

Green Spaces for Health

Background

- Green Spaces for Health is a city-wide, community-led initiative based in Cork City, where there is a population of approximately 210,000. Cork is rich in green spaces but faces challenges common to urban areas, such as habitat loss, ecological fragmentation, and community disconnection from nature.
- The message of Green Spaces for Health is that respect for nature and connecting with the natural world supports physical and mental health. The initiative works across Cork City's South Parish and other areas to maintain existing green spaces and identify new greening opportunities.



Key Activities

- Restored Parkowen (a former cemetery) into a public park featuring native hedgerows, rewilding zones, pollinator-friendly flower beds, and reduced chemical use.
- Hosted weekly volunteer gardening sessions and public events including mindfulness, ecology tours, and Tai Chi.

Key Activities

- Partnered with St. John's Central College and Hive Mind to establish rooftop bee hives, expanding urban pollinator habitats, and creating educational opportunities.
- Delivered a free six-week "Work That Reconnects" course based on eco-philosophy to deepen community connection with nature.
- Founded the Eco Congregation at St. Finbarr's South Chapel, promoting multi-faith environmental actions such as paper recycling and energy audits.
- Launched a paper recycling programme in partnership with local businesses, diverting paper waste to ecological insulation production.
- Collaborated with University College Cork (UCC) and CARL Research to conduct a comprehensive tree audit of South Parish, mapping species, measuring trees, and assessing carbon sequestration.
- Developed the "Re-Imagining South Parish" participatory project to envision sustainable, inclusive futures for the community.
- Worked with Cork City Council to reduce mowing frequency and avoid chemical herbicides.

Impact

Environmental Impact

- Increased biodiversity through native plantings, habitat creation, and rewilding areas.
- Supported pollinator populations, including successful establishment of multiple urban beehives.

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Impact

- Reduced chemical inputs and promoted more sustainable urban green space management.
- Comprehensive tree audit informing urban forestry planning and carbon sequestration efforts.

Community Engagement

- High volunteer participation in gardening, citizen science, and educational programmes.
- Strengthened partnerships with educational institutions, local government, and community groups.
- Raised awareness about urban ecology and sustainability through workshops, courses, and public talks.

Health and Wellbeing

- Provided accessible green spaces promoting mental health and physical activity.
- Hosted inclusive community events integrating mindfulness, education, and recreation.

Challenges & Solutions

Challenges:

- Revitalising neglected urban green spaces with limited resources.
- Sustaining community engagement over time.
- Addressing climate change impacts in an urban context requiring multi-stakeholder cooperation.

Solutions:

- Engaged volunteers weekly for hands-on stewardship and community-building activities.
- Built partnerships with educational institutions and local authorities to pool resources and expertise.

Solutions:

- Adopted chemical-free maintenance and reduced mowing to enhance habitat quality.
- Developed participatory projects like 'Re-Imagining South Parish' to involve residents in planning and decision-making.

Tips for Similar Projects

- Partner with academic institutions and local authorities to leverage research and policy support.
- Use a holistic eco-social approach that integrates ecological restoration with wellbeing and social cohesion.
- Promote citizen science initiatives to increase engagement and generate valuable ecological data.

Identified Limitations/Weaknesses

- Ongoing volunteer commitment requires consistent coordination and support.
- Urban development pressures may limit expansion of green spaces.

Resources

- [Project Website](#)

Partners

