

A Little Patch of Ground, **Encounters**



A Little Patch of Ground is....

a participatory growing and arts project that culminates in the fruition of a vegetable garden, a multi media performance and exhibition, and an intergenerational community group.

“Beautiful. Truly inspirational and extraordinary; an emotional piece of work that should be shared across neighbourhoods in this country.”

Alicia Smith; Participation Manager, Culture Liverpool

Encounters offer imaginative spaces and participatory processes for people to explore their relationship with themselves, each other, where they live and the wider natural world. In arts, education, community, environmental and regeneration contexts, we use the transformative role of the arts to reconnect people to their own imaginative and instinctive power to shift how they see the world and their place within it.



The Patch of Ground process:

Over a period of 20 weeks, a culturally diverse and intergenerational group of local residents meet on a weekly basis to create and grow their own permaculture inspired vegetable garden. They cook and eat together, and through a variety of media, explore thoughts on food, resources, climate change, interdependence and sustainability.

Participants learn to explore the world as our shared home, through the sharing of personal stories about moments of connection in nature and undertaking documentation and writing tasks about special places outdoors. Through creative writing, making and drama activities, the group takes a journey together, inspired by eco-philosopher Joanna Macy's behaviour change cycle of; Gratitude, Despair, Seeing with New Eyes, Going Forth.

In the last weeks of the project, these transformative personal experiences are woven together into a multi-media performance incorporating text, image, objects, and movement that intimately reflect the shared stories, thoughts and ideas unearthed during the project.



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These public performances are accompanied by an installation of photographic images, samples of text and other fragments from the creative process, which takes place over the main growing season.

A Little Patch of Ground, Liverpool & Doncaster:

In 2009, Encounters started developing **A Little Patch of Ground** at the Bluecoat in Liverpool (Capital of Culture, Four Corners programme) as a way to work with people and communities creatively, in response to the changing climate and the raft of ecological challenges of our time. The success of this project encouraged the company to repeat the project in Doncaster at The Point (home of dArts) in 2010, supported by the Arts Council.

The success of the Liverpool and Doncaster versions has confirmed that both the process and form of this project create a powerful and dynamic vehicle through which new skills are developed, diverse relationships built and new ways of seeing and thinking about the world are seeded

A Little Patch of Ground was created by Encounters' Creative Director Ruth Ben-Tovim, and Associate Artist Anne-Marie Culhane.

The participants' responses to the project in both Liverpool and Doncaster have been universally positive. Participants developed skills in growing, thinking, performance, cooking, and communication with a broad range of people:

"I... learned a lot about myself, the world around me, and the people in it. I learned things take time to grow and things don't grow on their own. Not just plants."

"I felt like I rediscovered part of myself – what I am naturally, rather than what society has turned me into."

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Participants comments continued...

“It was an amazing experience. I learned new things about the environment and myself and about other people. It’s changed my life.”

“The project has changed my attitude to interconnection especially – it has given me a greater sense of connection to the group, and – somehow – to Doncaster.”

“The project achieved... a bonding of people from different backgrounds – planted a seed which may continue to grow.”

“I learnt not to judge people. I have learnt to try to see different ways of thinking.”

“Good times, good company and good food. We had fun and grew emotionally and creatively. It was good to watch the plants grow and flourish, just like us. It’s been inspirational!”

“The experience of working on a project where the emphasis is the questions not the answers!”

“I learnt an abundance of new skills, all of which I will value for a long time, and I developed self-confidence in my abilities.”

“I feel a renewed commitment to my relationship with nature as a result of taking part. This was a really grounding experience...and a pleasure to be part of it.”

“Being part of a diverse community with common values was wonderful and inspiring. I’ve learnt something from all members of the group and their diversity. “



Audience response was also very positive:

“Seeing individuals of all ages and cultures working together to present a high quality piece of performance was uplifting and emotionally powerful. The environment, soil and growing things is a universal human language and concern. A memorable and outstanding piece of artwork/community engagement.”

“I was very moved by the performance. The fact that the men, women and children who presented the piece were very diverse contributed to its impact. I think that they will have a greater commitment to doing what they can to protect the natural world and create a sustainable future for the world. It certainly had that effect upon me.”

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Successful transplantation:

What has been clear too, from the transplanting of the project from one organisation (Bluecoat in Liverpool) to another (dArts in Doncaster) is that this is as much of a valuable learning experience for the host organisation involved, as it is for the participants. For the dArts and Bluecoat teams, the experience provided:

“a new way of working for both delivery and building staff, sparked good conversations, both internal and external.” Staff enjoyed “the organic physical change around the building – growing and changing flowers and plants... the opportunity to open up the building in a new way to the public ... and try new ways of engagement with different target groups”.

Additionally specialist practitioners involved in the projects (permaculture growers, wild food experts, local artists) have expressed a real passion for the aims of **Patch** and its interdisciplinary reach, as well as a desire to stay involved, or replicate what they have experienced as professionals. As a result of this, future versions of **A Little Patch of Ground** will include an apprentice and mentoring programme for participatory arts practitioners and permaculture experts, with the hope that as a result of this training, in the future more people will be able to deliver this pioneering project.

Future transplantations:

Encounters are looking to roll out **A Little Patch of Ground** across the UK. Nationally we will be partnering with the Permaculture Association, and Transition Town Network, to build the learning, impact, legacy and reach of the project.

If you are interested in being a host organisation for **A Little Patch of Ground** please contact Ruth Ben-Tovim: ruth@encounters-arts.org.uk 07870 698333 to set up a meeting, or follow the project on the website www.encounters-arts.org.uk .