



SOIL SISTERS TOOLKIT

HARNESSING
THE POWER OF
THERAPEUTIC
GARDENING IN
WOMEN'S
REFUGES

Wen.

INTRODUCTION



Wen (Women's Environmental Network) connects, inspires and mobilises women to take action on issues that connect gender, health, equality and the environment.

The Soil Sisters project was realised after speaking with women living in domestic violence refuges and asking what can Wen do to help? Visiting underfunded refuges, we saw staff working hard in difficult circumstances to meet women's needs. We met incredible women, who inspired our admiration and respect beyond words. We also saw neglected, un-loved gardens and an amazing potential for us to co-create nurturing, safe, welcoming therapeutic gardening spaces.

Whilst celebrating the proliferation of nature based wellbeing projects across the country, that supported people through trauma and recovery, we could see it wasn't being used to support women survivors of abuse, living in domestic violence refuges.

With funding from the *National Lottery's Reaching Communities fund*, Wen was able to deliver weekly therapeutic gardening sessions with hundreds of women living in five refuges across East London between 2017-2022. The weekly sessions and the gardens we co-created, working alongside the women, aimed to foster a connection with nature and each other. Through this we hoped to provide a sense of safety, self-belief, joy and nourishment. How we worked was important to us. Each site had fantastic staff and volunteers from the Soil Sisters team who designed and facilitated sessions and gardens around the desires of the women they met, modelling non-violent ways of being.

The project was a privilege and joy to be part of.

Beth Summers, Wen Co-Director

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit shares some of our learnings from the project and our hope is that it will inspire and resource anyone who would like to take on similar valuable work, from support workers, growers to refuge residents themselves. We share our tips for the daunting tasks of creating therapeutic gardens, reflections on the value of therapeutic gardening and importantly some seasonal activity ideas to help you give it a go. Nature is ripe with metaphors that can be powerful routes to thinking and healing, so for each season we have shared a few key words to help you.



Meet the team



Garden case studies



Soil Sisters' reflections



Therapeutic activities through the seasons



Acknowledgements



Resources



MEET THE TEAM



Bernadette combines her background working in mental health and homelessness services with her passion for gardening, to reclaim and transform neglected spaces into community gardens.



Maria found her passion for horticulture by volunteering at a local park. She then went on to retrain and start her social enterprise, The Green Firm CIC. Maria worked at Thrive Battersea as Horticultural Therapist and was part of Soil Sister since the very beginning. Maria currently works at Olden Community Garden in Islington.



Shaheda trained as an Early Years Teacher, then later as a community gardener at a local city urban farm. She is happiest when working with nature, growing food, centered around well-being and positive living.

1 GARDEN CASE STUDIES

- **TERRACED OVERGROWN GARDEN**
- **CHILD FRIENDLY GARDEN**
- **COURTYARD GARDEN**
- **FOOD GARDEN**

TERRACED OVERGROWN GARDEN

The garden didn't feel like a garden - everything was overgrown, the grass was knee high, no flowers or plants that were distinctive enough to have a name, other than the weeds.

We needed a major shift in our thinking and approach to planning. Landscaping a garden was not something I was familiar with, nor did we have the budget to do such an extreme makeover. So we did what we felt was possible using our limited resources. Despite that, the garden definitely had a major transformation.

We did some planning, talking it through with the women at the refuge. We stood in different parts of the garden to see where the light fell to determine where we would like to sit in the summer. We drew up sketches of different designs ideas and agreed on a plan.



THE SHARED VISION:

A garden that could offer respite for women surviving domestic violence. Somewhere women could go and find joy in nature, learn new skills, and share moments of happiness. To have a space where there is no shame or judgement.

A place where there is laughter.



CREATING THE GARDEN

Using our co-created plan, we built raised beds during a workday with residents and Wen staff and volunteers. The women were amazingly helpful even using the power tools for the first time. We then filled the beds with tonnes of topsoil and manure and started planting. The women finally had a growing space.

Over the years we grew many different vegetables and herbs in our growing bed. We visited local garden centres together so the women could choose which flowers they would like to see and smell in the garden. We brightened up the walkway into the main garden with beautiful perennial flowers and autumn bulbs. Some months down the line, unable to buy new furniture we gave the existing benches and table a makeover. The women enjoyed sitting in the garden during the summer.

Rainy days were all about enjoying being cosy, indoors with craft activities and delicious cooking sessions. At one point we had women from 5 different countries at the same time in the refuge which meant we could travel the world through food and not leave our kitchen!





“ It's good we are doing gardening because if we get our own house with a garden, we can grow our own vegetables. We are learning from this.

- Refugee resident

THOUGHTS AND IDEAS



Before starting the project and activities; be clear and communicate expectations, boundaries, rules/regulations and share policies with partner organisations as well as receive the refuge policies. Have enough meetings, conversations and good open channels for sharing information with partners.



Be realistic about the project and what you can achieve considering the sensitivity around who you're working with. Give time and space for change.



At the same time, be ambitious and dream with the women, make their ideas come to life if you can. Encourage them to think beyond the confines of the refuge, the life they are in.



Manage your own time and make time for self care and reflection. Some sessions you will leave burdened with emotions and thoughts, you will embody some of the experiences the women have had, it can be difficult to detach your own feelings, the frustrations, the sadness that comes naturally, so take care of yourself.



Try to always remember the purpose of your session and time with the women. If it is meant to be therapeutic in nature, then allow space for that. Since garden maintenance jobs can feel urgent, ensure an element of the session is about finding calm and peace for the women - even if it's connecting during the tea break.

CHILD FRIENDLY GARDEN

The garden was small and derelict, the grass had worn away and was a mud bath after the rain!

There were abandoned toys everywhere and no flowers, vegetables or herbs growing. There were overgrown trees and spiky shrubs. There were safety concerns about the lack of gate, the thorny pyracantha hedge and signs of rats, pigeons and foxes.

Our first activity was to dig a small patch of earth in the garden and sow some wild flower seeds into it. We could at least make use of the poor soil. Out of the empty earth came beauty. The children joined in with watering and digging too. We had begun!



THE SHARED VISION:

- More space
- Place for children to play
- Place to grow food
- A seating area



CREATING THE GARDEN

When I first began at the refuge I did several sessions in different ways to try and ensure that every woman there and as many of the children too could have a part in designing the garden and feeding in ideas about what we would grow, places we would go and other fun things we could make or draw!

I tried to use many different visuals/ways to assist anyone with English as a second language.

We walked around the garden together and I brought in garden magazines for women to show me what they liked and we cut out plants and vegetable pictures we wanted to keep to remind ourselves for later on.

I also did a session with all the older children, most of them I had not met before, (they ranged from 6 - 16) but we sat together at the table and discussed what they would like to have had in the garden when they all first arrived.

We used flip charts and note taking to gather all this information together, and then we put up the plans on the wall of the refuge so women and older children could see the ideas as they formed and make comments, say what they liked and disliked.

Obviously this is a never ending process as the garden changes and develops through the seasons and years, but also because the women who are at this refuge can only stay 6 months and so I need to consult on this with new women arriving at regular intervals.

There are some things that are already established but there is always room in the garden for new ideas and developments and allowing the women who arrive to make it their own and leave something beautiful for the other women who will come after them.





**“The gardening has
been the most
consistent thing in
our lives since
we’ve been here.
Refuge resident**

THOUGHTS AND IDEAS



Do it! No matter how small - even just a few pots on windowsills or by the front door. It is so good for us all to grow and put down some roots and get our hands dirty in the soil. A simple task like planting lots of bulbs can have a massive impact on how a place looks and feels!



Have a variety of activities so that there is something for everyone e.g. children led in school holidays, gardening, cooking, walking, days out, art and craft. Be prepared to adapt to last minute changes and weather conditions.



See if you can build links with local community gardens, city farms or other resources nearby like allotments and garden centres. This could help with inspiration and maybe some free resources and opportunities for visits. It also helps connect the women with the area.



Cooking is another great shared activity that Soil Sisters participants have enjoyed. So many of the women are great cooks and sharing that knowledge can really help boost their confidence. See if a kitchen space or budget could be made available with different people taking a lead on what to cook.



Try to ensure that maintenance people don't come and trim all the plants that the group have been growing! This happened to us a few times!

Bernadette - Soil Sister

COURTYARD GARDEN

This was a purpose built hostel, ground floor kitchen and communal space with a view and a door into a small paved garden. It was an unloved space, with no growing space for residents, only some crab apple trees and a birch tree for greenery. For the most part it was shady and dark but at certain times of the day it was a sun trap.

We built raised beds out of sleepers around a circular seating area in the sunny corner of the garden.



THE SHARED VISION:

To create a garden where women could sit and feel the sun on their faces, surrounded by beautiful flowers, fragrant herbs for cooking and colourful art.

CREATING THE COURTYARD GARDEN

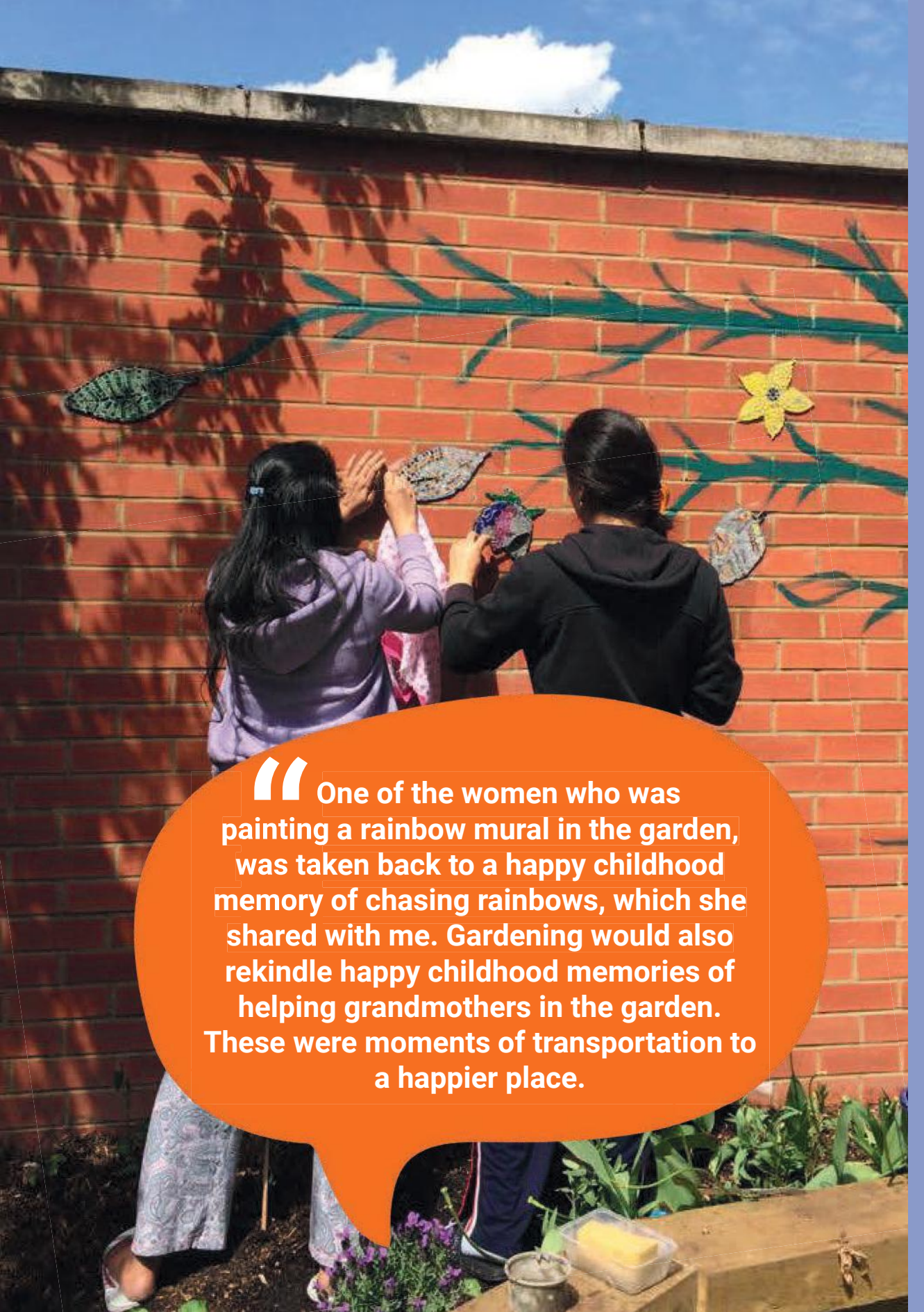
All around where we sat there were flowers, herbs and food growing. We planted climbers to cover walls and create a lush green feeling. The shady side of the garden was filled with large evergreen shrubs in pots and the sunnier side a large potted olive tree. The raised beds had veg, herbs and a couple of dwarf fruit trees. For a small space we really packed in plants which helped to create a containing, nurturing environment.

We created a mural of a tree which over the years was filled with mosaic pieces by each new resident. Art felt really important to this group of women who also painted pictures on the doors and the raised beds.

This was a challenging garden. The first week the support worker just said 'good luck with this one!'. There was no outdoor tap, no soil and it was very shady. But taking each challenge bit by bit we showed you really can create a therapeutic garden anywhere.



**Allow for
sadness
especially
when women
first
arrive**



“ One of the women who was painting a rainbow mural in the garden, was taken back to a happy childhood memory of chasing rainbows, which she shared with me. Gardening would also rekindle happy childhood memories of helping grandmothers in the garden. These were moments of transportation to a happier place.

THOUGHTS AND IDEAS



When the project ends consider how the garden will be looked after. For us this meant we planted low maintenance trees and shrubs which would be less of a burden when the project ended. It is important to be mindful of the housing provider's commitment to maintain the garden. Talk this through with staff and try to find plants that will fit the long term needs of the site.



This was a small garden with limited growing space so we did a lot of nature based craft activities indoors which required a lot of resources. Preparing these was a challenge, sourcing them carrying them around. Perhaps pool your resources across projects like we did. We shared a badge maker and mosaic kit. Or perhaps make use of a local hub, cafe or community centre with resources you can borrow.



Refuges can feel quite strict, sometimes with a looming threat of eviction. It is important that therapeutic horticulture is a choice, so think about how to encourage people to attend without making it feel mandatory. Then given half a chance hopefully you can engage them through the activities.



Have clear guidelines from the start about attendance, boundaries, photographs, lines of communication. Safeguarding the women is an absolute priority.

Maria - Soil Sister

THE FOOD GARDEN

This big terraced house garden was impenetrable at the start! But underneath the overgrowth we could see huge potential. There was an established cherry tree, a vegetable patch hidden at the back with thriving fruit bushes. Importantly there was an excitement about growing. Someone had given this garden some love in the past and the women were ready to put in the effort and reap the harvest.



THE SHARED VISION:

A place of sanctuary where the women could find beauty, nature, freedom, delicious food and nourishment for the soul.



CREATING THE FOOD GARDEN

We started the process of transformation by focusing on co-designing the space. This can be an incredibly empowering experience - encouraging people to share their favourite foods, colours, their own experience enjoying nature or growing. This first step, getting residents to take the lead in the design was vital for fostering a sense of ownership and belonging, which is challenging within a transient place. The effort each woman put in planting was a gift to future residents.



The food growing was a really powerful part of this project. We invested our effort, money and hopes in and it was worth it. Seeing the women grow from seed to harvest was an empowering moving experience - there was a sense of 'I can't believe I did that!' First there is the joy in the activities and learning - but the self-esteem that is grown alongside harvest is huge - that you have the power to create something beautiful. Importantly, most of the residents are reliant on food banks, so the access to fresh nutritional, culturally appropriate food they grew themselves was vital for their lives. They even proudly shared produce with staff!



One of the residents told us how one summer evening after they had put up some beautiful solar lights she walked into the garden barefoot, felt the earth beneath her feet and looked to the sky. She felt the calm of being in nature.



THOUGHTS AND IDEAS



Gardening is an act of hope - you try your best but it can all go wrong! If the neighbour's cat visits or some well intentioned weeding digs up your precious seedlings. Don't be dismayed. Gardens show us you can take risks in a safe and manageable way. They are a good container for us to learn to cope with trying, failing and recovering - because they grow back.



Growing food obviously leads to cooking, sharing and eating food! This important element of the project emerged organically, led by residents. Veg would inspire sharing of their stories, histories, culture and food. They owned the food and were able to host the staff and volunteers, which felt culturally important and made it feel more like a home. Many were fantastic cooks and enjoyed being able to share their expertise as everyone else enjoyed the food.



Balancing types of garden spaces right for the place and people is quite important. Veg growing is valuable but labour intensive. Having the beauty and wildlife of hardy perennials and trees brings value year after year. They bring consistency, deeper roots and can feel like you are leaving a legacy or gift to the future. Consider fruit bushes or trees, lavender, herbs, and perennial flowers.



There's a tension in a transient setting of creating a garden that needs time. Try to value each sensory experience, each individuals effort and intention along the way and enjoy the process of gardening, not just the produce. It helps to create a sense of belonging and heart in a place which is not their home and over which they have limited control.



Hannah - Soil Sister 2018/21

2 SOIL SISTERS' REFLECTIONS



A woman wearing a red hijab and a red long-sleeved shirt is painting a wooden garden bed. She is holding a green paint can in her left hand and a paintbrush in her right hand. The garden bed is filled with various plants, including green leafy herbs and red flowers. The garden bed is made of wooden planks and is painted with different colors: purple, yellow, and green. The background shows more of the garden and some greenery.

Soil Sister Participant

“

I've been thinking how by nurturing the garden, we are nurturing ourselves how we can benefit from taking care of the garden through being outside, enjoying nature, and enjoying our own food, herbs and flowers. And the children have a lot of fun watering too!

Bernadette- Soil Sister

“

Being a Soil Sister shows how effective gardening can be at bringing us together; helping with our well-being; and how growing our own food and flowers can brighten our days!

Working alongside children at the refuge, I've seen how the garden and nature can be great for children as well. Getting mucky, having fun and growing plants can help children experiencing trauma with their recovery.

Designing the garden with the Women of *Hestia* has been an empowering process. It's a chance to see their growth and development reflected in the garden they've helped to create for themselves and those in the future.





Refuge support worker

“

One of our service users, who has recently moved to the UK, found your sessions very helpful. You went on a walk in the local area to a café and other local resources. She felt that this experience helped build her confidence and she is now looking forward to attending local ESOL classes. She feels comfortable going back to the places that you took the women to, should she go on her own.

Shaheda - Soil Sister

“ While we want the women to move on from the refuges to live happy healthy lives, it does bring a lot of sadness when the people we have been gardening with leave the refuge and we don't get to say goodbye. No doubt, that does feel like one of the most challenging things about being a Soil Sister.

There is a real sense of sisterhood and belonging that manifests the longer you spend time together, as women, sharing stories and ordinary everyday moments, rely on each other's good nature to support one another and get through, what can sometimes seem like a tough gardening session. But often, the women are invested in the results of the garden as much as we are as gardeners.



3 THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITIES THROUGH THE SEASONS





SPRING

1. Seed Sowing
2. Nature Connection
Session Ideas

New beginnings - gentleness - growth - hope
rebirth - blossoming - nurturing - freedom

1. SEED SOWING

YOU WILL NEED:

- Seeds
- Seed trays/pots/ recycled containers
- Multipurpose compost
- Plant labels
- Pen
- Watering can



Seed sowing is very easy to do once you have the right materials. We ordered seeds from Vital Seeds, a good quality seed shop online. We also looked through our cupboards and found old seeds and ones we saved in the previous growing seasons. We had the black trays you see in the photos above and lots of compostable little brown pots which you can put straight into the ground once the seedlings have come through. This reduces any stress to the plant during transplanting. However, you can use anything that would hold soil and allow drainage. For example, yoghurt pots work well. Just make holes in the bottom and fill them with compost.



WHICH POTS?


The size of the pots you use can depend on the size of the seed and plant you are growing. If you are growing chillies, the seeds are small and the chilli plant will grow slowly and be more contained, whereas if you're growing a squash, the seed will be larger and the plant will grow bigger sooner so use a bigger pot for more space.

Once you have the right pots, fill them with multipurpose compost. Make a hole in the middle if you like by inserting your finger, then drop the seed where you have made the hole.

Otherwise just put the seed in the middle of the pot, then press the seed gently in and cover with more compost. Label and date the pots or growing trays, water well and keep in a fairly warm location, either inside a cold frame or near a windowsill. Make sure the pots are moist at all times to encourage germination.



NEW SHOOTS

A close-up photograph of a person's hand, wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt, holding a small green seedling with two true leaves. The seedling is rooted in a dark, moist soil ball. The background is a blurred green metal fence and foliage. An orange starburst graphic is overlaid on the lower left, containing text about transplanting seedlings.

In around a week you should see little seedlings shoot up. Once you have two true leaves (leaves that look like the plant they will grow into) you can transplant them into bigger pots or your final growing space.

NATURE CONNECTION SESSION IDEAS



SENSORY MINDFUL MOMENT Being in nature is an easy way to practice mindfulness - simply invite people to stand in nature and connect to each of their senses. People can be barefoot (or not), have their eyes closed (or not), you can stand in a circle or just wonder around. Simply invite them for a few minutes to pay close attention to what they hear, see, smell, feel and taste. Then come back together as a group to share.



GARDEN TOUR AND PLANT HEALTH CHECK This exercise connects people to gardens and de-mystifies gardening. Simply walk around looking at the plants you have. What do they smell, look or feel like? Do you know what they are? Maybe google them or download a plant app. Do you like them or what would you like to see in the garden? Are they looking healthy and happy? If not what seems wrong and is there anything you could do to help? This is a powerful way to value people as care-givers and their hopes for the garden.



WEEDING AND COMPOSTING Weeding can be hard work, but can also be an incredibly rewarding task - full of metaphors that are useful in therapeutic gardening. Why not alongside a physical day of weeding try to phrase it that you are clearing space for new life and exciting changes. Perhaps normalising cutting off dead or diseased parts of plants. The compost bin can also be a place where you put things you no longer need and they can become something positive and nurturing.



SUMMER

1. Tea Party
2. Pickled Cucamelon

Warmth - beauty - strength - courage - adventure
nourishment - resilience - movement - action - fire

1. TEA PARTY

This is a particularly good session when there are some new women at the refuge. It's very informal, friendly and introduces new ways that the garden can be enjoyed. It also demonstrates herbs that are relatively easy to grow and each woman can go away with their own herbs too.

YOU WILL NEED:

Kettle, tea strainers, sugar, milk, honey, spoons, small plates, biscuits, small scissors for cutting herbs, string for drying excess herbs, lovely garden books and magazines



Food for thought

Having beautiful garden books or magazines to hand can inspire conversations and memories. We used them to open up discussions on design ideas for the garden. The tea party also encouraged us to use our sense of smell in a positive way! Trying out different flavours, tastes and textures can provoke both good and difficult memories, but this is in a calm and safe environment that you've created.

PREPARATION

Grow some herbs in pots such as lemon balm, lemon verbena, sage or mint.

Otherwise, buy small bunches of fresh herbs such as mint on the day.

As well as being useful for the session small pieces of mint can be separated and put in water to develop roots and then potted up for a new plant, so that everyone who wants to can have their own mint plant.

Gather together a lovely tea set, proper cutlery. (charity shops often have sets/cutlery for a reasonable price. Or borrow one.)

Ideally, set up the table with the tea set in the garden, but inside will do if the weather is poor!



2. PICKLED CUCAMELON

This recipe can be scaled up or down as needed depending on the size of jar.

Ensure you have clean sterile glass jars by boiling in hot water then drying in an oven.



YOU WILL NEED

3 to 4 cups of fresh cucamelons
1 and 1/3 cups distilled white vinegar
2/3 cup apple cider vinegar
2 tbsp cane sugar
2 tsp sea salt, or pickling salt.
6 sprigs of fresh dill
2 large cloves of garlic
1 tsp peppercorns
1 tsp mustard seeds
One pinch of red chili flakes or homegrown scotch bonnet.



PICKLING HOMEGROWN CUCAMELONS

Cucamelons have a hard outer shell with a sour sometimes bitter taste when eaten raw. They are in the cucurbitaceae family which include melons, squashes and cucumbers.

Cucamelons formal name is Mexican Sour Gherkins which feels more fitting judging by the taste and appearance of them. They grow naturally as climbers and produce a massive crop so we decided to explore ways of utilising the harvest!

PREPARATION



In a pot on the cooker, combine both vinegars, with salt, and sugar. Heat and stir the pickling brine until the sugar and salt completely dissolve, and then remove from the heat.



Wash and cut the cucamelons in half as shown.



Add the washed dill and peeled garlic cloves to the bottom of a clean jar, along with remaining spices. Then fill the jar with cucamelons.



Once the brine is lukewarm, pour it over the cucamelons until the jar is full and/or they're completely submerged. Do not use hot brine, it will cook the cucamelons instead of pickling them.



Add an air-tight lid, and then move the jar to the refrigerator once cooled.



Allow the pickled cucamelons to marinate in the refrigerator for at least one week to develop maximum pickle flavour.



During the first three to four days in the refrigerator, gently tip or shake the jar to immerse/rotate any cucamelons floating on top – ensuring even pickling and that no “floaters” become dry or mouldy.



Consume within 2 to 3 months for best quality and texture. Keep refrigerated.

“ We enjoyed our pickle on lovely sourdough bread with vintage cheddar, every single resident converted and asked if we could make a second batch!





AUTUMN

1. Planting Bulbs
2. Mural Painting

Harvest - abundance - sharing - community
reflection - clearing out - letting go - gratitude

1. PLANTING SPRING BULBS



YOU WILL NEED:

- Spring bulbs, eg daffodils, tulips, alliums
- A container (size and shape can vary according to requirements)
- Compost (standard multipurpose is fine - use peat free)
- Water (use a watering can if you have one)
- Trowel and gloves are nice if you have them but not essential

Choose your container – it should be at least 30cm deep.

Fill the pot with $\frac{2}{3}$ multi purpose compost.

Place the bulbs with the flat side down and the point upwards as if standing on the soil.

Cover with compost to the top of the pot, water and label.

You can also plant bulbs directly into the soil if you have a garden area.

2. MURAL PAINTING

YOU WILL NEED

- Aprons/bin bags
- Sandpaper
- Different sized paint brushes
- Small containers for paint
- Sticks to stir the paint
- Pots to put paint brushes in to soak
- Sheets to prevent accidents!
- Paint (try to get environmentally safe paint)
- Undercoat may be needed to cover what was there before
- Polyfilla for any cracks/holes
- Sealant to go over the paint once it is dry and finished to preserve the beautiful work you have done.
- Photos and a round of applause!

Don't forget refreshments, snacks and music/singing to help the day go well!



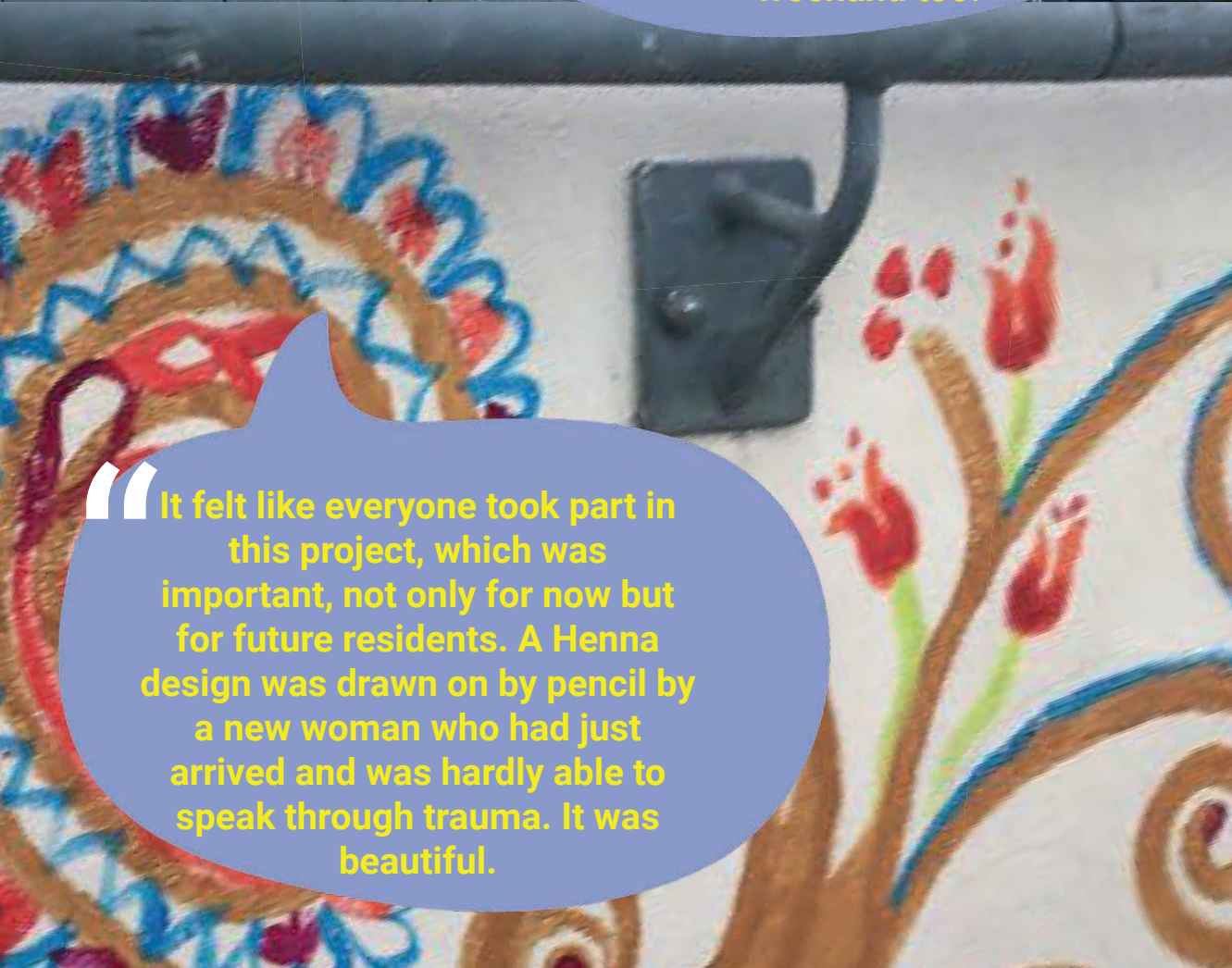
Get permission first from whoever is in charge or manages the building/garden/wall. Ideally one of the women who has an interest or skills will lead on the project. Get them to do sketches and plans on paper to show to those who you need permission from. You may need to adapt or change ideas.

Try to involve/consult as many residents as possible at every step of the way, you never know at what stage someone might become interested and join in.

Plan a rain free day to work together on it. Make sure you prepare as much in advance: activities for children and stencil making to help guide images. If possible, have someone with art/creative experience there to help guide you all.



“ We were assisted by Kally, an Art Teacher. About 10 mums and 20 children all arrived at once! It was chaos, but brilliant fun. Walls painted, stencils designed and the women who had led on it painted bees, butterflies and flowers on in freehand too.



“ It felt like everyone took part in this project, which was important, not only for now but for future residents. A Henna design was drawn on by pencil by a new woman who had just arrived and was hardly able to speak through trauma. It was beautiful.



WINTER

1. Therapeutic
Lavender
2. Mandala Stone
Painting

Inner world - stillness - peace - sanctuary - earth
calm - sleep - renewal - dreaming

1. THERAPEUTIC LAVENDER




Lavender is brilliant therapeutic plant; its scent is a great way to focus the mind and help keep you present. It also aids sleep.

You can grow lavender directly into a sunny border or you can plant it in big pots. Lavender will thrive in dry conditions and poor soil.

I recommend planting English lavender. Garden centres often sell trays of this variety at a reasonable price.

It's good to prune the stems after the flowers have been devoured by the bees. Bunch the stems and keep them indoors or in a dry shed.

On a rainy day in November with the lavender heaped up on the kitchen table I sat around with the women chatting and scraping the flowers buds off the stalks, packing them in to muslin packages tied with string.

A photograph of several dried lavender sprigs with green stems and small, light purple buds, arranged on a grey, textured surface. An orange speech bubble is overlaid on the lower right portion of the image.

“ Understandably, most of the women have sleeping problems. When I returned the next week, the support worker told me that after the session an air of calm had descended over the house with a few of the women nodding off.

LAVENDER PYRAMID SACHET

YOU WILL NEED

- Fabric of your choice
7.5cm x 15cm
- String or ribbon
18 cm long
- Dried lavender
- Funnel or paper cone



- Tie the string at the end to make a knot. Place the tied string in the center of the fabric, making sure that the tied knot is sticking out of the top.
- Fold the rectangle fabric in half to make a square (inside out). The tied knot should be sticking out of the center top.
- Sew two sides of the square together, starting from the side with the tied knot sticking out, then move on to the next side. When sewing the second side. Seam is 1/4 inch (0.7 mm) throughout.
- Press the seams open and squeeze the last side (the unsewn side). Join the edges and pin in place. Sew the edges together, being careful not to sew the string inside. Cut off the excess corners.
- Turn the sachet inside out.
- Using a funnel or paper cone fill the sachet with dried lavender, through the opening.
- Hand-stitch the opening with whipstitch to close.

2. MANDALA STONE PAINTING

YOU WILL NEED

- Mandala box
- Extra stones
- Water in a cup
- Newspaper or tissue to lay on the table



This is a great craft activity if you have limited time to plan a session.

You can buy ready to use packs very easily from arts and crafts stores. I luckily found these in my local charity shop for £2 a box, bargain!

I would recommend buying extra stones or picking some up from the beach as they only have around 5 in each box. I needed around 9 or 10. They also have easy to follow instructions with different templates to follow.



PREPARATION

Use the easy-to-follow guide. Make room for creativity and paint away! Once the stones have been painted, its good to leave them somewhere airy to dry out completely.

The women really enjoyed this session. It offered the opportunity to take time out to reset from their busy lives and focus on something outside of themselves.

They were all drawn in and quietly concentrating on the intricate details of the design. It reminded some women of Diwali, and the rangoli patterns used to decorate during the Hindu festival. A few participants wanted to do more than one as it got their creative artistic juices flowing.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly we want to thank all of the Soil Sisters participants. We have huge respect and gratitude to the hundreds of women living at the refuges who over the years we have had the privilege to meet.

Our thanks to our partner organisations Ashiana Network and Hestia who work hard in very difficult circumstances of chronic underfunding and emotionally exhausting work. Thank you for enabling us to deliver this project alongside the women you support.

Thank you to all the wen staff and volunteers who have brought this project to life

Klaudija Alasauskaite
Shaheda Aziz
Shaira Begum
Claire Bluncell-Jones
Siham Bortcosh
Simone Due Rasmussen
Suzanna Elping
Jala Haidar
Katherine Jackson
Bernadette Kennedy
Hannah Leigh-Mackie

Elle McAll
Julia Minnear
Maria Papoui
Anna Peters
Heidi Ringshaw
Alexia Shakou
Bethany Summers
Natalia Szarek
Linda Tai
Glenda Trew
Julie Yip

With huge thanks to
**The National Lottery Reaching
Communities fund**



RESOURCES



More information and activity ideas:

- Please check out Wen's website for more information and resources around Nature for Wellbeing
wen.org.uk/our-work/nature-for-wellbeing/
- Thrive are the leaders in the world of social and therapeutic horticulture
thrive.org.uk/get-gardening
- TCV have a range of activity resources
tcv.org.uk/getinvolved/activity-resources/
- RSPB run a Nature on your Doorstep programme
rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/
- 30 Days Wild by the Wildlife Trust wildlifetrusts.org/30dayswild
- The Mental Health Foundation produced a very useful report about how connecting with nature can benefit your mental health
mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/nature-how-connecting-nature-benefits-our-mental-health
- Trellis Scotland advocated for the power of social and therapeutic horticulture. trellisscotland.org.uk/content/seasonal-activities

Nature for Wellbeing evidence base:

- Growing Health has a wealth of resources and case studies demonstrating the impact of social and therapeutic horticulture
sustainweb.org/growinghealth/
- The Kings fund released an important report about gardens and health
kingsfund.org.uk/publications/gardens-and-health
- Natural England have commissioned a number of reports highlighting the importance of nature based health interventions.
<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4973580642418688>



Wen.

Wen

Women's Environmental Network
20 Club Row, London E2 7EY
info@wen.org.uk
wen.org.uk

