

Methilhill Community Children's Initiative (MCCI) & Charlie's Plot! -The Story



MCCI is a community group and registered charity. Formed in the summer of 2012 by local parents and childcare workers the group had the aim of bringing much needed clubs and activities to the area for local children and young people.

In March 2013 the first clubs started from the rented church hall and attracted 59 children!

In the Autumn of 2013 we did that terrible thing and heard the Fife Health and Wellbeing Alliance had spare funding and we created a project, The Great Outdoors Youth Club to fit the criteria! We had a lovely idea of taking children to visit natural spaces during the summer months... and then were awarded the funding, which had to be spent by March!! We nervously piloted the club over the winter months and were amazed to see our more challenging children blossom while they explored beaches and woods, in the cold and every other imaginable type of weather!! Suddenly behavioural issues vanished, timid children gained confidence, and lone children started to work with peers... and we knew we were on to something special.

We visited the Secret Garden woodland nursery and were stunned with the resilience and self esteem of the children... and the laid back approach of the staff. THAT was the type of atmosphere we wanted, and NEEDED to re-create for our local children. But there were obstacle... we had no premises, No money, No experience in this type of setting. However, we knew we had to give it a go.

Developing the Methilhill Community Learning Garden



At the end of March 2014 MCCI signed a lease on a ½ acre plot of private land in the middle of Methilhill, an ex-mining community and an area of multiple deprivation. It was overgrown, unloved and a mammoth task to whip in to any kind of useable state. We were awarded various pots of small funding and set about creating the Methilhill Community Learning Garden.

The children and young people planned the space and the only thing we had to say was an impossible wish was for the group to buy a pet elephant! The garden was designed to incorporate lots of natural elements combined with spaces to be quiet, spaces to learn, spaces to be challenged, and spaces to be active. The garden opened in July 2014 and has gone from strength to strength, now housing a 6 day a week programme including a Nursery, Toddler group, Youth Clubs, School and Nursery visits and Charlie's Plot Climate Change project.



The Aims of MCCI are to encourage the participation of all children and young people, regardless of their barriers, whether that be financial, physical or developmental.

Activities within the garden are designed to challenge children, to promote active engagement with learning whilst giving children freedom and choices. Children's independence, confidence and resilience grows as does their sense of responsibility and respect for living things and their environment.

We believe the success of the garden lies largely in the participation of the children and young people... from the first initial ideas and conversations to the on-going development and maintenance. The children and young people are consulted and included in all decisions and this gives us ownership of our space... the adults are simply the caretakers of the garden!

MCCI's approach to working with young people has also been rather than to develop clubs and projects from adult ideas and then try to attract young people to attend them, they work by supporting young people to develop their own ideas.



The group has won several awards including;

FVA 2014 New Organisation of the Year

FVA 2015 Environmental Project of the Year

Young Scot Awards 2015 environmental runner up

2015 Greener Together Award

Kindom FM Local Hero 2015 nominee

But the group's biggest success beyond doubt is the learning and engagement of the children and young people.

The garden has proved to be an amazingly therapeutic environment which levels the playing field for children. Our more challenging children appear calmer while our more quiet children become more confident and out spoken. Children who usually find group working challenging are seen to work with peers while timid children become leaders. Children who generally find it difficult to engage with their learning are able to relate to outdoors, nature based learning.

Young people also have the opportunity to work towards recognised awards such as Dynamic Youth Awards, Youth Achievement Awards, Saltire Awards, John Muir Awards and the RCHS Plant and Grow Award.

We are particularly proud of our voluntary effort, with our young people

donating over 1000 hours of their time last year alone, and 2 group members having achieved Saltire Summit nominations.



Charlie's Plot is a project led by young people in Methilhill and funded by the Junior Climate Challenge Fund.

The project encourages local people to plant and grow their own produce to supplement their diets and work to increase awareness and understanding of climate change issues.

The group formed in October 2013. After learning that MCCF aimed to open a learning garden, we approached MCCF requesting a piece of the garden that we could use for our own project.

We developed our ideas and approached the Climate Challenge Fund for financial assistance.

Now in our second year of JCCF funding, we have transformed our garden area into a working demonstrator of how growing your own is achievable for everyone.

Our project involves working with local schools, nurseries and youth clubs. The Green Shoots Challenge is aimed at the local community growing at home, developing edible spaces in the community. Currently we are working on a short animation, 'Climate Change Heroes' which aims to educate young children on issues of climate change in a fun way.

Top Tips for Engaging Children and Young People

- Partnerships- not dictatorships.
- Involve young people from the start.
- Create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.
- Advertise and use social media.
- Offer regular 'treats' and rewards.
- Make it fun!!