

**Conclusion**

Putting Down Roots is a pioneering project. St Mungo's help homeless people put down their own roots. It strengthens communities and combines the joy of gardening with the development of employment skills and the benefits of beautiful gardens in public spaces. In the future, Putting Down Roots aims to:

- Expand to involve more homeless gardeners
- Increase the number of sites available to work on
- Improve the opportunities for homeless people to gain accredited qualifications
- Help more vulnerable men and women gain skills to succeed at independent living
- Establish gardening projects as a social enterprise
- Create a team delivering gardening contracts to other organisations such as local authorities, companies and residents' groups
- Develop a range of regeneration and composting programmes



**Work done so far:**

- Over 60 garden sites worked on since 2001
- 400 clients involved since 2001 – 95 of them over the last year
- Nine clients helped into related employment
- 17 clients helped onto gardening courses
- Over 60 partnerships established with external organisations

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St Mungo's is opening doors for London's homeless. Every year we help more than 5,000 homeless and vulnerable people find responsive and integrated solutions for problems with housing, employment, training and health.

We offer pioneering services to men and women who have complex and overlapping needs that often exclude them from mainstream services. Our work is essential for preparing people with mental health, substance use, alcohol and housing problems to move on.

To constantly improve the quality of our services we welcome diversity and build partnerships to reflect and help all local communities across London.

We are grateful to our donors whose support enables us to share our information through briefings.

**For information on subscribing to 'Briefings', please call 020 8600 3006**

*Dissemination of our good practice is funded by charitable voluntary income.*

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**PUTTING DOWN ROOTS**

St Mungo's Putting Down Roots gardening project involves homeless people in a range of gardening activities with a focus on enjoyable structured activities to develop job skills and community involvement.

**Who do we help?**

St Mungo's Putting Down Roots helps men and women who have experienced homelessness. All of our gardeners have slept rough in London – often in the parks we garden in – and most now live in St Mungo's accommodation.

Over the last five years Putting Down Roots has:

- Involved over 400 homeless people
- Improved the beauty and biodiversity of more than 60 green spaces
- Benefited thousands of Londoners who live or work near our public gardens

**What is the aim?**

To support individual development and make a positive contribution to the local community.



**How does it work?**

Our team of gardener trainers help homeless people design, create and maintain beautiful urban spaces that can be enjoyed by all.



## Benefits to Homeless People:

**Education and employability:** Putting Down Roots provides the foundation of a career in horticulture, offering service users:

- Formal pre NVQ Qualifications
- Grants and support for college education
- Work experience
- Employment skills – reliability, initiative, timekeeping and responsibility
- A recreational hobby



**Rehabilitation:** Putting Down Roots offers structured activities for people in treatment for drug and alcohol use to improve their success rate and overcome addiction issues.

**Social skills:** Clients develop self-esteem and confidence and make friendships to overcome the isolation they experienced while living on the streets.

**Outreach:** Our gardener trainers engage with the street population who live in and use the gardens where we work. They have a role to inform rough sleepers and street drinkers about St Mungo's services. They encourage them to use public spaces more responsibly and involve them in discussions on the changes being made to open spaces.

**Anti-social behaviour:** Rough sleepers are often considered a nuisance but Putting Down Roots encourages our clients to work alongside local residents and participate in community events.



## Putting Down Roots for reforming drug users

### Case Study: Lee Emery

"Three years ago I was homeless and addicted to drugs. I wound up in hospital after an overdose and was approached by St Mungo's who found me accommodation and helped me get clean.

About a year ago I started volunteering for Putting Down Roots, doing three days a week of activities in local parks and St Mungo's hostels. I got involved in everything – from mural painting to pond digging. It helped me regain my confidence and overcome my anxiety. I'm now in a paid position as a gardener trainer for St Mungo's and am also studying for a GNVQ. I want to do a course in landscape gardening and one day set up my own business.

I'm now able to see my own potential and realise I can succeed in life and don't have to settle for the worst – it's given me the confidence to strive for better things. Volunteering for Putting Down Roots is one of the best decisions I ever made."

*Lee Emery won this year's Third Sector's 'Volunteer of The Year' award.*

## Benefits to the Community – A Space For All:

**Safety:** Street drinking, sleeping rough and drug use reduce local residents' sense of safety and comfort in their communities. A recent report, entitled 'A Space For All', identified a direct link between street activities and poorly maintained urban green spaces.

*But if a park is well maintained people are more likely to behave responsibly in it and respect their surroundings.*

**Community development:** Putting Down Roots reclaims public spaces with the homeless population and allows everyone to enjoy them. And we organise fairs and design events to encourage the local community to get actively involved with our projects.

**Regeneration:** Our gardens are of a quality that can no longer be matched by parks' departments in all but their flagship spaces. St Mungo's Putting Down Roots has made dramatic improvements to green spaces across London – from Waterloo to Seven Sisters – bringing them back into use for play, relaxation and enjoyment as the 'green hearts' of communities. The hard work of homeless people has benefited the lives of tens of thousands of Londoners.



## Emma Cons Gardens

After many years of use by local street drinkers, Emma Cons Gardens, near The Old Vic Theatre in Waterloo, had become severely dilapidated and was a local eyesore. In partnership with The Old Vic and with funding from the Single



Regeneration Budget and Circle Waterloo, Putting Down Roots has now transformed the gardens into a peaceful area the whole community can enjoy. Most importantly, it has involved street drinkers in the development of the site and has enabled them to make a positive contribution.

**"Putting Down Roots provides an invaluable service to both homeless men and women. By rebuilding their skills and confidence, Putting Down Roots enables those affected by homelessness to play an active role in the local community."** *Simon Hughes MP*