



PERMACULTURE
ASSOCIATION

CASE STUDY

Creating Thriving Communities

A Permaculture Approach

Permaculture is an ethical framework used to design regenerative systems at all scales – from home and garden to community, farm and bioregions.

We live in a time of great uncertainty and unfolding crises with the social, environmental and economic failures of the current system being cruelly exposed by rising inequality, social division, increasingly precarious and insecure employment, loss of biodiversity, accelerating climate change and the inability of an increasing number of people to meet their basic needs for good food and housing.

In this project we are exploring how people across Britain are working to create thriving communities!

www.permaculture.org.uk



**NATIONAL
LOTTERY FUNDED**

The Grange

Great Cressingham, Norfolk

Community: Refugees and Asylums Seekers; adults with learning difficulties; local community.



www.thegrangenorfolk.org.uk

Overview

The Grange is a 10 acre smallholding and an old rectory in West Norfolk. In 2011, Ben Margolis and Sophie North moved there and spent six years developing the site as a permaculture demonstration space and a place of sanctuary in particular for refugees and asylum seekers, but also for other groups and members of the local community.

The Grange offers therapeutic retreats, courses in practical skills including green woodwork and pottery and a variety of volunteering opportunities and open days for people in the local area, as well as for asylum seekers. They also run permaculture design course and regularly host open days, visits and organized tours for university students and others.

The Grange partners with charities who are able to offer long-term support to asylum seekers and others and now also advise other projects around the UK looking to offer similar opportunities.

Permaculture

The Grange is a Permaculture LAND centre (Learning and Network Demonstration site) and regularly welcomes people on tours and permaculture courses. The design for the land and for the project is based on a permaculture design process with the key aims of the projects reflecting the ethics of permaculture.

The project has a clear focus on the function of offering therapy and skills meaning it is not currently producing large amounts of food or other produce. One reason for this is that they have learned that many people are more interested in building infrastructure and other physical activities that the more micro-tasks often involved in gardening.

Earth Care

The land at The Grange is managed using a permaculture design which focuses on the functions of offering therapy, encouraging wildlife and biodiversity and growing food for use on and off site. There is a large vegetable garden which uses core permaculture techniques including hugel beds, no-dig techniques and the use of green manures. There are also ponies and chickens who contribute greatly to soil nutrients and other yields.

The Grange has a five year old forest garden which was initially planted using funding from Norfolk County Council and includes a wide range of edible plants and trees.

People care

The Grange has a therapeutic focus, although the staff and volunteers there are not trained therapists. They offer therapeutic opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers through the activities offered on site, as well as by working with trained psychotherapists from partner charities.

Many asylum seekers have suffered significant trauma, both in their flight to the UK as well as in the UK asylum system. The Grange relies on their partner charities to identify people who are in the right mental and physical state to visit The Grange and make the most of the opportunities on offer. There are also very real issues of secondary trauma for staff and volunteers to be aware of. All staff and interns have mandatory monthly supervision with a psychotherapist, and this is also made available to volunteers if needed. Everyone involved in the project receives training to help them understand the asylum system and how best to work with each other.

Fair shares

The Grange is always open to the public and hold regular open days and other events to encourage those in the village and the wider area to get involved. Excess produce from the garden is given as veg and fruit boxes to asylum seekers who volunteer on Workday Wednesdays or distributed to the local community.

All courses that take place at The Grange including Permaculture Design Courses, and craft courses, are offered for free to asylum seekers or others in the local area who would otherwise be unable to access them. This includes a full bursary scheme for the Permaculture Design Course.

Outcomes and monitoring

The Grange has a significant amount of anecdotal evidence of improvements in people's wellbeing and confidence after visiting The Grange. They carry out focus groups in the form of 'closing circles' at the end of each group visit and have received extremely positive feedback from almost all participants. The most common reasons cited are feelings of being trusted and welcomed into someone's home as an equal. This is especially true for people who visit multiple times, who report that they feel more confident, are able to discover skills and hobbies that they can continue away from The Grange, and that their mental health improves.

The Grange has not carried out structured assessments of improvements in wellbeing. However, visiting psychotherapists have described it as 'turbo charged therapy' with some of their clients improving more in the time they are at the Grange than in months of one to one therapy.

Case study

Michael fled the war in Burundi leaving behind his family, many of whom were killed. He was destitute in London on and off for 8 years and was supported by a charity called Room to Heal who started to bring groups to The Grange in 2012. Michael was one of the first members of Room to Heal to visit The Grange and after his first visit, came back several times on group visits as well as skills weekends where he supported various projects including building, gardening and woodwork.

On his first trip, Michael was nervous and unsure about being in unfamiliar surroundings and in someone else's home. Over subsequent visits Michael came to feel at home at The Grange and would enjoy showing others around who had not been before, as well as making friends with people in the local community.

For Michael, being welcomed into a family home and sharing meals with people from many different cultures was a very significant experience. "To me it is more like a rehabilitation centre. It has rehabilitated me. Dinner reminds me so much of my family time, to be the real me. It was amazing to see people of different ethnic background being together, respecting each other, being peaceful. The place has really helped me to be trusted, to trust other people."

