



Moya Lloyd and schoolteacher and plotholder Shelley McGregor with some of the work produced with local schoolchildren.

# ALL TOGETHER *now*

**Ken Tudor** meets some inspirational gardeners and artists who are sharing the power of plants with people less fortunate

**I**t was the day when gardeners, artists and a group of vulnerable young people met up with a herbalist, folklore expert and an MP – to celebrate the amazing “all-round togetherness” at a city allotment site.

The special get-together day at Boundary Way Allotments, without doubt the most amazing horticultural place I have visited in 40 years, highlighted the work being done to help so many less fortunate and those wishing to get more from their plots.

It was a pleasure to be shown around by Moya Lloyd, project lead for the Boundary Way Project, sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts Council.

On this hillside of 70 allotments at Warstones Estate there's so much to admire, from special plots for the blind, to disabled and young people with special needs, to experience the joy of growing.

There's also a shop run by Penn and District Horticultural Society near the special

beds, run by Beacon, the local charity supporting those with visual impairment.

There's a community garden too, with a chalet to provide a communal meeting place for plotholders and groups, such as Walking for Health. Plus, there's a pond to attract wildlife, including newts.

The sensory garden is another popular area with raised beds, with strong scented herbs and brightly coloured plants, and then the heartbeat of the site, a huge polytunnel, a communal growing place for plotholders, a workshop classroom and extra space for meetings.

Up on Moya's plot is a fascinating shed camera obscura. When I stepped inside I was bemused until my eyes adjusted, and then suddenly there was a flicker of light.

It showed up a black-and-white inverted image of the plots through a hole in the side of the shed. There was a mathematical description of how it worked but it was

a bit beyond my comprehension. The immense amount of mutual respect and togetherness that is so tangible on all levels is co-ordinated by Moya, and it is clear that the ever-enthusiastic project leader lives for her job, working on the site, but also running a plot she shares with art teacher Shelley McGregor, with fine vegetables and lots of lovely flowers.

She works tirelessly to encourage more people to enjoy the facilities at the site, and at the same time she grows to eat and uses her plot as a learning resource.

“Shelley and I are collaborating to use the plots and community garden as a creative resource,” she explains. “Schoolchildren have explored different media including iPad photography, collage, stop motion, lantern making and dyeing with plants.

“We grew a vast range of ornamental gourds last year for sensory play and drawing. We have also created a space for





**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**

Hard-working allotment grower and site secretary Howard Berry; a lovely plot on the Boundary Way hillside; herbalist Maria Billington talks to Holly Pleydell about plants springing up around the community garden; father-and-daughter team Maximillian and Rebecca O'Farrell with a mixture of veg and flowers they picked up at the plant sale.



enjoyment and relaxation." And additional funding from Arts Connect has led to Arts Awards enabling pupils to gain accreditation for their achievements.

Another plotholder, Howard Berry, also hosts a group from Penn Fields School on a weekly basis and shares his knowledge of growing and sustainable approach.

As a result of Howard's links, teaching assistants Jo Langston and Richard Dew have recently set up a plot with a sixth form.

In a secluded corner, artist and folklorist Anne Marie Lagram was working with a group to create a sun wheel, with each person working on a particular segment.

Anne Marie is known for her folklore knowledge and annually publishes the *Country Wisdom & Folklore Diary* as a way of keeping alive the old ways.

She says: "This has been a lovely day and together we have created this lovely wheel and had a good chat about folklore and the countryside along the way."

Herbalist Maria Billington, who runs the Gatis Community Space in Whitmore Reans, was also there.

"One of my goals in life is to help people reconnect with nature and learn about plants to help them to improve health and wellbeing," enthuses Maria.

She was asked to work on ideas for workshops for plotholders and the public at the community garden. "This was the start of an incredible journey for myself and the project," she adds.

"Initially I planned to map plants on site and develop a resource about those plants.

"I went on to work with Penn Fields Year 9s and Springdale Primary Year 4s. This proved quite challenging with disabilities and young age ranges and required some creative thinking.

"Activities included making toothbrushes out of twigs, painting with berries, making bunting using the hapa-zome technique which involves hammers, cloth, plants and lots of bashing, and tasting edible plants."

Young people also made teas from dried plants and worked at guessing what they were called. "I've really enjoyed this work, and watching their faces as they've tasted nettle tea or nibbled on a hawthorn leaf is a delight," says Maria.

They have identified 85 different plants and trees and are working on finding out their





**FROM TOP:** Folklorist Anne Marie Lagram, centre, with a sun circle she and visitors created during an afternoon of folklore tales from down the ages; allotment garden champions Alma and Alan Kimber on a plot which has won many prizes and grown hundreds of medal-winning exhibits; Alan checks out his runner beans in the heatwave – and expects them to be on the exhibition bench soon.

uses in nature, medicine and any interesting facts and folklore, recipes, poems and history.

Maria says: "It's been a fascinating journey and I've yet to find a plant that doesn't benefit mankind in some way or another – yes, even bindweed and horsetail.

"My challenge to all who take part in my workshops is learn to love your weeds!"

One of the most uplifting items in the day's programme was the presentation of awards to members of the Crafty Gardener Programme, which focuses on supporting adults with learning disabilities and mental health needs.

They are a community interest company based on the site, providing health and employment-related support through

horticulture, crafts and retail activities.

They have an area on the allotments where they grow vegetables and plants and during the day many people walked away with well-grown plants from the sale area.

But the main item for them was the presentation of the Leonard Cheshire Disability awards by Councillor Alan Bolshaw for people who had impressed with their work on the project.

The 'Can Do' award-winners were highly praised by Eleanor Smith, MP for Wolverhampton South West, who toured the site and admired the efforts of the various groups.

She said she had enjoyed seeing the activities of everyone involved in the project and especially enjoyed meeting those successful under the Leonard Cheshire project.

And she pointed out that she had been immensely impressed with the amazing sense of togetherness on the site.

Sally Newton, one of the organisers of the Crafty Gardeners, was all smiles on the day and said the event to celebrate the activities at the site had been a great success.

"A lot of good things happen here," she says.

Nearby Alan and Alma Kimber watered in the 29C heat in a bid to get produce for the shows ahead.

"It's been ridiculously hot and it has



been awful to keep things going," says Alan, a multi-winner of the Wolverhampton Allotments Competition.

Alan, who recovered from a major stroke to win the top trophies at Tettenhall Horticultural Society show last autumn, had fast-emerging veg in the June heatwave. "But we will have to see what happens between now and the shows," he notes.

It is a remarkable kaleidoscope of life down at Boundary Way with so many people working to improve the lives of others.

But at the end of day it is a collection of 70 plots with people toiling away with the soil and the heat to grow produce for the table or the showbench.

It is a remarkable place.

