

## GARDENERS' WORLD

### Hulme Community Garden Centre, Manchester

Hulme is only two miles from Manchester's city centre. It's an unlikely setting for a plant nursery: usually they tend to be located on large sites away from inner cities. But the Hulme Community Garden Centre has tapped into the initiative and creativity of local people to regenerate inner-city land into an accessible and sustainable community garden and nursery.

The garden centre began in 1998 and since then it has tried to improve local people's understanding of horticulture, conservation, food production and nutrition, particularly among unemployed people looking for work. It provides a community focal point and opportunities for the residents of Hulme and neighbouring Moss Side to improve their health and well-being.

The co-ordinators of the community garden are conscious of the role the garden can play in encouraging social inclusion. They promote the garden among groups and individuals with limited space for recreation. They also encourage people with limited social contacts to join in activities where people from across different communities and generations participate. "There is no doubt our project makes a very positive contribution to community cohesion," says staff member Bella Kennett.

Catherine Waring, one of the nursery co-ordinators, says that, "It's been a challenge but we've managed to keep going for six years. We have four permanent part-time staff – a nursery co-ordinator position shared by two people, a volunteer co-ordinator and a nursery assistant. Usually we also have about three volunteers working with us at any one time. We still get funding and will probably never be completely self-sufficient due to the size of the site and not having enough paying customers."

#### Willow Arch



Winter



Spring



Summer



Autumn

**"This is a living hedge, woven from planted willow. We harvest it for fencing, sculptures and other projects. It was planted in April 2001 and has become a favourite haunt of some of our resident birdlife. We have a sensory garden which allows everyone, but in particular people who are visually impaired or have physical disabilities, to enjoy the smells, touch and feel of a garden."**

*Catherine Waring, Nursery Co-ordinator*

The centre has about 1000 regular customers a year who come to buy products. But as Catherine explains, people come to the centre for a variety of reasons. "It's hard to separate those who come to buy plants and other items from those who use the community garden centre facilities. Carers bring their clients at lunchtime and we are next door to the Afro-Caribbean day care group."

The centre is a not-for-profit enterprise and any income from sales is used to subsidise the community services. The centre has just started running a course in organic gardening through the local college, and there are plans to create more services. Catherine says that, "We would love to expand to have a local garden maintenance service visiting houses in the neighbourhood."

The centre has already made a big difference. "Customers and visitors have been very positive," says Catherine. "They see us as a green oasis in among the concrete of Hulme. People enjoy coming here and we give a lot of gardening advice. There are a lot of people around here who have allotments so we let them know what are easy flowers and plants to start with."

## Facts

- Willow is light, strong, flexible and very versatile. It can be used for weaving into baskets or for erosion control along river beds, and is an alternative for paper making. It can even be used for green energy and medicinal purposes.
- There are 59 city farms, nearly 1000 community gardens, 66 school farms and a number of community-managed allotments in the UK. The farms and gardens significantly contribute to improving an area and the quality of life of people living there. If you want more information get advice from the Federation for City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG).

## Further Information

- More information on Hulme Community Garden Centre can be found at their website: [www.hulmegardencentre.org.uk](http://www.hulmegardencentre.org.uk)
- For a fascinating insight into the traditional willow industry you can visit The Willow and Wetlands Centre at Meare Green Court, Stoke St. Gregory, Taunton, Somerset, TA3 6HY, or call them on 01823 490814. Alternatively, you can visit the website of The Basket Makers Association at [www.basketassoc.org](http://www.basketassoc.org)
- For more information on how gardening can change the lives of disabled and disadvantaged people, you can contact Thrive at The Geoffrey Udall Centre, Trunkwell Park, Beech Hill, Reading, Berkshire, RG7 2AT, or phone them at 0118 988 5688 or visit their website at [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk). You can also check out the Sensory Trust at The Eden Project, Watering Lane Nursery, St Austell, Cornwall, PL26 6BE. Contact them on 01726 222 900 or visit [www.sensorytrust.org.uk](http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk).
- For further information on community development initiatives you can contact the Development Trusts Association at [www.dta.org.uk](http://www.dta.org.uk).