

The Papillon Project

Thomas Greenwood Trustee



The Papillon Project Team

'We look at the world once, in childhood /The rest is memory'.

In her 1996 poem *Nostos*, Louise Glück captures something many of us may consider true, that the experiences of childhood, and the senses those encounters awaken, create the hinterland of memory and feeling we draw upon throughout our adult lives. For a great many the strongest, happiest memories of childhood come from contact with what can broadly be defined as 'nature', whether that be in gardens, parks, countryside or wilderness. A compassionate society should ensure that all children can connect with nature in such a way as to create those hinterlands of memory.

How are we doing? In the most recent official government statistics dealing

with children's responses to nature, *'The Children's People and Nature Survey for England'*, we find grim statistics. Although 87% of children and young people surveyed agreed that being in nature made them very happy (only 2% disagreed), only 47% felt highly connected to nature, whilst 26% felt moderately connected. Most worryingly of all 27% felt low levels of connection. In short, the vast majority of children and young people are very happy when connected to nature, but less than half actually feel so.

In 2015, with a growing understanding of the disconnect between what children and young people need to be happy, and the limits of what a school education was offering them, Matt Willer established 'The Allotment Project' at

Reepham High School. In 2019, further inspired by the energy, enthusiasm and the deep roots the allotment had developed in Reepham, the idea of establishing and nurturing secondary school allotment communities across Norfolk was born. As befits a horticultural charity the initial seed of an idea has germinated successfully. Over the last five years The Papillon Project has grown and now partners 36 secondary education providers, with the potential to reach over 27,000 young people and inspire them to 'give it a grow'.

The Papillon Project now employs a core team of four staff whose roles are diverse, challenging and intensely rewarding. Across the seasons the team undertakes a great variety of work within schools: transforming land to create new allotments; supporting the upkeep and productivity of established allotments; and supporting schools with educational enrichment such as the *Noticing Nature Programme and Learning about Agriculture*. Every school project is different and the most important part of our role is to find out what works best for the young people in a particular setting. The Papillon Project relies for its success on a great number of volunteers,



'CANallot' City Academy Norwich (July 2021)



'CANallot' City Academy Norwich (May 2023)

both on the allotment and in the 'office'. These stalwarts of the project enable the school allotments to thrive, the charity to grow and young people to grow food for themselves and their community.

The first project I visited in my role as a Trustee was at the City Academy Norwich. I was instantly impressed by the diversity of planting, the range of

School Gardening

food grown and the overall productivity of the plot. More remarkable was how this plot had been nurtured in so short a time from a simple corner of school field to a verdant and life-enriching resource for the school and the wider community. Previous figures show how much can be achieved in a small amount of time when the expertise of our team is matched by the dedication of school staff and the enthusiasm of the students.

Alongside Papillon the pupils at City Academy, supported by Mrs Franklin the Headmistress and Mr Gilbertson the dynamic allotment lead, have created an allotment garden which lets young people connect to nature in a way that prioritises sustainability, permaculture and the fostering of a shared responsibility in our environment.

Nationally the work of the Papillon Project has never been more important.



Carrots from 'CANallot'

In November 2023 The House of Lords cross-party Horticultural Sector Committee published 'Sowing the seeds: A blooming English horticultural sector'. The report details the significant challenges facing a sector vital to our lives and wellbeing, 'The sector is under-prioritised and unappreciated



CANgrow' a pupil's plot (June 2023)



Upcycled fencing growing runner beans at 'CANallot'

by policymakers, leaving holes in the UK's food security and ability to meet net zero goals.' Amongst the seven key recommendations are calls for investment in careers and improving the sectors green credentials. By advocating a horticulture firmly based on green principles, and by engaging with young people and showing them career opportunities, the Papillon Project is helping to sow the seeds of a blooming horticultural sector.

In the future the Papillon Project aims to reach more young people with a number of transformative projects in Great Yarmouth. The funding for these projects was in part raised from the Pap Lecky expedition, a 27 mile paddle from Norwich to Great Yarmouth on a hand-built raft made from an eclectic,

but sea-worthy, collection of repurposed materials. This is one example amongst many types of fund-raising project that allows the Papillon Project to offer allotments to schools for free.

Supporting such a diverse range of allotment gardens in such different settings is a challenging and sometimes complex business but the core purpose of the Papillon Project is simple: to connect young people to nature and let them grow their own food.

For more information about The Papillon Project (charity no. 1189383) please visit us at our website (www.thepapillonproject.com) or contact us by email (info@thepapillonproject.com)