

# Lewes Community Allotment

**Lewes Community Allotment, set up by Lewes Common Cause Cooperative, has been providing greenery and goodness to those involved for the last twenty-five years.**

The green-fingered bunch at the allotment grow so much more than fruit and veg: they grow a sense of community and belonging. Lesley Healey tells **CommunityAd** about the joys of being part of the group. "We learn a lot about being patient with each other, learning from each other, listening and teaching skills, as well as the practical skills of growing - where ten people are likely to have ten different opinions".

Run as a membership cooperative, it is exactly for that sense of community that people get involved. "The reason most people become members is to have people to work alongside, share expertise and learn from and have company as we garden together. It's also a useful introduction for people with ambitions to become allotment holders but with no experience. We used to meet on Wednesday afternoons, but now our gardening is spread throughout the week - obviously so we don't break COVID-19 regulations or get too close to each other. When the regulations have allowed, we have twice monthly education and training sessions, where more people can come together (while keeping apart!). We've talked about things like taking cuttings, climate change, sustainable growing, crop rotation etc. It's also a chance to check in with each other".

It all sounds rather idyllic and something anyone can get involved with, and there is a waiting list to join while COVID-19 restrictions have stopped group sessions. Lesley talks of how funding and grants may have dried up but the flow of community spirit and voluntary manpower is still running strong. "In the past, the Community Allotment had a succession of grant funding to pay for a support worker - sometimes two people - who worked variously with children, adults with learning or physical disabilities, young adults with challenges entering the workplace etc. Unfortunately, we currently have no funding - it ran out about 18 months ago.



"So, at the moment, it is funded by its membership - currently 14 people are full members and two are 'friends' - and I coordinate it. Even though we can't have one big session, all members still know what's going on, what work needs doing, what's there to harvest. Though I am now a Director of Common Cause (unpaid - it's a social enterprise), I was an allotment member first, but several members have been around for much longer than me, so are very knowledgeable: everybody is generous with their knowledge, skills and experience."

The enterprise is always looking for ways to reach out to people who can benefit from using the allotment. For example an art group (in normal times) occasionally comes for a painting session, a home schooling group came to look at the sustainable mix of food and nature growing alongside each other, other community gardens have visited, and members have visited them, to exchange ideas and Lesley recently visited a group in Kingston village to talk about setting up their own community allotment. The latest exciting project to benefit from the Allotment will be run by Froglife, working with younger people who are not in mainstream education for various reasons. It will be based at the allotment one afternoon a week.

If you'd like to find out more about the allotment, please visit their Facebook page: **@ Lewes Community Allotment**, or Common Cause's website: **www.commoncause.org.uk/lewes-community-allotment**