fact, we also had an understanding with the Council that SLI would have the first right of refusal as and when plots adjacent to our scheme became free.

However, following the appointment of the new head of the Green Space team last year, the previous understanding has been disregarded. As a result, our request for additional plots has been rejected, even though there are so many underutilised/overgrown plots around us and we have so many new growers wanting to join our scheme.

At the moment, we are trying to accommodate new growers by reallocating land which was previously used for Pick-Your-Own scheme (see below for more information about PYO). Soon, we will have to stop taking any more new growers unless Norwich City Council changes its mind.

Pick-Your-Own Scheme

A Pick-Your-Own (PYO) scheme started at the same time as GO². The main aim of the PYO scheme was to offer an opportunity to those who had little spare time or were physically unable to work on the allotment to come and pick organically grown produce. It was hoped that the PYO scheme

could help people see how the fruit, vegetables and herbs they eat were grown and get a regular supply of locally grown fresh produce straight from the land. The PYO scheme also helped raise funds for the organisation by turning surplus produce into cash in its initial years.

Most of the original members of PYO are now taking part in the GO² scheme (see Clive's story below) and others are working as volunteers. There were a few drop-outs as well – those who were not happy with the idea of buying “what is available” according to the season instead of buying “what they wanted”. With the growing demand for land for GO² and hardly any regular PYO members at present, the scheme is coming to an end, at least for the time being.

Clive Sexton's account of PYO

The Grow Our Own project has provided me with much more than a source of freshly harvested food. It has also stimulated my physical, mental and spiritual well-being, become a source of many new friends, and helped to reconnect me to the environment.

My first contact with the project was as a purchaser of surplus communal produce. I soon offered to help with some of the routine tasks, and began spending almost all of my spare time on the allotment, usually digging! Grow Our Own was operated by a few dedicated volunteers, and the initial challenge was to clear land so that it could be cultivated. In return for our work, we received a share in the produce. Four years later the project has over 130 members, and all of the land allocated to us is being used to produce food.

I now have my own small piece of land where I grow soft fruit, an echo of my grandmother's garden where I spent the happiest days of my childhood, eating gooseberries, raspberries, blackcurrants and blackberries. The physical exercise and fresh air frees me from the stresses of my paid work, and has assisted my recovery from illness.

One of the most rewarding outcomes from my work has been to see new growers take on land and start to produce crops, sometimes for the first time in their lives. And such a diversity of people; a working example of how anyone can grow some of their own food, with the right support. But the growing of food is not the end in itself; Grow Our Own has built a community and a sense of common purpose and optimism.

Inevitably, as the number of members has increased, the nature of the community has changed too. I no longer know the names of everyone who is involved. For practical and legal reasons ways of doing things have become more formalised, and this can create invisible barriers.

These drawbacks are more than outweighed by the joy of being involved in such an amazing project. I am very lucky to have this opportunity!” Clive

Volunteering

The volunteering scheme is aimed at those who are interested in gardening and growing but are unable to commit time on a regular basis. It provides an opportunity to learn gardening skills and get fresh produce from the allotment free of charge in return for help.

The number of regular volunteers is growing rapidly. Those growers who stay on gradually become part of the group and offer a range of help from digging, clearing and maintaining plots to making paths, maintaining flower and herbs beds and camomile lawn, making jam and chutneys for fund

raising, to name but only a few. In fact this is the sort of co-operation that has helped make the work of Sustainable Living Initiative truly sustainable.

We also have volunteers who are not members of the organisation and do not have a plot but come and help us occasionally. While every help these volunteers provide is invaluable to us, so is the feeling of fulfilment among the volunteers (see Lucy's story below). So this is a win-win situation for all.

Lucy Hogg

"I have volunteered at the Bluebell Road allotments for the past few months. Until now I have always been a bit of an armchair gardener, without a garden or time to spend in one. As a volunteer I go to the allotments perhaps once or twice a month and help out on the community plot, this could involve weeding, planting, harvesting vegetables or just general tidying up.

I always come away feeling that I have learnt something new and contributed something useful - I also come away with a selection of seasonal fruit or vegetables to enjoy! Gardening makes me feel more connected with nature which is extremely fulfilling and I know that I am storing up plenty of skills that I will be able to share with others and bring to my own garden one day.

Thanks Sustainable Living Initiative for making this possible!" Lucy

Growing-at-Home Scheme

The main idea behind the 'growing-at-home' scheme is to provide help to people to grow fruit and vegetables in their own back gardens. The scheme offers practical help and advice on how to grow fruit and vegetables organically. Members of the Growing-at-Home scheme will also have the opportunity to come and meet the other growers on the allotment and learn from their experiences. For a small fee, members will get seeds and seedlings through our Centre based at the Bluebell South Allotments, off the Avenues.

The Growing-at-Home scheme has not yet made much progress. In the coming months, we plan to advertise the scheme in various local media. We also aim to cover the whole of Norwich, not just the area close to the Bluebell South Allotments, as originally planned.

Composting (by Peter Anderson)

The land on the Grow Our Own allotments is typical of Norwich soil: sandy and alkaline but easy to work most times of the year. Such soil needs as much humus added to it as can be managed, which means that making compost should be at the heart of gardening on this site.

So far, the project has operated a compost area largely to show what might be achieved. It has also been a way of learning what works well. It was during the second half of 2009 that composting began to show good results. Well-made compost has been achieved (see the picture) but it will never



Figure 7: Composting in practice

be possible for this area to provide enough compost to add humus for the number of members involved and their plots.

A number of larger heaps of material have also grown up on various parts of the site, largely because we have needed somewhere to store material as plots have been cleared. These large heaps have generally been left to decay without any satisfactory composting process. They are also harbouring unwanted biennial weeds, such as couch grass, docks and other, multi-seeded plants and the result will be to reproduce those unwanted weeds and seeds.

Such large heaps have the potential to produce larger and better quantities of compost. Their bulk means that they could be induced to heat up much more than bins or smaller heaps. This does mean that to make larger quantities of compost will require systematic management. The material decays more quickly and efficiently if cut up or broken down before it goes on to the pile; some turning will be necessary; heaps need to be watered periodically and covered.

It is hoped that with the change in the way volunteering is now being organized, each section of the growing area (based on sheds, for example) will be able to set up its own composting area and be responsible for its management and sharing out of finished product. This really is the way forward, for we cannot burn material (nor should we) nor should we rely totally on bought-in farmyard or stable manure.

It is also hoped that from now on members will take an interest in helping to produce usable compost. This will involve recycling their own plant material, sorting it into what is compostable and what is unwanted, chopping it up and taking it to the nearest compost area. It is pretty straightforward work but it does require care and interest. The rewards will be improved growing beds by providing humus to the soil, nutrients for healthier plants, better water-holding capacity – the classic starting point for organic growing.

To this can be added the appropriate use of bought-in manure, well-rotted leaves and the use of green crop manures. It's now time to move towards this sustainable process of soil improvement.

Heritage seed (by Peter Anderson)

The second year of seed saving with the Garden Organic Heritage Seed Library has produced some promising results for members to try next year. We will be offering two varieties of French climbing bean, a compact pea called Poppet, which did well and has been bulked up from last year, a long beetroot, and more Bath cos lettuce.

Our Guernsey parsnip failed to germinate last year and the Heritage Seed Library discovered their seed had not been fresh. They replaced it and it has germinated this year and we expect to gather seed from next year's growth. We are also over-wintering asparagus kale and should get seed from it next year. A Chinese aubergine (see the picture from Mahesh's garden) also impressed and will probably feature in the poly tunnel in future.

Figure 8 : Aubergine - Szechuan



We plan to introduce six more vegetables for seed saving next year.

Quinoa experiment

This year we have taken part in a Garden Organic members experiment to evaluate the potential for growing quinoa (pronounced keen-oh-wa or keen-wa) under UK conditions (see picture).

The seed, looking like couscous, is high in protein, containing twice the protein found in other staples such as wheat, and is gluten-free. It cooks quickly, has a light, fluffy texture and a mild, nutty flavour. It is seen as possibly an alternative to rice or couscous. It can be made into porridge, added to stews or ground into flour.

Figure 9: Quinoa



We have grown two varieties this year and the final plants (about 25 of each variety) were largely left to themselves, with little cultivation or management done. They clearly suffered from the very dry conditions of August and September and did not reach the expected height. They did produce seed heads, however, and about 1kg of seed was recovered from each variety.

The cleaning process has been rather tiresome, however. The seed had to be sieved clean and then winnowed to get out the last of the fine debris. They then had to be treated to get out the bitter saponins, which is also a bit of a bother. This process is probably something that UK gardeners won't take to.

It was expected that members would be able to taste the quinoa at one of the monthly food Sunday and their views added to the experiment report.

Events

We organise a Food Event and Open Day once a year and Volunteering Day and Food-Sharing day once a month. The main objective of these events is to help each other, share experiences and promote a sense of community.

Food Events

Our annual members' food event took place on Saturday 18th July 2009. It has now become an established tradition to have this event on the first day of the summer school holiday. We had quite a lot of new faces as well the old ones, most of whom date from the start of the organisation.

The weather turned out to be good, allowing us to have a barbeque and enjoy the fresh food from the allotment such as, early potatoes, salads and summer fruits. The event was another step in promoting cooperation and friendship between the members and friends of SLI.

Open Day

This year's Open Day took place on Saturday 26th September. The main activities included an information desk which provided information about the scheme and welcome to the visitors, received applications from new growers and renewed subscription of the existing growers; the fund-raising desk organised tombola and the sale of home-made jam, chutneys and fresh produce from the allotments; the refreshment desk had a wide selection of home-made cakes, freshly squeezed apple and pear juice and homemade lemonades; the quiz desk had a garden quiz competition for adults; the children's desk had a range of activities for children; and finally the Akabella group entertained the visitors with their singing (see Figure 10 for a sample of Open Day photos).

Apart from the existing and new, would-be members and volunteers, we had visitors from outside Norwich as well who had heard about scheme and wanted to see our work. We provided information, refreshments and entertainment to people of all ages. What made the day most enjoyable and successful was the enthusiastic participation of our members in organising the event. To quote one of our members, "the Open Day was particularly successful and showed how involved the members have become " (Moir).

Volunteering Day

The last Sunday of each month is our volunteering day when members and growers give help for communal activities, such as clearing plots, making paths, painting the shed, and so on. Apart from improving the facilities on the allotment, the main purpose of the volunteering day is to bring growers and members together, share gardening ideas and experiences and develop a sense of community.

With the rapid increase in the number of growers, we had many more helping hands during the year. Those members who were unable to come on Sunday offered help to do any outstanding jobs that needed doing. So the monthly volunteering day has become an indispensable tool in maintaining the services and facilities on the allotment.

Figure 10: Open Day, Saturday 26th September, 2009



Food-Sharing Day (Bridget Beauchamp)

This is another social activity aimed at promoting a sense of community and learning from each other. Our regular food-sharing events, held at lunchtime on the first Sunday of the month, have gone from strength to strength. On fine days we sat at the tables in the picnic area, or spilled out onto the camomile lawn; when it was cold or raining the hut offered shelter and plenty of space (see picture below). Numbers varied but there were never fewer than twenty and often well over thirty. There was always plenty of food, and, as the aim was for people to bring dishes made using produce from the allotment, the wide variety depended on what was available at the time. There have been some excellent soups, carrot and allotment grown coriander, parsnip and apple and curried pumpkin were all memorable. There were always plenty of cakes and deserts, with sampling encouraged. In September and October the plentiful apples were fed into our new apple press and provided juice for all.

Figure 11 : Food-sharing day



As well as providing a sociable occasion the lunches offer growers a chance to cook and to sample new ways of cooking familiar vegetables – on one Sunday there were several very different potato dishes. Or, as when one lunchtime, a dish of curried fat baby, or achocha, a vegetable from South America, proved popular, to try something completely new. “The once-monthly food-sharing lunch has become very popular - it gives members an opportunity to catch up on allotment news and to share recipes” (Moira).

New Developments

Wheel-chair access

The wheelchair access project that started in the year 2007-2008 with funding from Geoffrey Watling charity and the Norwich City Council was completed in 2008-2009, with the additional funding from Norfolk Community Foundation. We now have 10 wheelchair accessible raised beds (see the picture) along with special hand tools for people with mobility problems and 12 raised beds for children.

Figure 12: Wheelchair accessible raised beds and one of the users



On its completion, the improved access project was visited by the then Minister for Third Sector, Mr. Kevin Brennan in March 2009 (see the picture below).

The development of these facilities has enabled GO² to become a fully inclusive project. As mentioned earlier, a total of 12 children and 7 adults with mobility difficulties took part in GO² scheme during 2008-2009.

Apple Press

On our Open Day last year, we had borrowed an apple press to make our own fresh drink by utilising apples and pears freely available on the allotments. It was a great success and our members wanted to buy our own apple press by raising fund. However, one of our neighbours on the allotment, Roger Bailey, told us that he was going to make an apple press for the group using recycled material. In less than a year, he actually did it (see photo).

Figure 13: A Government Minister visiting the project



The apple press has the capacity to take up to 15kg of crushed apples which will produce 6 litres of juice. The apple press has been popular ever since its inauguration and a number of local groups and individuals have made good use of the press in turning surplus apples into juice and cider.

Visits, media, publicity

In our last year's report, we mentioned that we should use our knowledge and experience in promoting growing communities in Norwich and beyond. During the year 2008-09, we invited people to come and see our work, offered our help and advice in setting up similar schemes in other areas and took part in a number of events organised by like-minded organisations and groups.

We had visits from the Grapes Hill Garden, Elm Grove Lane Allotment

Society, Eye Growing Local allotment project, Family Action Swaffham WellFamily Service, among others. These visits have facilitated exchange of ideas and promoted solidarity between groups interested in promoting allotments and community gardens.

We attended a variety of events including World Environment Day organized by Buying Solutions at St Andrew Business Park, Norwich, Green Fair organized by the Broadlands District Council, BBC's Dig In road show in Norwich and Plant Swap and Biodiversity Event in Postwick, Norwich. Likewise, we gave presentation at Growing Local event at Bungay and Sustainable Living Festival organized by CUE East, University of East Anglia.

We took part in the Eco Awards competition jointly organized by Norwich City Council and Norwich Evening News. Two of our members attended "the vegetable patch planning and planting course" organised by Norfolk Smallholders Training Group.

Articles about the Grow-Our-Own scheme were featured in the *Eastern Daily Press*, *The Advertiser* and in *Permaculture* magazine. Grow-Our-Own was one of the three local groups chosen for Waitrose Community Matters award in September 2009.

Finance

During 2008-2009, we received a grant from Norfolk Community Foundation towards the costs of raised beds for wheelchair users and children, and a donation from the Royal Bank of Scotland. We raised money from our Open Day event and from the sale of jam, chutney and plants. With the increase in the number of growers, nearly 60% of our regular income was from plot rent.

With regard to expenses, the main items were: providing wheelchair accessible raised beds, growing areas for children, special hand tools for people with mobility problems and greenhouse

Figure 14 : Master designer and a young disciple making apple juice



repair (see Annex 2). With the completion of all capital projects, the Grow-Our-Own scheme now has enough income to pay for the regular expenses and is financially self-sustainable.

What the growers say

We meet most of our growers on a regular basis and get their comments and feedback in an informal ways. Quite a lot of growers are already working as volunteers to help us manage and maintain the project.

However, with a view to giving the growers an opportunity to voice their concerns, we asked for their feedback regarding the services and facilities provided at the time of plot renewal. We also asked them to suggest areas for improvement and what role, if any, they would like to play in improving the quality of services. Here are some excerpts from the growers' responses describing their experiences:

Anonymous

- An excellent way of providing a growing space without the long wait for an allotment. Friendly people and helpful advice. A good community feel.
- Please get rid of the Google notice board! It is unfriendly to use, and I am being bombarded with messages from other people in my emails. Why not have an open website? What we are doing is not secret! It would be helpful to have on it plants / seeds that are available, calendar of planning for the year, tips, etc.
- Advance notice of plants that will be available.

Thanks for your help over the year. You are doing a great job.

Janet Ede

Here are my comments as requested. As a newcomer it seems to me that:

- An excellent scheme
- Many advantages: convenience of a smaller plot
provision of tools on site
provision of plants etc.
invaluable help and advice
friendliness and feeling of community.
- Scheme seems to work extremely well
- I have signed the volunteer list and will undertake to maintain the path leading to my plots.

Caroline Corbould

- Have really enjoyed my first year with Grow-Our-Own Scheme. And even surprised myself with what I have been able to grow!
- I like the social side of the scheme and knowing there are other people there for advice. I have also enjoyed being able to go up there during the summer evenings and have a quiet hour or so. I don't think there is much I dislike about it!
- As my plot is down the far end it would be nice to have a small area down there we could sit and have a drink &/or some food. Maybe during the winter we could make a small patch.

On the whole I have found the plants offered have done well. One or two turned out to be something slightly different!

- I am happy to help out volunteering when I am around.

Finally thanks for a great scheme!

Alastair and Heide Grieve

The scheme seems excellent to us and thank you for all your help. We are enjoying it. I (Alastair) will continue to clip, weed, etc around the cycle racks. Heide suggests that the lay-out of some of the paths could be improved.

These contributions from our growers are very helpful in improving the quality of inputs and services and in making the annual report writing a truly collaborative exercise. We strongly encourage other growers to write about their experiences too!

Plan for the future

With the development of all the physical facilities, volunteers and above all a strong community of growers, the Grow-Our-Own is now a mature and truly sustainable community allotment project.

As discussed earlier, we are unable to expand the scheme in its present location because of the lack of additional land. So the options for us are to keep looking for a suitable site to expand the Grow-Our-Own scheme and to make maximum utilisation of the facilities developed in the current location by combining a range of activities for example, training, visits and the Growing-at-Home scheme. Using our Centre at Bluebell South Allotments as a hub, we should promote growing communities by closely working with schools, local community groups and families and by sharing our experience and expertise with a wider community.

Acknowledgements

Grow-Our-Own, a practical-action project of Sustainable Living Initiative, is now five years old. It has grown from a pilot project into a full-fledged programme. This would not have been possible without the support, hard work and commitment of many individuals and organisations. On behalf of Sustainable Living Initiative, I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all.

The Norfolk Community Foundations deserves appreciation for providing a grassroots grant that enabled us to develop facilities for children, wheelchair users and people with mobility difficulties. I also would like to thank Claire Pinkney of the Royal Bank of Scotland for giving us a donation as part of the Community Cash-back Awards.

Of all the well-wishers of Sustainable Living Initiative, Robert Bailey, Alan Foulger, Keith Clays, Janet Bearman, Ben Binns, Brian and Jo Baxter and Judith Lubbock have been a source of great support.

I would particularly like to thank the following growers who have given a tremendous amount of their time in contributing to the never-ending communal work on the allotment over the past year: Alastair and Heide Grieve, Andrew Hardy, Angela Beckett, Bernard Farrant, Brenna Powys, Charles and Juyna Lewis, Claire Pinkney, Enid Williams, Hella Simper, Ian Raycroft, Janet Johnson, John Hunter, Karen Wright, Laura McCartney-Gray, Moira Froud, Roberta Manners and Tony Mooney.

Of all the people who helped to make the Open Day 2009 such a great success, the following people deserve special thanks: Amy Deol, Anita Pant, Anna Robinson-Pant, Bridgid Hayward, Celia Jablon, Claire Pinkney, Dev Ghimire, Hannah Weinstein, Ian Rycroft, Jane Graham, Jaya Sexton, Jane Chittenden, Joanna Snape, John Hunter, John Snape, June Abbey, Juyna Lewis, Karen Sexton, Laura McCartney-Gray, Lucy Hogg, Moira Fraud, Roberta Manners, Roger Rowe, Sian Jones, Tessa Phillips, Robert Hunter and Sandra Celada.

Of all the members and volunteers of SLI, I particularly appreciate the regular help and support given by Christine Wilson, Clive Sexton, Dorothy Palmer, Howard Lawson, Jane Graham, Lucy Hogg, Mick Edwards and Rochelle Wilson. A special thank you to Debbie Payne for her hard work in preparing our account report on time, and to Ben Pant for his help in maintaining the website.

This report itself is a product of collaborative work, thanks to Bridget Beauchamp, Clive Sexton, Claire Byrne, Joanna Cole, Lucy Hogg, Moira Froud, Peter Anderson, and Sian Jones for their contributions. In addition to this, I appreciate the feedback received from Caroline Corbould, Alastair and Heide Grieve, Janet Ede and John Hunter.

Last but not least, a word of appreciation is due to our Directors - Bridget Beauchamp, Kim Hudson, Peter Anderson, Peter Medhurst and Vicky Leconte, for providing continuous help and support without which I would not have been able to carry out my responsibilities.

Happy Gardening!

Mahesh Pant
25 November 2009

The Directors couldn't let these acknowledgements end without an expression of thanks to Mahesh for his vision and drive in setting up Grow-Our-Own. That it is now a thriving, lively community of growers is due in no small part to his enthusiasm, commitment and sheer hard work over the last five years.

ANNEX

Annex 1

Sustainable Living Initiative Limited

Company Information
for the period from 1st October 2008 to 30th September 2009

DIRECTORS:

P. Anderson
K. Hudson
P. Medhurst
B. Beauchamp
V. Leconte

SECRETARY:

M. Pant

REGISTERED OFFICE:

37 Buckingham Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR4 7DE

REGISTERED NUMBER:

5472105 (England and Wales)

**Annex 2 : Income and expenditure account detail for the year to 30th September 2009
(Comparatives for the year ended 30th September 2008)***

	2009	2008
	£	£
<u>Income</u>		
Sales income:	805	5,91
Produce Sales including Open Day	602	554
Plant Sales	106	27
Miscellaneous Sales	97	10
 Recurring income:	 3,080	 1,618
Plot rent	2,934	1420
Members fees and related income	146	193
Seed kitty	0	5
Other income:	5,250	7,266
Donations	255	253
Grants	4,992	7000
Interest	3	13
 TOTAL INCOME	 9,135	 9,475
<u>Expenditure</u>		
1. Direct expenditure:	3,240	1,958
Plot rent	593	482
Seeds	776	550
Manure	329	299
Repairs	196	0
Small Tools	473	342
Plot improvements	873	285
 2. Investment in equipment & facilities:	 4992	 7,316
Solar Light and water butts	0	870
Greenhouse Repairs	406	0
Disabled access improvements	4024	6446
Tools	303	0
Other Direct Expenditure	259	0
 3. Overhead expenditure:	 1,397	 1,682
Telephone & broadband	359	301
Postage	20	9
Stationery	98	151
Insurance	432	1042
Training	44	0
Subscriptions	121	15
Sundries	323	164
Professional fees	0	0
 4. Taxation:	 0	 (0)
Corporation tax payable on result for period	0	(0)
 TOTAL EXPENDITURE	 9,629	 10,956

*These are draft figures subject to account adjustments.