

Vision England Final Evaluation Report

Vision England is a project under the umbrella of Our Bright Future partnership.

Vision England worked nationally with young people aged between 11 – 24 with a disability, an additional need or a complex communication need. Vision England aimed to engage young people with disabilities with their local environment. This could be through learning about conservation, developing new skills that were environment or nature based or experiencing the outdoors in new ways and in new locations – whichever way met their individual needs best.

The project supported 11 – 24-year-olds with a disability and worked on a national level, enabling young people from all over the UK to get involved.





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Evaluation Process

For this evaluation an outcome-based evaluation was used, measuring against the following aims and outcomes specific to both the project and to Our Bright Future.

The project specific overall aim was:

- The project will increase the confidence, independence, social skills and career awareness of 240 young people with a visual impairment, aged 12-17 years, at a crucial transitional stage of their life, using the outdoor environment as the motivating factor so that they no longer feel so isolated and alone.

The project specific outcomes were:

- 240 young people with VI (Visual Impairment) will increase their self-confidence and improve their independent living skills and independent travel skills
- 240 young people with VI will benefit physically (improved fitness) and mentally (maturity, self-belief, determination, better judgements of risk) from taking part in outdoor environmental activities
- 240 young people with VI will feel less isolated and alone and will gain new friendships and establish informal support networks from the other young people with VI taking part
- 240 young people with VI will make a meaningful and positive contribution to their local environment and communities through improved education, employment and volunteering opportunities, increasing community integration

The Our Bright Future three asks are:

- Ask 1: more time spent learning in and about nature
- Ask 2: support to get into environmental jobs
- Ask 3: policy makers, employers, businesses, schools and charities to pay more attention to the needs of young people and the environment

Feedback was collected in the form of surveys, feedback forms, photos, informal interviews and informal verbal feedback.



It should be highlighted that the outcomes that are specific to Vision England all focus on young people with visual impairments. During the delivery of the project this demographic was changed to young people aged 11-25 with any disability, and this evaluation reflects that.

Story

Vision England was one of many projects delivered through Our Bright Future. Our Bright Future is an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts which brings together the youth and environmental sectors. This £33 million programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, is formed of 31 projects across the UK. Each project is helping young people aged 11-24 gain vital skills and experience and improve their wellbeing.'

The project was initially delivered by the RNIB through residencies throughout the year for young people with a vision impairment aged 11-17. Sense do not have access to any of these records.

Vision England moved from RNIB to Sense in April 2019. To reflect the aims and ethos of Sense, the criteria to participate in Vision England was updated to include those aged 11-25 with any form of disability, including those with more complex needs. This positive change meant that Sense could use our specialism in supporting those with complex needs to engage with the environment.

Unfortunately, Vision England was non-operational for over a year during lockdown in 2020. Vision England became operational again in Spring 2021 and continued through until December 2021 with a focus on day events and community groups alongside residential delivery



Virtual Workshops

Virtual workshops were designed and delivered in collaboration with Field Studies Council (FSC), Vision England's project partner. The virtual workshops were developed to focus on a different area of the environment each week and have a creative element involved as well as be accessible for those with a range of disabilities

These virtual workshops were designed to allow young people to have something to engage with while face to face delivery was not possible.

Due to staffing issues and delays with launching the virtual workshops there was lower engagement than anticipated and in the end 4 out of 24 planned workshops were delivered. No feedback was collected as part of this delivery.



Community Projects

Community projects were a way of engaging people with their local environments. As well as being a primary aim of the project, we found that these spaces were most accessible to people with disabilities and enabled greater participation.

In total there were eight community projects:

- Touchbase Pears College Garden Project
- Sandwell GOT Group Community Garden Project
- JFK Specialist School Stratford Garden Project
- Suffolk Sense College Garden Project
- Sense College East Garden Project
- Epping Forest Project
- Multi Sensory Garden Touchbase Pears



Touchbase Pears College Garden Project

Sense Head Office is based in Selly Oak Birmingham, from which a range of services including a day centre, a college and community groups are based out of! Vision England delivered a community group in partnership with the Sense College and Forest School Birmingham.

This project started in June 2021 and ran through to December. Almost all the young people who engaged with this group were nonverbal and used PECs or symbols to communicate.



The young people during the summer went on many sensory nature walks in the parks and outdoor spaces nearby to get inspiration on what they wanted their garden to look like with smells and colours and flowers. They planted perennial flowers and herbs during the summer months and put someone in charge of watering the flowers and herbs every week. This was great to help the young peoples independence, being in charge of remembering and initiating the watering of the new plants each week.

As there are many young people with sensory impairments, they wanted to make sure everyone could experience the garden in some way, so they created a sensory garden. Crafts were made out of recycled materials using beads, milk bottle tops and shells These were hung up by the students within the sensory area next to and between the herbs and flowers. The students also wanted to have a bench here to be able to sit down in the area.

In the autumn, the students started on bug hotels and made them from scratch using recycled materials. The students also had the chance to use some power tools with support. All the young



people took it in turns to use a drill and a saw to help make the bug hotels. For some young people this sensory experience was quite intense and took a while to get used to. However, the young people really loved making this part of their garden, it was tactile for those with visual impairments and was a very clear start and finish point to this part of the project: it was easier for young people to see their progress and be proud of it.

The young people then wanted to add to the crafts and structures in their garden and took inspiration from a totem pole and wanted to recreate their own. They drew around their hands and using small saws and with support they were able to cut out their hands and paint them. They were able to stick them all together and, using the drill, were able to secure them on a plank of spare wood. The young people added to this each week with more hands or more sensory objects they had created.

As the sessions continued the young people added to their craft and to their garden by planting more plants and learning about how to take care of a garden at a very calm and slow pace. It was important for this group to take their time with their learning and to repeat many of the activities. In the autumn the young people planted more flowers, mainly wildflowers, daisies and tulips. They also planted bamboo and some bulbs for winter to brighten up the garden during the colder months. They built a willow arch to welcome people into the garden and painted part of the fence to brighten it up.



'I wanted to express a hearty thank you from me and all the staff and students at Sense College Birmingham for all your support in facilitating the amazing gardening project with Hannah from Forest school. The students all miss the sessions greatly and we are incorporating gardening into or long-term timetables as they all have become very green fingered. Thank you very much for all the equipment that was donated to the college. We will make very good use of this.' Sense Education Manager





Sandwell GOT Group Garden Project

The members of the Get Out There (GOT) group had an extremely overgrown garden at their centre. It was full of brambles, nettles and debris and was not suitable for any outdoor activities.

Vision England and the GOT Group got together and with the help of a member of FSC staff managed to meet for an afternoon every week over the summer holidays for a six-week programme together to transform this garden! The group was made up of 5 young people all between the ages of 11 and 17 years.

The leaders of Sense GOT Group were really keen to make sure that the young people involved were involved and in charge of every aspect of the reinventing of this garden, to ensure that the young people had an agency over the project as well as working on their independence skills. The space was cleared beforehand due to limited time the young people had and to give the young people a clean slate of a garden to work with and imagine from.



The first session consisted of the group meeting Pip from FSC and discussing ideas and plans they had for the garden in a line with what was doable and realistic with the budget given to them and the time frame. The young people took the lead on this, explaining to Pip what they wanted to use the garden for and coming up with ideas of what to put in it to make it accessible and an inviting place for people to be. They wrote down a list of what they needed and where it would fit in the garden.



The second session was all about getting a shopping list together and pricing it up and buying the equipment needed for the project. The



young people took charge of this task, keeping the list and pricing up the plants and tools they needed as they went to make sure they kept in budget.

The third and fourth sessions were a physical, digging up the areas they wanted to plant in. The young people chose which areas and once shown how to safely dig, they took charge of digging and planting the herbs and plants they wanted. They also learnt about watering the plants and how often.

On the final session, with Pip's instruction and the help of the staff, the GOT group built a small wooden flower bed for more flowers. There were also some benches added and a fire pit to make it a fun and inviting place to spend time in the future and ensure the garden is used.

The GOT group have plans to maintain the garden with the tools they brought and, in the spring, add more flowers and herbs to it to maintain the garden and make it a beautiful place - not just for the GOT group members but for wildlife too.



John F Kennedy School Garden Project

John F Kennedy Special School is in the heart of East London, in an area known to be a deprived. JFK school and Vision England along with FSC developed a project that worked over two half terms, totalling twelve sessions. The outdoor space in the school, being an inner-city school, is limited and mainly concrete. There was not a lot of colour or wildlife on the school premises. They wanted to make a brighter outdoor space for all the students there and encourage wildlife to visit as much as possible. The staff at JFK and FSC worked together to come up with sessions that also fitted into their 'healthy living' syllabus. There was a huge emphasis on wellbeing and being outdoors and in touch with nature as part of this.



Twelve young people over two classes actively got involved in the sessions while multiple other classes enjoyed experiencing the garden in their own way, appropriate to their abilities. The participants used this as an exploration of nature and what it means to use outdoor space, as many of them did not have outdoor space at home and had not have the opportunity to really learn how things are grown. Young people were involved with making clear choices about which plants and herbs for the garden and learnt the names of many new plants, many of which the young people claimed they had not seen before. This was built on every session and even on the last session were able to identify the plants they had chosen and planted!

Participants also had an active role in the landscaping of the garden, digging up certain areas and working as a team. The young people were supported with planting their own

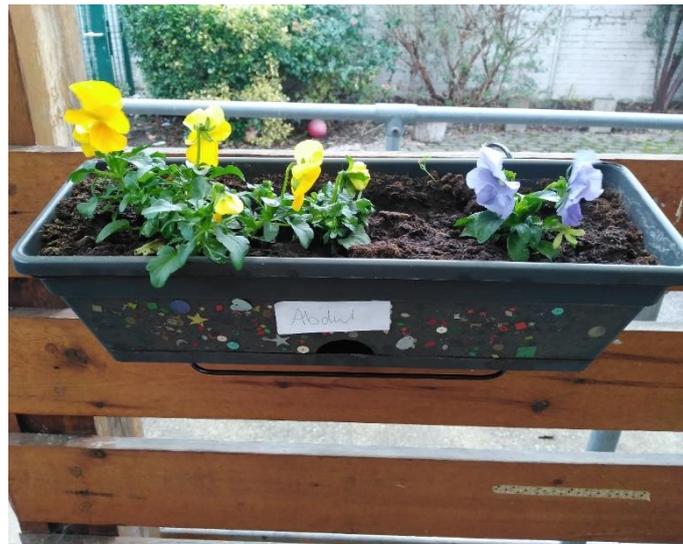




plants and learning how a plant needs to grow which they were able to recall every week when planting something new.

The participants painted bird boxes for their garden and learned about birds and their importance. They were able to pick places as a group to put their bird box in the garden so themselves and other classrooms could see them ready for spring. In conjunction with this, there was a lot of emphasis on common British bird types and their sounds so that the students could identify the birds they may see in the spring.

There are plans in the spring to turn one area that the students dug up into a vegetable plot and grow vegetables.





Sense College Suffolk

The students at the Sense College in Beccles are based on an industrial estate and so do not have a lot of green space around them. They have a small garden within the middle of the college, but it has barely been used in years. They wanted a multi-use garden that can be the heart of the college and be a place of learning, experiencing and socialising for all the students. They really wanted to make the garden a place that has multiple uses for multiple



subjects and make learning at the college more holistic in its style. Many students at the college have sensory impairments and smell and touch are important communication tools, including sensory massage and sensory spaces. The college wanted a herb garden to produce the herbs to make their own essential oils to use in the college and to teach the students how to do this. Similarly, they wanted a space in the garden for growing vegetables to use within their independent cookery classes. The staff wanted to teach the students about growing vegetables, tending to them, harvesting them and then using them in cooking. These were such amazing ideas of an immersive and holistic way of working as well as making the college self-sufficient in these areas and Vision England wanted to make this happen.





The college had 5 students who could take a hands-on and active role in the regeneration of the garden. Vision England worked in partnership with the I Green Grow Cooperative to support and guide the project. Together these students took an active role in mapping out the garden and choosing the plants and herbs they wanted based on smells and touch. The students worked with the facilitator to dig using shovels and trowels areas of the garden they wanted to plant in. Using picture cards and simple recipes, the students chose what plants they wanted to have and decided they wanted a polytunnel to be able to grow these successfully.





Sense College East - Knapwell

Sense College East in Knapwell is a learning environment for over fifty students. It is a central hub for many smaller colleges within the area and is renowned for its specialist care and support for those with complex disabilities.

Knapwell has a fair amount of outdoor space, however most of it is inaccessible to those with any kind of mobility need. The ground is uneven which makes it very difficult for wheelchairs, mobility aids and anyone who may be unsteady on their feet.

Vision England worked with the college to improve this green space and make it accessible and usable for the young people it is supposed to benefit. The students involved with the project, with communication support, were able to identify and discuss the issues with the garden currently and put a plan together of what they wanted changed. They wanted to have the terrain evened out and a path to be put in all the way around the garden. They had help from a local building team to put this in using the plans of the students. They also wanted to add some sensory resources around the garden for the other students who needed support from objects to interact with the garden.



Since installing the path and the sensory objects, the garden has been used by all students. There have been 'follow the leader' games played, sensory winter walks and plans for spring activities to take place in the garden now it is accessible to everyone, regardless of their disability.

One of the managers from the college has written a report on this – please see in appendix a.





Epping Forest Project

Epping Forest project was quite different to the other community groups delivered. Vision England worked with the young people and volunteers on the Redbridge Buddying programme to put together a 6 sessions course for young people.

The sessions took place in Epping Forest, which is local to Redbridge and is known as a beautiful, wooded area for picnics, walks, foraging and wildlife. When asked, many of the young people had said they had never been to Epping Forest, despite it being on their doorstep. Vision England thought this would be a great place to introduce young people to their local environment and an opportunity for young people to familiarise themselves within a green space local to them to help them contextualise and understand environmental issues. Vision England wanted to give the young people new knowledge of the forest and what simple steps and tasks can be done in order to help the environment.

Over the 6 sessions the young people did an array of activities always with a large outdoor element. The young people learnt a lot about bugs. They learnt what kinds of places bugs hid and why they were so important to the forest life. Young people had a go at catching bugs and identifying them. Young people took part in similar activities with mammal traps. Using a special device and food the young people set down harmless traps to entice small mammals. There was a discussion around what sorts of mammals they may catch – what they look like and their names to encourage the young people to identify them. Excitingly, on one of the occasions a vole was caught. There were shrieks of terror and excitement and one young person said ‘(my)favourite thing was catching the vole!’

Other sessions saw the young people going pond dipping. They learnt all about ponds, what they might find in a pond and their importance in the Epping Forest classroom, before going out into the forest with nets and buckets to try and catch and identify what they had talked about in the classroom. One young person was





able to identify a newt he found in the pond after scoping it up in his net! In one session young people learnt how to make a shelter using only natural materials. They later learnt how to make a fire using only natural materials and the importance of being safe around fire.

There was a lot of focus on orientation of the forest. It was important that the young people felt confident and comfortable in the forest and if they were to return with families, they would be able to recognise parts of the forest and show them to their families. Every session there was a long walk through the forest, usually twice, to do activities there as well. There was also a scavenger hunt on a couple of sessions to help the young people learn to identify certain trees and animals they can find in the forest. Some of the sessions had a more creative element to show the young people what sorts of activities they could do if and when they were to come back by themselves with their buddies or with their families. One of the sessions the young people made natural collages: they were encouraged to use their senses to find things around the forest they looked nice, were nice to touch or smelt nice. The young people went around and collected their favourite items and turned these into a collage. Another creative activity happened on a couple of sessions was using berries and mud to paint. The young people went around the forest collecting berries and mashed them with a paint brush and used the dye of the berries to paint on cloth and on trees themselves.

For many young people, it was the first or second time they were meeting their volunteer buddies on one of the Epping Forest sessions. The staff who manage the project said it was a wonderful way and place for these buddy matches to meet and create memories together instantly. One of the volunteers said that it was 'a great opportunity to meet my young person' and that they had a 'focus they were able to form a bond over'.



Multisensory Garden Project

The project is a small part of a much bigger project planned and delivered by Sense's Arts, Sports and Wellbeing Team to improve an outdoor space - but not in the typical way! The people involved in this project wanted to make a multisensory garden using technology which allowed visitors to engage with the garden differently. Using Midisprout equipment, visitors can listen to the plant's vibrations in the form of music as each plants will makes a different sound when linked to the Midisprout. The Arts, Sports and Wellbeing Team also wanted to incorporate soundscapes from around the area to create a sound bath throughout the garden as well. The project worked with 4 young people in particular, who all have a range of sensory impairments.

On the first session the young people involved had an introduction to the equipment, which included the subpac vests, Midisprouts and the computer software Typatone and Garage Band. All young people had to choose a sound avatar. They picked popcorn, pneumatic drill, Dr Who theme tune and bongo drums. The young people went on a mission outside to collect leaves and twigs and other natural materials and used their favourites by feeling and colour to cover a mask.



The second session was a trip to the botanical gardens to test out the equipment they had been introduced to in the previous week. The participants tried the Midisprouts with different plants and used the subpacs to feel the plants at the same time at the plant's vibrations created music through the Midisprout. Different plants made completely different sounds and even different parts of the plants sounded different to each other, from petals to leaves and roots. The plants also sounded and felt different depending on whether you were touching them! This was mesmerising for the participants and all the staff! A lot of time was spent trying out different areas and different plants: comparing the noises and vibrations made. The participants had modelling clay and were asked to try and make a physical representation of the noises and vibrations



felt from the plants. The young people decided to record many of these noises choosing their favourites to use for the next session.

On the next session the participants listened to the recordings they made picking out their favourites. They discussed the difference the sounds, comparing each other's recordings and discussing which plants it came from and how it made them feel. They then mixed their favourite sounds with their own personal avatar sound. They used a programme called Typatone which turns words into music. They wrote poetry on this programme that reflected the sounds they had recorded from the botanical gardens. They then were able to turn the poetry they had written into music with Typatone.



For the last session they returned to the botanical gardens, they listened to the tracks that had made with their favourite sounds and personal avatar. They recorded more sounds to add while in the botanical gardens. They then used Garage Band to add effects and finish their tracks.

Throughout the sessions, the young people wore the vibrating Subpac vests whenever they were listening to sounds. This enabled one of the participants who is profoundly Deaf to be able to experience this project



Community Project Evaluation

The community projects were a new part of the project in 2021 and were a big success, resulting in the improvement of 4 green spaces. A couple of the projects added to the garden and made the space more wildlife friendly while teaching the young people about the importance of this. In some cases, the project was about actually making the spaces accessible for the disabled young people who used them. This was either through physically making it more accessible by adding paths or evening the ground or by making sure the right equipment and resources were available in order to engage the young people appropriately in a way that was accessible to them.



Collecting feedback for these projects had its challenges. The young people who attend some of these colleges and groups ran by Sense have complex needs, meaning that many young people communicate in non-formal ways and relied on those who knew them and their communication methods well to let us know how they felt.

Vision England received 32 feedback forms relating to the community groups.

93% of young people said after their project they cared about the environment more.

93% of young people said they enjoyed their project.

87% of young people said they felt relaxed during and after the project's sessions.

90% of young people said they knew more about how to help nature more after the project.

93% of young people said they felt confident during the session and after the project's sessions.

87% of young people said they felt close to other people in the group during the project.

In some cases, there was a group of young people who had an active role in the project who are in the numbers and figures here. However, the work they have done to improve their garden or greenspace will improve the experience of so many more students who due to their disabilities were not able to have an active role. An example of this is in Sense College East where the garden was inaccessible physically at the young people who wanted to use it. There were 4 young people who took an active role in planning the improvement to the garden, however it will allow over 30 students to be able to go into the garden and enjoy it now.

Aside from the physical achievements of the improved gardens, the main achievements from these community projects have been the improved wellbeing as seen by the statistics about confidence and feeling relaxed. From verbal feedback from some projects, staff reported that some young people who had challenging behaviour would often be calm and engaged throughout their outdoor session for almost the whole session, showing reduced behaviour which can challenge during the sessions. This has been reported in JFK school, Touchbase Pears, Sandwell and Epping Forest projects.





Day Events

Vision England wanted a way to engage young people from a variety of backgrounds and disabilities. There are many young people who weren't able to go on a residential or community event and so Vision England opened up another offer. The purpose of these was to expose young people to the environment in a new way. For young people to want to conserve and care about the environment, they need to have solid and multiple positive experiences of it. When asked what experiences they have had around nature and the environment, many young people said that they had mostly been with school and been going to somewhere 'boring' for a walk. Vision England wanted to give them a completely different experience.

Vision England delivered 10 day sessions:

- Lambourne End
- Herbal Medicine
- Herbal Medicine and Planting & Bushcraft Skills Workshop at Thrive Festival
- Canalability
- Foraging Cornwall
- Accessible Surfing and Ocean Awareness
- Mushroom Foraging
- making recycled art
- sustainable food course

Lambourne End

Lambourne End is an outdoor learning centre in Redbridge that mixes play and adventure with learning and sustainability! The young people who attended this community group had not had a group session before – this was going to be their first time meeting each other and they chose this venue as the place they wanted to meet and learn more about the outdoors.

As many of the young people on this particular project have a keen interest in animals, it was decided to have this event to be partly animal focused. The young people got involved with an activity called ‘Horse Power’ and ‘You Must be Kidding’ where they learnt about specifically looking after horses and goats as well as then getting hands on experience with the kind



of labour that surrounds taking care of these animals. It was a giant success with one young person wanting to stay with ‘the goats all day and sleep in the pen with them’. Though this didn’t happen – he was still very excited about learning and spending so much time with the goats.

The next sessions were about survival and shelter building. Young people were put into groups to learn to make shelters out of natural materials. This was great as a team building exercise for the



young people as well as having to identify properties of natural materials to decide whether they would be a good resource to build a shelter with.

One young person had such a good time on the day and has begun volunteering at Lambourne End every week on their programme to gain some experience to put on his CV.

Herbal Medicine

The East London Young People's Project delivered a herbal medicine class in Dalston Curve Garden. Vision England teamed up with local organisation Phytology to create a sensory and creative natural remedy session for the young people on this project.

In the session, the facilitator went around the garden with the young people to teach identification on common herbs you can find in the UK (lavender, nettle, thyme, rosemary, sage, lemon balm etc). The young people chose which herbs to make tea from and they all tried it.

They learnt about the uses of herbs and what they can treat and help with in everyday life. All young people got to ask questions about the herbs and what they did. They then got to smell the essential



oils, and all make their own individual body balms.



Another young person who is non-verbal interacted so well with the herbs and smells. She is a very sensory young person and her volunteer said that this is the first time she has seen her interact so much with things she had to smell and taste and feel as usually these senses can be very overwhelming for her.

Thrive Festival Workshops

Thrive Festival was a day festival developed by the Sense's East London Young People's Project Team for young people with disabilities and additional needs. Many people with disabilities or additional needs have not been to festivals as they are not very accessible due to noise crowds and communication barriers.

Throughout the whole day bushcraft and woodcraft activities were available or young people to get involved in. Using natural and recycled materials to make magic wands and 'dragon eyes' which the young people could then use around the festival. They chose these things as they wanted to show young people that you can make toys and fun things using natural materials rather than plastic! They also held a workshop of flower printing making bookmarks and designs using a mallet and the natural dyes of flowers leaves and petals. The facilitators identified the plants they were using so that the young people could recreate it at home if they wished.



There was then separate planting workshop where the young people planted herbs and a couple of specific trees for the farm where the festival took place. Before the festival young people painted big wooden planters which then were used during the festival. For one person who is Deafblind, this planting workshop was very special to him. Using Deafblind manual, he told me that this was his favourite – feeling the soil and the plants.

There was then a separate workshop that used the herbs on the site to create a hand soak and bath. The young people who took part loved this idea – they went around the farm learning about the herbs



that were there and picking their favourite based on either scent or properties it held. This was also a really lovely workshop and a lot of non-verbal people joined in this workshop who 'smiled all the way through' the facilitator reported back.

One young person who has a learning disability, who had gone to the previous herbal medicine workshop in Dalston Curve Garden had remembered the properties of the herbs he had learnt there and was able to recall them and apply them in this workshop too.



CanalAbility

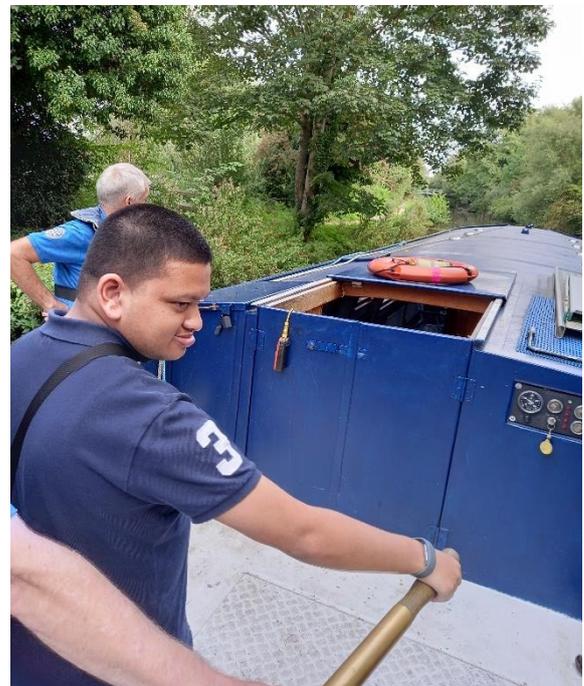
The young people on the East London Young People's a told the manager of this project that they wanted to go out of London and try something new. Young people with their volunteer buddies and leaders of the group travelled to London Liverpool Street station and got a national rail service to Harlow in Essex. For many young people this was the first time they had been on a train that wasn't a tube.

The groups were then joined by 2 members of FSC who were facilitating the group workshops. These consisted of bird identification, plant identification, talking about the eco systems on the canal, listening out for bird songs and discussing how the canal systems work. Each young people got a chance to steer the boat and some even helped with the opening and closing of the locks on the canal: learning about water levels and the systems behind it.

One young person who is quite anxious about trying new things and especially anxious about COVID, emailed after the event which said:

'Hello it was funboat trip.

I enjoy it.and thank you taking me outside. 😊'



Foraging Events

2 foraging events were held for 2 different groups within Sense.

One was held at the end of summer in Cornwall with our Cornwall GOT group. The young people here went for a walk in a nearby woodland to forage for edible plants and berries. The group had a local expert with them who told them all about their local edible plants and how to identify them as well as teaching them about being safe while doing so.

Another foraging workshop was delivered later in the summer with the Birmingham Touch Base Teen group. They visited a forest near Birmingham looking for edible plants, berries and specifically mushrooms! There were lots of plants identified via other means as many of our teen group have sensory impairments and so smell and touch were very important here. The group were even sent recipes after the event with the ingredients they found while in the forest.





Ocean Awareness and Accessible Surfing

A charity in Swansea has set up an accessible surf school empowering all young people with complex and profound disabilities to be able to experience the water in a new way and to deliver learning about the sea and local environment in a sensory way. Sense Cardiff Day Centre, where many people have complex needs, travelled over to Swansea to take part in this school. For the young people that were able to have an awareness and understanding of the event, there was a small ocean awareness session where the people attending learnt about the dangers to the oceans to do with plastics, overfishing and pollution and how to help these issues in your local area.

All the people had the opportunity to take part in surfing for the first time ever. Using specialist boards and equipment everyone got to participate regardless of their disability and mobility needs!



Food Sustainability Class

The Sense Redbridge Buddying Project wanted to learn more independence skills as well as continuing to grow their community feel after all meeting in Lambourne End and having a more long-term project in Epping Forest. They wanted to incorporate some more independent living skills into this project however still with the focus of the environment.

Vision England partnered up with local organisation BreadNButter to support this aim. The day session focused on food waste and the amount of food people waste in their daily lives. During the session the young people talked about ways to reduce this via cooking and using more of the vegetable, ways to use leftovers and reducing plastic by buying food that's as plastic free as possible. There was also a discussion around compost and what it is used for and how it can help our environment with wastage but also the soils to grow our food.

Throughout these discussions the young people made a 3-course meal out of locally sourced ingredients to compliment these discussions and turn them into real life tangible scenarios.



Recycled Arts Workshop

The last day event of 2021 was also with Redbridge Buddying. Just before the festive season the group attended an art class that specialised in making art sustainable through using recycled materials.

The session started with a discussion about litter and where it should and shouldn't go and asking for the young people's answers and inputs. After an interactive discussion on waste and plastic, the facilitators introduced the materials being used to make the crafts that day. The group were using discarded everyday items and turning them into art. The facilitators explained that these materials were found in places they shouldn't: on beaches, in forests, on pavements etc.

The group made Christmas decorations and cards out of these recycled materials! This was a great way to teach young people about waste and to encourage them to be more creative with their waste and how to use their waste to creative things they can be proud of and reuse or recycle





Day Event Evaluation

The day events were a big success for Vision England. Vision England wanted to show the diversity of what kinds of activities were available that involved the environment and the natural world to try and engage young people in a new way - hoping to ignite a new interest or hobby potentially. A couple of young people really enjoyed their day event and want to find somewhere to continue it afterwards – one young person enjoyed the woodcraft at Thrive so much and wanted to start attending their events monthly. Another after attending Lambourne End as a day event contacted them to try and get volunteering experience with them looking after the animals. Another young person really enjoyed the herbal medicine and said he wanted to do more activities similar to that in the future. The teen and Cornwall GOT group enjoyed their foraging sessions and told me that they are looking to have a springtime foraging session to see the differences in the things they can forage through the seasons.



Vision England wanted the day events to bring people together and create shared memories and experiences. Some of the day events had the same people attending and so they were able to recognise young people from previous events and build on their relationship or friendship. In some cases, bringing brand new young people together.

In written format Vision England collected 28 forms.



70% of young people said after their day event they cared about the environment more. The remaining 30% cared the same amount about the environment after the event.

100% of young people said they enjoyed their event.

92% of young people said they felt relaxed during and after the event.

71% of young people said they knew more about how to help nature more after the event. The remaining 29% said they knew the same amount as before the session.

89% of young people said they felt confident during the session and after the session.

82% of young people said they felt close to other people in the group during the session.

In cases where written feedback was not obtained, verbal feedback was collected over the phone or in person if possible. From this feedback collected, the responses were very similar: all young people enjoyed their day event and that it gave them a new experience. Most saying that they liked being outside and wanted to do something similar again.





Residential

Throughout the 6 years of Vision England, the project has delivered residential in partnership with Field Studies Council (FSC.) Both partners recognise the value of residential for young people, and especially for young people with disabilities. Residential are an opportunity for young people to be away from caregivers and learn a bit more about what it means to be independent. Young people with additional needs or disabilities have even fewer opportunities to involve themselves with activities and events that help with their independence due to a lack of access and therefore an accessible residential like this is even more important.

2019

The project in 2019 had 2 residential that were a week long for mainly young people with visual impairments over the summer.

The residential took place on a 2 different FSC sites.

- FSC Castle Head
- FSC Juniper Hall

2021

In 2021 the project held 7 residential.

All the residential took place on a 3 different FSC sites.

- FSC Juniper Hall
- FSC Preston Montford.
- FSC Malham Tarn

All the residential focused on conservation, education and fun! Depending on the facilities present at each venue, the activities differed.



All residential had a conservation activity to help young people learn about what kinds of activities conservation entails and to help the young people feel a sense of agency and achievement. On some residential this was clearing areas of weeds and working the ground ready for the new planting season in spring. On some sites this was building large wooden planters and planting wildflowers, while doing this learning about the bee population and their importance. Others helped with clearing of spaces of litter and weeds and places wildlife homes in these areas such as birdboxes and hedgehog boxes.



All residential also featured a small hike. This was very much enjoyed by everyone who went on it though I know on each residential it came with some challenges. Finding a hike that was accessible to all the young people was a challenge at points with some young people needing to have guides and others needing prompts and others needing no support. On these walks th young people experienced fields, rolling hills, medieval turrets, waterfalls, forests and lakes. All young people that



went on the hike really enjoyed it, despite some young people being very reluctant to go on one in the beginning. With some running ahead and purposely finding to muddiest and or wettest or windiest trails she had a great time. She did not want to come back inside after the hike!

The residential had a large element of education to them, all of them having a focus on teaching the young people about



the environment they were in. This included camping and learning about the local wildlife. Some young people went on a bat walk with headtorches and used bat detectors to listen to the bat noises and watch the bat activity. On others, mammal or moth traps were set over night and inspected in the morning to see what kinds of mammals and moths were around. On another there was a mushroom foraging and hunting session while on one of the hikes. One young person brought along their fungi identification book and with the supervision of staff, young people all took it in turns to try and identify the mushrooms they had found.

All residentials had an element of independent living attached. For example, on many of the residentials the young people attending had to make their own beds and then take the bedding off after use. On some of the residentials, young people had to pick and make their own lunch sandwiches. Young people got to choose what they did in their spare time and chose what time they went to bed. One young person was very excited by this prospect of choosing his own bedtime and said it was the first time he has ever done this! Many of the young people in 2019 and 2021 were able to achieve the John Muir award. This award demonstrates knowledge, dedication and taking part in an active role in conservation of the environment. To achieve the award people must discover and explore an outdoor space near to them, they must have completed a certain number of hours performing a conservation task, must understand who John Muir is and shared news of their outdoor space.



This award will be something that the young people can use as evidence and experience when they are applying for positions in the future.



Residential Evaluation

The residentials were overall a big success and were essential for the success of this programme. One young person said to me while I was visiting a residential: 'it's nice having people around me who have similar [sight] problems ... I don't feel weird here'. There were also reports of young people who were happy to use their cane while on these residentials, but beforehand parents had said about how reluctant they usually were to use them in public. These personal stories and the statistics above show how the impact these experiences have on this group of young people and is essential for building confidence and self-esteem and relates to the outcome of mental wellbeing.



Out of the 72 feedback written feedback forms Vision England collected

80% of young people said after their day event they cared about the environment more. The remaining 20% cared the same amount about the environment after the residential.

90% of young people said they enjoyed their event.

72% of young people said they felt relaxed during and after the event.

70% of young people said they knew more about how to help nature more after the residential. The majority of the 30% who did not say they cared more, many said they already cared a lot before and so they care the same amount as before.

74% of young people said they felt confident during and after the residential.

82% of young people said they felt close to other people in the group during the residential.

In addition to this, upon comparing the responses Vision England had in 2019 and 2021, many of the young people in 2019 had higher scores for the confidence and relaxed questions compared to

2021 answers that were slightly lower. Of course, this could be down to individual differences from the young people. However, it could also be an indicator of the impact COVID and the lockdowns have had on young people's mental health and self-esteem. Highlighting further the importance of these residential were for the young people in 2021



The outcome of this project relating to 'positive contributions to the environment' was achieved here in the residential as young people took an active role in conserving the environment. Particularly during the 2019 residential where the participants had longer to achieve this and therefore could give more time over the week to these tasks. From the feedback here young people learnt a lot about

conservation and the impact on their behaviour.

' I will think about my effect on the climate environment, and improve ways to help it. And participate in more residential like this to continue improving my knowledge,' young person, 2019

'Keep looking after nature with my bird box and I will sit and listen to nature more,' young person, 2019

'The staff were very helpful and the sessions with Pip were very fun ... I enjoyed meeting people my age and the staff helped me. It was very fun, going to places with the group being helped by people. I enjoyed it,'



Case Study – John F Kennedy School

As the project coordinator, I had the pleasure of attending John F Kennedy Special School on their last session of their community project. As mentioned previously, JFK is a Special Educational Needs School in Stratford. They specialise in supporting a wide variety of disabilities and have small bespoke classes for students with similar abilities to ensure that the students get the best and most appropriate support for them to achieve their full potential.

Being an inner-city London school and having visited the school on many occasions before this I knew they did not have any green space at all in the school: this is why I reached out to them to see if they wanted to get involved with the project.

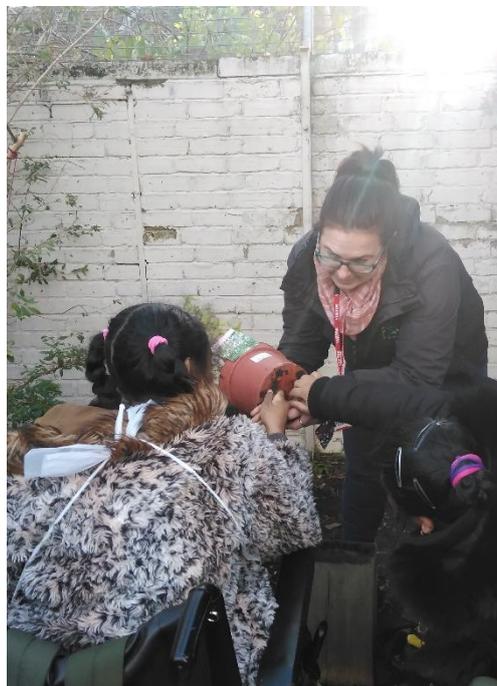
When I arrived, I was greeted by one of the teachers taking part who informed me of all the work that had been going on. She explained how 3 separate classes of different ages and abilities got involved and how incredible the experience has been for them. She took me to the class to join in. They were planting perennials flowers and FSC staff asked the class the steps of what needed to happen next. A young person said 'you need to dig' and the staff member asked if this was right and everyone nodded and agreed. Every young person was given a job – a couple of young people were asked to go and get the shovel, another 2 young people were taking it in turns



to dig and the young people in wheelchairs were holding the buckets for soil to go into. It was great to see everyone having an active part in this, despite the needs they might have. It was clear they had done this in a similar way before and everyone already knew the role they were playing. After the hole was dug and agreed upon, the staff member asked about the next steps: without hesitation one young person immediately said 'pot' meaning the pot needed to be taken off. After the pot was taken off, the staff member asked what was next, one young person signalled to a member of staff, the next step was to break up the soil at the bottom to free the roots. The young person had started doing the action with her hands to show she understood what needed to happen and how to happen. The staff member brought the plant closer to this young person so she could actually physically do

this step herself, a teaching assistant told me this was her favourite part was breaking up the roots of the plant. The teaching assistant asked the young person why they had to do this, and the young person signed 'grow'. The staff member then asked what was next and another young person said it needed to go in and be covered up. The young person who was blind did this and very carefully placed it in and everyone who was able helped cover it up.

Later on in the session the young people filled up bird feeders for the garden outside. When I asked the young people what these were, they all were able to tell me or sign to me that these were to 'feed birds'. The young people then chose where to hang them and clapped and cheered when they were up! The FSC staff then brought out some bird plushies that had the bird song. The young people were able to identify most of the birds, some saying the names and some signing the first letter. We listened to each bird song and everyone said which bird they hoped to see first.



When back in the classroom, the staff at FSC got a big thank you from the class. The school have plans to plant vegetables in the spring and grow harvest them in the summer. Each young person went around and said what vegetables they would like to plant!

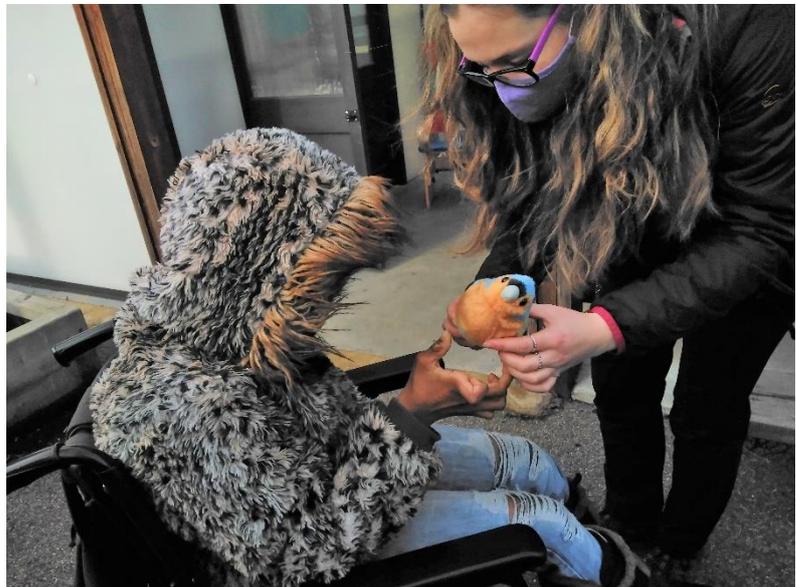


I chose this as a case study as I wanted to demonstrate the kinds of activities and engagement our young people are able to participate in. For these young people, the very fact they were able to focus and actively participate in a class like this is massive. The teachers told me that students often difficulty recollecting information they had learnt from week to

week and month to month. However, with this programme and with support, they were able to recollect and engage with the sessions. It was truly amazing to see individuals that had such complex needs engage so much with this programme.

One young person I asked said ‘it is my favourite part of the week.’ Another said ‘she loved learning outside’ and ‘didn’t want it to end’

A statement from their teacher said ‘The gardening workshop has been amazing for the students. They have not only learnt about growing plants, but also developed communication skills and their fine motor skills when handling their plants and the tools They were able to plan activities that met the needs of each of our pupils such as introducing bird sounds in a soft play toy to one of our students with a visual impairment and providing fast pace activities for all. It was an engagement and enriching experience for all



Overall Evaluation

Overall, Vision England was a big success. The work that has been achieved through all the means mentioned above have meant that so many young people have had new experiences and learnt more about the environment.

Vision England was able to support 307 young people with disabilities through residentials, community projects and day events.

Overall, 135 responses were received across the project.

An overall look at the feedback received back says that:

- 81% of young people said after their project they cared about the environment more.
- 94% of young people said they enjoyed their project.
- 80% of young people said they felt relaxed during and after the project's sessions.
- 74% of young people said they knew more about how to help nature more after the project.
- 83% of young people said they felt confident during the session and after the project's sessions.
- 83% of young people said they felt close to other people in the group during the project.

For many of the participants, due to their needs they were not able to give written feedback. In these cases feedback was sought from managers or leaders of the group, those who know the young people well.

'the young people have loved the project. [One young person] smiles every time he is outside,' from a tutor in college, Knapwell.

'the students have benefitted massively from this project ... the students held their attention throughout all the sessions which is unusual for them,' from JFK school project.





From these statistics and quotes here, it is clear that Vision England has been successful in delivering the outcome it has set out to achieve. Vision England has made a clear positive impact on the young people’s view and experience of the environment: which will hopefully act as a foundation to be built on in the future. It has also had a positive impact on young people’s confidence and mental wellbeing through this project: allowing them to have new experiences, express themselves in new ways and make new connections.

The day events and community projects were a great addition as it meant more young people who would not be able to attend residential to benefit so much from Vision England - thus making Vision England more accessible.

The Our Bright Future three asks are:

- Ask 1: more time spent learning in and about nature
- Ask 2: support to get into environmental jobs
- Ask 3: policy makers, employers, businesses, schools and charities to pay more attention to the needs of young people and the environment

Ask 1: more time spent learning in and about nature

Vision England particularly focused on ask 1.



92% (23 out of 25) projects, residentials or day events were either completely or spent the majority of time outside in nature.

100% of the projects, residentials or day events had a focus on learning more about nature in a specific way. Whether that be in a way to help people get more interested in nature and what it has to offer or learning new things about nature and how to use it in different ways.



Ask 2: support to get into environmental jobs

This ask was not a focus of the project. We shared opportunities with young people and offered support where appropriate to seek and apply for opportunities in this field. There is one young person who is now volunteering at the venue that hosted one of the day events, learning to take care of the animals there. So although it was not a priority for Vision England, it has been achieved to an appropriate level within the specific context Vision England was working in.

Ask 3: policy makers, employers, businesses, schools and charities to pay more attention to the needs of young people and the environment

This was not a focus of the project. However, there were many people influenced within our own charity Sense to realise how people with disabilities can benefit from learning more about the environment to increase knowledge and independence. The projects have also really influenced the schools and colleges who participated: many of them saying how beneficial programme like this has



been to the students and that they are looking of ways they can incorporate it into their curriculum in the future. Therefore, the main influence has been on other people, showing other organisations and facilitators the importance of working with young people with disabilities. Often, when people have not had the opportunity to work with this group of people, expectations of what can and will be achieved are warped and the standard is extremely low based on stereotypes society has built around them. Particularly within the environmental and climate change conversation, often, young people with disabilities are left out of these conversations considered to be too difficult for them. These events residentials and community projects has positive challenged these ideas for the facilitators and organisations they worked with and will hopefully mean these places will encourage or actively seek out working with people with disabilities in the future.





Legacy

Physical

Vision England has had a huge impact on local gardens and green spaces making them accessible for their disabled users.

In Sandwell where there was no real garden but just a jungle of weeds, there is now a fully cleared accessible garden! This space is filled with herbs and flowers creating a sensory experience for its users, that will only be added to come Spring 2022. The garden also now has benches and a firepit the garden has been used as a communal space enabling young disabled people to come together and will continue to do so through continued work on the garden led by the young people who use it.

The garden at Knapwell was not suitable for almost everybody at the college due to a number of different mobility needs and the inaccessibility of the space. After discussions and planning led by the students, Vision England was able to lay a smooth concrete path for the young people all away around the garden for everyone to use. Now, fit with sensory resources and interactive items along the way, all students can now use the path into the garden. The college are hoping in the warmer months to do outside learning more with this new path!

In Beccles, had little outdoor space and what they did have was very bland and concrete. After planning by the students and teachers, they decided they wanted raised beds for herbs and a wheelchair friendly polytunnel for vegetables. With help of a facilitator from a local farm coop, the students helped to put all these raised beds and polytunnel into place! The college plan to start using the herbs they grow themselves to make oils for their aromatherapy sessions as well as grow their own fruits and vegetables to be used in their independent cooking classes! Maintaining the garden and planting these will become a big part of the future curriculum there.

In JFK School, an inner city special educational needs school with a very concrete outdoor area, the students there have worked hard on learning how growing a garden works. They have dug areas to create herb gardens and learnt all about the different kinds of common British birds and how to attract



and protect them by making birdboxes and bird feeders. The plan is for JFK to start growing their own fruit and vegetables with the students come spring 2022.

In Selly Oak at Touchbase Pears college, the students there were learning over a whole term how to make their garden more friendly for wildlife. They used raised beds to plant herbs and flowers for the bees as well as focusing on their garden. They learnt about maintaining the garden space and planned out their year with which flowers and herbs they will plant in in line with the seasons and local wildlife.

At Touchbase Pears Vision England has supported the beginnings of an incredibly exciting project to create a multisensory garden for public use. They have developed a space using sound spaces from across Birmingham and technology that allows you to touch a plant to hear the vibrations, creating music that's fully accessible. This garden will allow for everyone, regardless of sensory impairments to enjoy nature in a whole new way: Vision England has supported the purchase of equipment and facilitation of workshops with disabled people for the initial stages for this project.

Wellbeing

As well as physically creating and improving spaces that will benefit so many people in the years to come, this project has also had an effect on the young people who took part.

On the Redbridge Buddying Programme in East London, through the Vision England programme was the first time they have been able to meet as a group. Vision England, through bespoke day events which were environmentally based, were able to bring these young people and volunteers together to meet each other. The manager of the programme said that it felt like a community had been created and as a result of support from Vision England they were able to evidence the benefits of group events to be apply and receive funding for them to continue.

In terms of another community Vision England has created: the residential allowed for a similar feeling. Many disabled young people who attended had never been in a group where they didn't feel 'different'. They were for once surrounded by other people who had similar disabilities, and these



young people were able to relate to each other and share experiences and thoughts with people who would really understand them. Many exchanged contacts and have kept in touch since.

Knowledge

Lastly, the legacy left behind in those in the young people's new knowledge, experiences and memories of the project is significant through day events, community projects and residentials, the young people involved have learnt so many new things about the environment, conservation, creativity through natural resources as well as independence skills, social skills and confidence. These events and sessions for these young people will be part of the bigger picture in their learning of the world. It will contribute to their independence and understanding; they will build on their new knowledge experiences and memories in a way that is impossible to measure but is invaluable to each and every young person.



Acknowledgements

Vision England would like to thank Our Bright Future for the opportunity and support given throughout the duration of the project.

Vision England would also like to thank the other organisations that worked with the Vision England Project over the duration of it's time at Sense:

- Field Studies Council
- Forest School Birmingham
- Green Grow Coop
- Justin Wiggan and Thomas Peel
- Phytology
- Wood Craft Folk
- Surfability
- BreadNButter
- WildfoodUK
- CanalAbility
- Barkingside Art Club
- Wild Walks South West
- Lambourne End
- AMS Group Paving & Landscaping



Appendix

A – Report by Michelle Wilson from Sense College East Knapwell internally reporting.

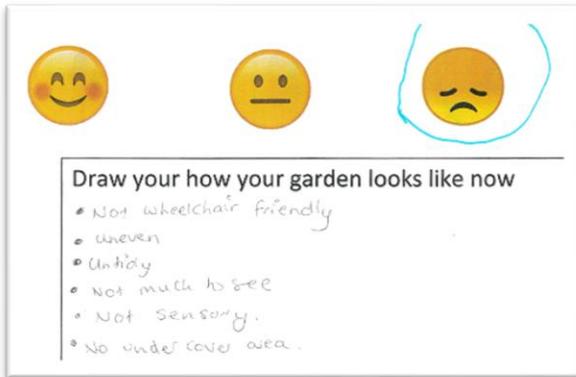
Sense Centre Knapwell Garden Upgrade

December 2021

Upgrading the garden at Sense Centre Knapwell had been on our Wish List for what seemed like forever. The existing garden was uneven, laid to grass, and mostly inaccessible to the people we support other than a single path from the gate to the back door. In late 2021 we were lucky enough to receive grant funding from Vision England, co-ordinated by the lovely Katie Yeo at Sense, for an outdoor project at Sense Centre Knapwell.

Katie gave us a fixed budget and a tight deadline, but we were determined that we could get something done within the timeframe that would benefit the young people that we support here and everyone visiting our Knapwell site.





After getting feedback from some of the students, it was agreed that the limited access was the biggest barrier to their enjoyment of the outside space, and that a new path around the garden would make life easier for everyone.

This project was happening during the Covid-19 pandemic and we wanted to support local businesses so we found a supplier who could get us the slabs we wanted to use, matched to the existing path, and we approached local contractors. At this point we were almost at the end of November, and the deadline to spend the funds was mid-December – we weren't at all sure it could be done!

The contractor that we chose, AMS Group Paving & Landscaping, could not have done more to make this project happen for us including working some personal magic to come in under budget. After getting the go ahead from Katie, we messaged AMS on a Monday evening to say that it was all systems go. Their response? "See you in the morning"! By the time students and staff began arriving on site at 9.30 am the following day, half the route of the





path was already dug out by Andy and his team. Rachel had previously been out to meet with them and make sure she was happy with the plans.

By the end of day two they had started laying the slabs, and the path had begun to form. The new paving was to be laid in a three-sided shape, beginning by the gate at one end of the existing path, going right out to the edge of the lawn and across the back of the garden before turning back to join the other end of the original path.

By the end of day four, the path was finished and, except for a few fresh laid slabs that still needed to settle, our students were able to try it out. The passing points were big enough that users of large, powered wheelchairs were able to pass each other safely, and one at a time were able to completely turn around in the space.





The AMS team were mindful to keep the existing path mud-free for the safety of the students and staff, they kept noise and disruption to a minimum, and they were more than happy to entertain those students who wanted to go outside and look at what they were doing while the work was in progress.



The new paving has made the entire garden accessible to every person that we support, and we will soon have some mirrors, garden decorations and outdoor musical instruments to install for the students to use as they follow the path. In time we plan to add raised flower beds, sensory planting and a water



feature to enhance the space, but the path on its own has already made a tremendous difference, with staff incorporating the space into various sessions, such as music where 'Follow the Leader' now takes a whole new route, or just enjoying the space with a walk around the garden.



We couldn't be happier and would love to thank Vision England, Katie Yeo, AMS Group Paving and Landscaping, and Aspinall's Building Supplies for helping us to finally make this happen.

