



CARITAS PLYMOUTH ENVIRONMENT CASE STUDY

ST MARY'S RC PRIMARY, BUCKFAST

St Mary's RC Primary in Buckfast, Devon has a wide range of environmental projects. This case study focuses on **pupil voice and the creation of a wellbeing garden**.

In 2019, pupils from year 5 and 6 worked with Buckfast Abbey gardening department to create a 'wellbeing garden' which focused on meeting sensory needs of pupils. Some of the Year 5 children received training as part of a Devon local authority scheme, 'Early Help for Mental Health'. As part of the training, they walked around the school identifying areas for improvement. That's when the children requested a quiet place outdoors where they could chat at break times. The garden was a joint effort as the school drew on gardening knowledge of our community, one of whom was a therapist who supports people with sensory needs. School Mental Health ambassadors wanted to create a quiet space in school and somewhere with colour. Thanks to a donation from parishioners, some of the work was funded and the family were invited to the blessing which was led by Fr Francis and the choristers helped to lead the singing.

The project built a new garden around some established apple trees. They planted raised beds with a variety of herbs and edible salads, grasses to create sound and to help shape a pathway of wooden stepping-stones that the children could follow. The children made wooden wigwam structures from hazel and willow and then planted sweet peas to grow up them. They also planted shrubs, such as wiegela to add colour and attract bees. School Prefects, the School Council and the school Eco Committee helped to come up with further ideas for the woodland area – e.g. mud kitchen, fire pit, pizza oven. They initially established the area about 4 years ago (2017) and have been developing the use of the outdoor space ever since. The [Mud Kitchen](#) was developed by Year 5.



Vegetables are also regularly grown on site and used either for cooking or donation.

Learning from the Activity

What was the result?

The activity **strengthened pupil voice** and promoted their interest in and care for the environment as they had a lead role in deciding what was created.

The garden had a **positive benefit on the wellbeing** of pupils. Different pupils have different needs, but certainly anxiety is something that many pupils struggle with at certain times of the year. The summer is a time of transition in primary schools, with new pupils in Reception class and older children moving onto new secondary schools. Having the garden available as a calm and tranquil place to reflect was really helpful for the children.

The work has **increased understanding** of plants and how they can benefit the environment and wellbeing. Pupils were asked to explain the plans behind the garden to external visitors.

The garden has **strengthened parish links** and increased awareness of environmental issues and what the schoolchildren are trying to achieve. Vegetables regularly grown on site – have been used in school cookery and even in [school lunches](#) in the past.

The garden has resulted in **national recognition**. The school has achieved RHS [Level 5 award for gardening](#), as well as other awards from the Campaign for Rural England, Wildlife Champions Award, Green Flag Award etc.

Can this activity be easily replicated?

The principles can be easily replicated. The school did receive some assistance with the labour for the gardening work and a donation towards the cost

Challenges ?

Finding the time to fit in projects like this and carry out the work is always a challenge. The funding from a parishioner was most helpful otherwise the cost might have been more of a challenge.

What would you do differently?

Perhaps have more involvement from younger pupils in the design of the wellbeing garden.

For more information please contact Caritas Plymouth caritas@prcdtr.org.uk.

