SICAP CASE STUDY 2026 LOT (11-1)

MEATH PARTNERSHIP

Growing Together - Bringing Communities Together Through Green Spaces, Climate Action and Partnership

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is co-funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development and the European Union through the European Social Fund Plus under the Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) Programme 2021 -2027.

Thematic Focus Area

Climate action and the just transition

Core Area of work

Collaborative responses to identified needs

Local Priority Target Group

People Living in Disadvantaged Communities

Alignment with LECP

1.2 To educate and engage the public on climate and environmental issues and opportunities
3.1 To improve health and wellbeing outcomes
5.4 To provide attractive, accessible public spaces and parks across the County
6.1 To expand and strengthen equitable access to community infrastructure
6.2 To promote integration and inclusion of all communities of Meath

SICAP Horizontal Principles

1: A Human Rights and Equality Framework
2: Quality Community Development Approaches
3: Collaborative Approaches
4: Climate Justice

Target Groups

People living in disadvantaged communities | People impacted by educational disadvantage | People living in jobless households or households where the primary income source is low-paid and/or precarious | People who are long-term unemployed | People with a criminal history | Refugees | International Protection Applicants | Disabled People/People with Disabilities | Heads of One-parent Families | Travellers | Roma | Island residents

Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland
Arna chomhchistiú ag an Aontas Eorpach Co-funded by the European Union
SICAP
pobal government supporting communities
LCDC Coiste Forbartha Pobail Áitiúil Local Community Development Committee
meath partnership engage · enable · participate · progress

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SICAP 2026 Case Study Lot 11-1

Growing Together - Bringing Communities Together Through Green Spaces, Climate Action and Partnership

Community Cohesion | Climate Action and Just Transition | Collaboration and Partnership

1. Introduction



Mineview and Oaklawns are neighbouring communities located within an area identified through the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, which uses Census data to measure relative affluence and disadvantage *(Deprivation Index: ID 167065050)*, (Pobal, 2022). The development of housing in the area has created new opportunities for people and families to make a home, while also highlighting the importance of building the social connections that can turn a housing development into a community. The arrival of new residents alongside people who have lived locally for longer creates a need for welcoming and accessible opportunities to meet one another, develop trust and begin to build a shared sense of ownership and belonging within the community.

For the SICAP action Legacy4Meath, the starting point was therefore not simply to organise a series of one-off community events, the approach was to identify something practical and visible around which relationships could develop over time and climate action and the improvement of local green spaces offered that opportunity. A community garden is open, informal and rooted in place, people can contribute in different ways and at different levels, whether by planting, maintaining a space, bringing children to an activity, attending a workshop, sharing an idea or simply stopping to talk to a neighbour.

What began with community gardening in Oaklawns and Mineview has gradually opened the door to wider community activity, the spaces have supported environmental learning, volunteering, family activities, youth engagement and collaboration with local organisations. In Oaklawns in particular, the pocket garden and associated community space are increasingly being used by different groups and partners, demonstrating the potential for an initial environmental project to become a platform for wider community learning and participation.

This case study tells that developing story, its focus is not only on what was delivered, but on how investment in people, place and partnership is helping to strengthen community cohesion. It considers how climate action can be made relevant and accessible at neighbourhood level; how collaboration can extend the reach of SICAP; and how residents can move from participating in activities towards volunteering, contributing ideas and taking greater ownership of their community.

2. Strategic Objective and Rationale

The strategic objective of the initiative was to use climate action and environmental sustainability as practical routes to social inclusion, stronger community relationships and improved wellbeing. Rather than treating environmental work as separate from community development, the Legacy4Meath SICAP action used improvements to shared green spaces as a means of creating contact between residents and giving people an accessible way to become involved in their neighbourhood.

This approach was particularly relevant in Mineview and Oaklawns because participation did not depend on residents already being connected to a formal community group. Gardening, community clean-ups, family activities and environmental workshops offered low-threshold ways to take part. The intention was to create repeated opportunities for residents, local organisations and statutory or community partners to work alongside one another on visible projects that could benefit both the physical environment and the people living in it.

The work sits within SICAP Goal 1 and the case-study framework supplied for this project also connects it with the Local Economic and Community Plan, the National Biodiversity Action Plan and Ireland's Climate Action Plan. Within that framing, Just Transition is important because communities experiencing disadvantage should be able to participate in, shape and benefit from climate action. At neighbourhood level, that means access to green spaces, practical environmental learning, opportunities to volunteer and a meaningful role in improving the local area. (Meath LCDC, 2023; Government of Ireland, 2025; Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024)

The initiative also demonstrates practical alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). This alignment is visible in the project's emphasis on inclusive participation, greener shared spaces, reuse and sustainable gardening, biodiversity, climate learning and partnership-based delivery (United Nations, 2015).

The target groups identified for the initiative included residents of Mineview and Oaklawns, Respond Housing tenants, children and young people living in disadvantaged areas, community volunteers and people experiencing social isolation. The rationale was that a shared, welcoming space could create connections across these groups while providing a base from which other opportunities could develop.

3. Building Community Through Climate Action

Climate action provided the practical starting point but community development was the wider purpose. The garden gave residents something tangible to work on together and over time, created a setting in which relationships, learning opportunities and partnerships could develop. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019)

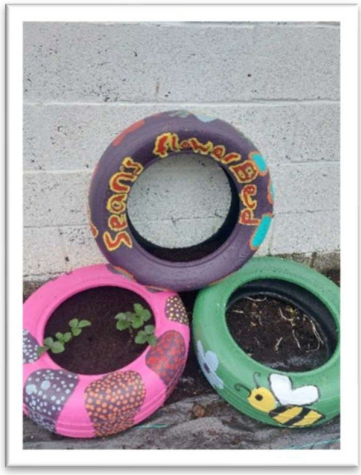
3.1 From Community Garden to Community Learning Hub

The community garden was chosen because it offered a visible and practical project that could improve the local environment while also creating a reason for people to come together. Unlike an activity that ends when a session finishes, a garden remains in the community. A garden needs care, invites conversation and changes over time. This made it well suited to an approach based on gradual relationship-building rather than short-term engagement.

Resident involvement was important from the beginning. The intention was not to create a finished space and then ask the community to use it, but to create opportunities for people to participate in the process. Gardening allowed different levels of involvement; residents could help with planting and maintenance, attend workshops, bring children to activities, offer suggestions or become involved as volunteers. This flexibility was particularly valuable for people who may not previously

have seen themselves as community volunteers. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2023)

TÚS provided support to the developing garden initiative, while Respond Housing became an important partner in connecting the work with residents and the wider housing context. SICAP's role was to help bring these relationships together and maintain a community-development focus: the physical garden mattered, but so did who participated, who felt welcome and what new opportunities could be created through the space.



As activity developed, the garden became more than an area for growing plants, it became somewhere residents could stop, chat and work alongside one another. These informal interactions are significant in communities where neighbours may live close to each other without having many opportunities to meet. Working on a shared task can reduce the pressure of formal engagement, conversation happens naturally while people plant, tidy, learn or supervise children.

The development of the Oaklawns community space illustrates the next stage of that process, a space that initially provided a focal point for meeting and gardening is increasingly functioning as a local community learning space. National Learning Network programmes, youth engagement, summer camps, gardening workshops, community meetings, family activities and environmental learning have all been identified as uses of the space. The significance is that the asset can continue to generate activity beyond any single SICAP intervention.

In this sense, the project was never only about growing plants, it was about creating the conditions in which relationships could grow: between neighbours, between residents and organisations, and between the community and the place itself.

3.2 Partnership in Action

The project expanded because no single organisation was expected to provide every element. Legacy4Meath SICAP, Respond Housing, Meath Local Sports Partnership, TÚS, residents, LMETB and the National Learning Network each brought a different contribution. This made it possible for an environmental initiative to connect with housing, sport and physical activity, education and training, youth and family engagement and community participation.

SICAP's contribution was particularly important as a coordinating and enabling presence. Rather than requiring every opportunity to be designed in advance, the project created a base from which partners could respond to emerging needs and possibilities. The garden and community space provided a common point of connection, while partnership working expanded the range of people who could be reached and the types of activity that could take place. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2022)

- Respond Housing brought a direct relationship with tenants and an understanding of the housing communities.
- Meath Local Sports Partnership enabled sport, Bike Week and family-oriented activity to become additional routes into participation.
- TÚS contributed to the garden's development and environmental learning.

- LMETB and the National Learning Network brought learning opportunities closer to the community.
- Residents themselves brought local knowledge, time, ideas and the everyday ownership without which a community space cannot become sustainable.

The value of this model lies in the way these contributions reinforce one another. A family may first engage through a children's activity, a resident through gardening, another person through a learning programme and another through volunteering. The shared space allows these different routes into community participation to overlap.

3.3 Climate Action and Just Transition

Climate action can sometimes feel distant from everyday community life when it is presented mainly through national targets or technical language. In Mineview and Oaklawns, the approach was to make it practical. Community gardens, biodiversity planting, rainwater harvesting, Leave No Trace, clean-up days, Bike Week, sustainable gardening and upcycling and reuse projects offered residents ways to experience environmental action through ordinary activities in their own neighbourhood.



This practical emphasis is important from a Just Transition perspective. The project's framing recognises that disadvantaged communities should not be excluded from environmental improvements or from the knowledge and opportunities associated with the transition to more sustainable ways of living. Climate action at community level can therefore have a dual purpose: improving environmental awareness and local spaces while also creating social contact, confidence, learning and participation. (European Commission, 2020)



This local approach also reflects the social dimension of the European Green Deal, which places fairness and inclusion alongside environmental transition and recognises the importance of ensuring that vulnerable people and communities are not left behind. In this case, that principle is translated into accessible community-level opportunities to participate in environmental action, learning and community life (European Commission, 2019).

- Biodiversity planting and sustainable gardening can build knowledge about nature while making a shared area more attractive.
- Rainwater harvesting can turn an abstract discussion about resource use into something visible.
- Upcycling and reuse activities can demonstrate practical alternatives to waste.
- Bike Week can connect sustainability with movement, recreation and family participation.
- Clean-up days can produce an immediate improvement while giving residents the experience of acting collectively. (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024; United Nations, 2015)

The social dimension is as important as the environmental one, as each activity creates a reason for people to meet.F or residents experiencing isolation, the invitation to help with a garden or attend a practical workshop may feel more accessible than attending a meeting specifically about social inclusion. Climate action therefore becomes a means of participation rather than a separate policy agenda. (Government of Ireland, 2025)

3.4 Community Learning, Summer Camps and Family Engagement



As the work developed, our Oaklawns outreach centre began to support a wider range of community learning and family activity. This represents an important progression. The success of a community asset is not measured only by the condition of physical space, but by whether people use it, return to it and begin to see it as somewhere that belongs within the life of the community.

Summer camps and family activities provide an important route into engagement because children often bring parents and carers into contact with community initiatives. A family may attend because a child wants to take part, but the experience can also introduce adults to neighbours, staff, partner organisations and other opportunities. Repeated family participation helps normalise use of the space and can strengthen the sense that the Oaklawns centre is welcoming and relevant to different age groups.



The involvement of Meath Local Sports Partnership widened the offer beyond gardening. Sport, Bike Week and community events create additional entry points for people whose interests may be different. This matters in community development: participation grows when there is more than one way to belong. Environmental activity, sport, family programmes and learning can sit alongside each other rather than competing for the same participants.

The use of Oaklawns by the National Learning Network, together with links to LMETB and their community educators and youth engagement through local schools, also points towards the development of a local learning hub. Bringing learning into a familiar community setting can reduce the distance between residents and services and it can also make the community asset useful throughout the year and for different purposes.

The longer-term significance is that Oaklawns is beginning to be used by organisations and groups as a place in which activity can happen, rather than being dependent on a sequence of isolated appointments or events. That transition from a project site to a shared community resource is one of the strongest emerging outcomes of the initiative.

Event	Attendance
Summer Camp – July / August 2026	25 children (16 boys / 9 girls aged 5yrs to 12yrs)
Oaklawns Community Clean Up Day	30 children (15 boys / 15 girls / 9 parents)
Mineview Community Clean Up Day	25 children (15 boys / 10 girls / 5 parents)

4. Collaborative Approaches

Partnership working strengthened the initiative by connecting community development with housing, sport, education, environmental learning and resident-led activity. The collaboration was not simply a referral network; partners were able to use the shared spaces and contribute different forms of expertise and opportunity. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2022; United Nations, 2015)

The approach is consistent with Irish community-development policy, which emphasises social inclusion, empowerment, active participation, meaningful engagement and collaboration. It also reflects the Government's Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working, including social justice, sustainable development, human rights and equality, empowering communities and active participation (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019; Department of Rural and Community Development, 2022).

4.1 SICAP and Respond Housing

The relationship between the Legacy4Meath SICAP action and Respond Housing provided an important foundation for engagement in Oaklawns and Mineview. Respond's connection with tenants complemented SICAP's community-development role and helped create opportunities for newer and longer-established residents to participate in shared activities.



The practical focus on gardens and community events offered a neutral setting for integration. Instead of asking people to build relationships in the abstract, residents could meet through a shared task or family activity. This supported the wider aim of helping people get to know neighbours, feel part of the community and develop a sense of responsibility for shared spaces.

4.2 SICAP and Meath Local Sports Partnership

Meath Local Sports Partnership added another dimension to participation by using sport and physical activity as ways of engaging children, families and residents. Summer camps, Bike Week initiatives and community events complemented the environmental work and widened the range of reasons for people to come into the space.

This collaboration is important because community cohesion is strengthened by repeated contact across different activities. A resident who does not initially engage with gardening may take part in a cycling or family event, while a child's participation may create a connection with the wider household. Sport therefore became part of the broader engagement pathway rather than a standalone activity.



4.3 SICAP, Tús and Community Learning Partners

Tús supported the community-garden element and helped connect practical activity with learning. As the Oaklawns centre and garden developed, relationships with the National Learning Network, LMETB and youth engagement partners expanded the educational use of the space.

This is a significant development because it brings learning closer to where people live. The community setting can provide an accessible first point of contact and create opportunities for residents and young people to encounter learning in a familiar environment. The growing range of users also strengthens the case for Oaklawns as a community learning space rather than a garden with occasional activities.

4.4 Resident Participation and Leadership

Resident participation is central to whether the work becomes sustainable or not. The the case-study framework identifies residents becoming volunteers, taking ownership of the gardens, helping to organise activities and developing local leadership as key areas of progress. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019; Department of Rural and Community Development, 2023)

These changes should be understood as a gradual process, where participation may begin with attending an event or helping with a small task. With repeated opportunities and positive experiences, some residents can become more confident in contributing ideas, maintaining the space or supporting activities. The emerging goal is not that SICAP withdraws abruptly, but that residents increasingly influence how the asset is used and developed, possibly progressing to more formal resident's associations. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019)

The progress from participant to contributor or to volunteer or local leader, is one of the clearest ways in which a physical environmental project can support longer-term community capacity.

"Joining the garden group allowed me to find joy in gardening while connecting with welcoming neighbours. It also provided a wonderful, hands-on space for my child to express their creativity and work on their own little projects, making our whole family feel truly at home in the community."

Aura, Mineview Community Gardener



5. What Difference Did It Make?

The emerging impact of the initiative can be understood at several levels: changes to place, changes in participation, changes in relationships and changes in the way organisations work with the community. The quantitative data will help demonstrate the scale of activity, but the wider significance lies in what those activities made possible.

At the level of place, community gardens were developed and green spaces became active rather than passive parts of the neighbourhood. Biodiversity planting, sustainable gardening, clean-ups and related environmental work provided visible improvements and gave residents practical opportunities to contribute. Oaklawns in particular is developing from a garden and meeting point into a recognised community resource used for learning, family activity, youth engagement and partner programmes.

At the level of participation, the project created multiple entry points, residents could engage through gardening, environmental workshops, community clean-ups, Bike Week, summer camps, family activities or learning programmes. This variety matters because people have different

interests, levels of confidence, caring responsibilities and previous experience of services so offering different ways to take part increases the likelihood that a first contact can become continued involvement.

For children and families, summer camps and community activities created positive reasons to use the space, as participation can act as a bridge to wider family engagement; parents and carers meet other families, become familiar with organisations and begin to see community activity as part of everyday local life. Over time, repeated use can strengthen both informal relationships and a sense of safety and belonging in shared spaces.

At the level of relationships, the intended change is simple but significant; residents know one another better; the garden gives people a reason to stop, talk and work together. These small interactions can accumulate, especially for people who are isolated, a familiar activity in a nearby space can provide a manageable route into contact. For newer residents, it can create opportunities to meet people who already know the area and for longer-established residents, it can provide a practical way to welcome new neighbours, for example seeing a familiar face at the local shops can led to further social interactions.

At organisational level, the continuing involvement of Respond Housing, Meath Local Sports Partnership, TÚS, LMETB and the National Learning Network demonstrates the value of using a shared community asset as a platform for collaboration. Partners can bring their own expertise while working within a locally grounded space with SICAP's coordinating role helping to connect those opportunities so that they contribute to a broader community-development process rather than remaining isolated interventions.

Perhaps the most important emerging difference is the shift in how the space is understood, Oaklawns is not only somewhere in which SICAP delivers an activity but is increasingly somewhere that residents and organisations can use for community purposes. That distinction matters for sustainability, as program ends; a community asset can continue to generate opportunities as relationships strengthen and local ownership develops.

The evidence should nevertheless be presented proportionately, the project is still developing and longer-term outcomes such as sustained resident leadership or durable reductions in social isolation require time and continued observation**.**





The strongest claim at this stage is that the initiative has created the conditions for those outcomes: accessible shared space, repeated opportunities to participate, stronger partnership infrastructure and emerging resident ownership.

5.1 Legacy4Meath Activity Q1 2025 to Q3 2026

No.	Beneficiary	Activity	Participants
4	Child and Family events	2 x Community Clean ups; 2 x Summer Camps	69
5	Non-Case Load	Outdoor Adventure; Green Steps Youth; Garden visits; Cook Once Eat Twice; Foraging	49
7	Courses	Leave no Trace; DIY; Recycling & Repurposing	50
3	Community Gardens	Patison Donore; Oaklawns Pocket Garden; Mineview Garden	11 Direct residents plus many active group users
6	Community's Groups Supported Directly	Mineview Garden Group; Navan Men's District Shed; Navan Cycle Initiative; Bettystown Youth Group; NLN Oaklawns Pocket Garden Group; Patison Garden Group	65 interventions
7	Collaborative Partners	Respond; Tús; MLSP; LMETB; NLN; Meath Climate Action; Meath Active Travel	-

6. How We Gathered the Story | Data and Ethics

This case study draws on a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered throughout the development of the initiative. Sources include SICAP monitoring and participation records, resident conversations and feedback, input from partner organisations, photographs and case examples. Together, these provide evidence not only of the reach and level of activity, but also of residents' experiences and the development of the gardens and Oaklawns Outreach as community spaces.

As the initiative involves residents, children, families and community volunteers, particular attention is given to dignity, privacy, informed consent and appropriate representation. Where individual experiences, quotations, photographs or video material are included, the relevant consent arrangements are confirmed before publication. Where identification is not necessary or appropriate, experiences can be represented through anonymised case examples.

Quantitative information included in the final case study is checked against relevant SICAP monitoring, programme and attendance records. This is complemented by qualitative evidence from residents, SICAP staff and partner organisations, helping to capture changes that may be less easily reflected in numbers, including increased participation, stronger relationships, volunteering, confidence and emerging community ownership.

This approach reflects wider community-development principles of participation, inclusion, respect and empowerment, recognising the importance of enabling people particularly those experiencing disadvantage to have a meaningful voice in matters affecting their communities (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2023).

7. Lessons Learned

One of the clearest lessons is that green spaces can provide a natural and relatively low-pressure way of bringing people together, as community development does not always have to begin with a meeting, committee or formal program. A practical task can create the first connection, and those connections can later support more structured participation. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019; United Nations, 2015)



A second lesson is that small projects can create opportunities beyond their original purpose, the gardens were a manageable starting point, but its value increased as partners and residents began to see other possibilities in the space. This suggests that community initiatives benefit from enough flexibility to respond to what emerges rather than being judged only against the activity originally planned.

Children and family activities are also important engagement routes. Summer camps, sport and community events can draw families into shared spaces and create contact with services and neighbours. Their value is therefore wider than the immediate activity: they can help build familiarity, trust and repeated participation.

Partnership working increases what can be achieved, but coordination matters. Respond Housing, Meath Local Sports Partnership, TÚS, LMETB, the National Learning Network and residents bring different assets. SICAP adds value by connecting those contributions to a shared community-development purpose and helping opportunities develop around the needs and strengths of the community. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2022; United Nations, 2015)

Another lesson is that community ownership takes time. Attendance at an event is not the same as ownership and volunteering once is not the same as sustained leadership. The progression needs repeated opportunities, relationships and practical support. Recognising these stages helps avoid over claiming while still valuing meaningful early changes.

Finally, climate action can have social as well as environmental value. Gardening, biodiversity, reuse, cycling and clean-up activities can create knowledge and environmental benefits, but they can also reduce barriers to participation and create social contact. This is particularly relevant to a Just Transition approach because it connects sustainability with inclusion, wellbeing and community capacity. (Government of Ireland, 2025; European Commission, 2019)

8. Outlook for 2026 & 2027

The next phase is to build on the community infrastructure already created rather than start again with a new initiative. Planned areas identified for continuation include further biodiversity projects, community growing, upcycling programmes, composting workshops, youth engagement, additional family events and continued use of Oaklawns and Mineview gardens as a community learning space.

The priority will be to deepen resident participation alongside this programme growth. As more activities take place, there is an opportunity to support residents to influence what is offered, help organise activities and take increasing responsibility for the gardens and shared space. Continued

partnership working can support that progression while bringing additional learning and engagement opportunities into the community.

Future monitoring can also focus more on progression: not only how many people attend, but how many return, volunteer, take on tasks, access another opportunity or contribute to decisions. This will help demonstrate whether the emerging community asset is translating into stronger and more sustainable local participation.

9. Conclusion

What began as a community greening initiative in Mineview and Oaklawns has developed into a wider programme of community engagement in which climate action provides a practical way for people to meet, learn and contribute. The gardens created a visible starting point, but their value has extended beyond planting. They have supported family activity, environmental learning, sport, volunteering, youth engagement and new relationships between the community and partner organisations.

The experience demonstrates the value of investing in both people and place, physical improvements can make a neighbourhood more attractive, but their deeper community value comes when residents are involved in creating, using and caring for them. In Oaklawns, the growing use of the space by the National Learning Network and other partners suggests that the initiative is beginning to establish a community asset with uses beyond the original garden project.

SICAP's contribution has been to connect these elements: creating opportunities for residents to participate, coordinating partnerships and helping practical climate action become a route into wider community engagement. The work also shows how Just Transition can be made meaningful locally by ensuring that communities experiencing disadvantage can participate in environmental action and share in its social, learning and wellbeing benefits.

The project remains a developing story. Its long-term success will depend on continued resident participation, strong partnerships and the gradual transfer of greater influence and ownership to the community. However, the foundations are visible. The most important outcome is not simply what has been planted or built, but the relationships, confidence, collaboration and sense of community that are growing around those shared spaces.

10. Acknowledgements

This case study acknowledges the residents of Mineview and Oaklawns and the contributions of Legacy4Meath SICAP, Respond Housing, Meath Local Sports Partnership, TÚS, LMETB, the National Learning Network, community volunteers, families and other partner organisations.

Special thanks are extended to Meath Partnership and the SICAP team for their ongoing support and local knowledge and to Svetlana from the Patison Garden in Donore for sharing her creativity, practical skills and commitment to reuse and sustainability.

Above all, the development of the gardens and Oaklawns outreach centre has been shaped by the residents and volunteers who continue to give their time, ideas and energy.

11. References

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Learning how to grow potatoes in Oaklawns | 3 groups 3 steps

1. NLN Pocket Garden - Chitting seed potatoes
2. Green Steps - Planting
3. Summer Camp - Harvesting

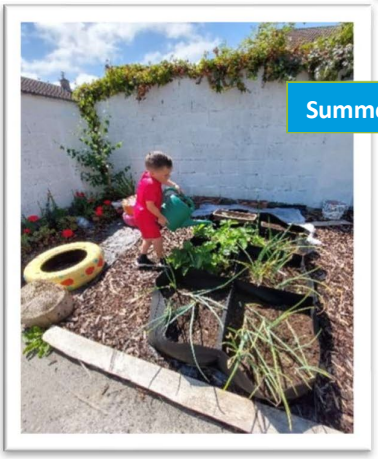






Spring 2025





Summer 2026





Green Steps Youth Program – Upcycling





Community DIY **activity**

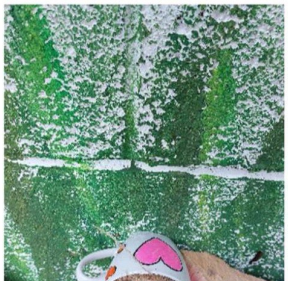






Wildflower corner under construction – Air Bee'n'Bee!







Pumpkin Patch







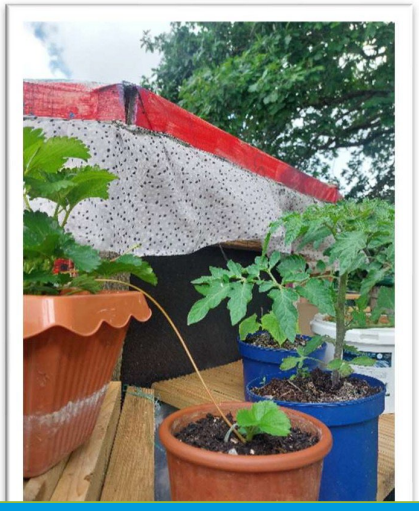


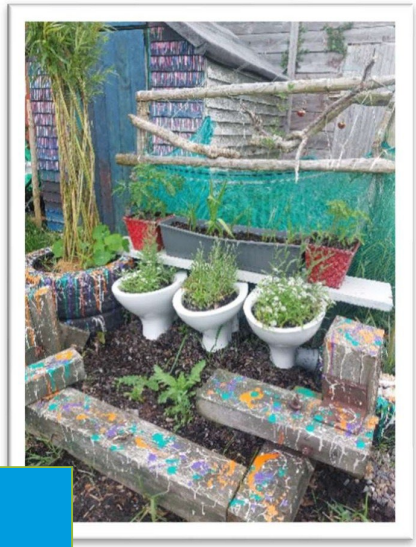












Patison Garden, Donore – Est. Jan 2025
A creative model of sustainability, transforming unused and discarded materials into something new, beautiful and purposeful.



