



Social Impact Statement

2021/22

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Introduction

This document provides an overview of Sow the City's social impact. Established in 2009 with a few packets of seeds and some compost, we now help thousands of people across the Northwest to grow and live sustainably. We design and build edible and wildlife gardens with the community and run food growing and environmental workshops – providing the benefits of nature to people whose lives are often shattered by drug and alcohol addiction, mental ill health, and homelessness.

Nature in cities makes a lot of sense. It helps reduce flooding, tackles climate change, and improves air quality. Plus, nature supports our health and wellbeing, and provides opportunities to strengthen communities.

The pandemic significantly reduced our operations in 2020/21 but since then we have expanded staff and volunteer numbers - and this has in turn increased our social impact. We have now provided workshops for over 14,000 people, facilitated over 7,000 volunteering hours, and created nearly 6,500 square meters of food growing space – equivalent to 7 football pitches.

As a social enterprise, profits from the delivery of our projects go back into the organisation to ensure that the impact of our work is developed and expanded across Manchester and beyond.

How do we measure our social impact?

Our social impact is measured in three ways:

Learning – the number of people that have been taught by Sow the City including sessions run at various community projects and at our new centre the Boiler House. People that attend courses learn how to live sustainably, save money, improve their activity levels, learn new skills, and improve their community network.

Growing - the m² of new growing space created by Sow the City. We only count sites where we have had a direct involvement for example running volunteering sessions, designing or building the garden or getting funding for it. Many of these sites are converting brownfield and/ or derelict land into productive food growing spaces.

Volunteering - This is the number of volunteer hours that people help with Sow the City projects. We have volunteers for practical sessions and volunteers that help with office duties and only count people that volunteer directly for us (rather than groups we work with). Many of our volunteers go on to find full time employment.

What happened in 2021/22?

Sow the City had a hugely varied workload in 21/22 running food growing projects for the public, private and voluntary sector. Here is a snapshot of some of the projects delivered:

- Delivery partner for Growing Manchester – Manchester City Council's community food growing programme. This community support network provides training, technical help and advice for over 100 groups across the city that want to set up food growing projects. The groups are diverse and range from local community groups to specialist support groups and housing associations. 2021-2022 saw the highest number of people engaging in this project to date.

- Delivery partner for the In Our Nature programme - supporting residents and communities in Manchester to act on climate change. We're working with partners in some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city to trial positive, practical ways of making it easier for residents and communities to take positive action on climate change.
- Covid recovery projects for Manchester City Council including providing seed growing kits and food growing courses for families struggling with social isolation.
- Regular school gardening sessions at various schools including nurture sessions for Looked After Children (LAC) and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- Achieve Asset Recovery Service - taking gardening referrals from Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust and providing nature based activities for people recovering from mental ill health and drug and alcohol addiction.
- Delivery of the Thrive programme – providing ecotherapy and woodworking for young people struggling with their mental health.
- Green Health Walks around Prestwich Hospital with people struggling with mental ill health. The green health walk is a marked route for hospital staff, visitors, and patients to enjoy the grounds, and promote the physical and mental benefits of greenspace and exercise.
- Continued investment in the Boiler House an ex-ONE Manchester housing association depot, The Boiler House is being transformed into a new centre for sustainability. In 2021/22 we ran a regular Men’s Shed, Women’s Shed, and various youth sessions with youth offenders and youth groups.

Learning

We taught 3,717 people in 2021/22 – a huge increase on the previous years and we have seen exponential growth in this area since we were established. Most of our learners were taught through our Growing Manchester programme, but a large percentage also attended and took part in our community outreach projects in East Manchester, as well as activities at our Boiler House hub. We have taught over 14,000 people since the organisation was formed (although some of these people will have attended more than one course). The impact in 2021-22 alone is around a quarter of our overall total reached in the previous 13 years since the organisation was established.

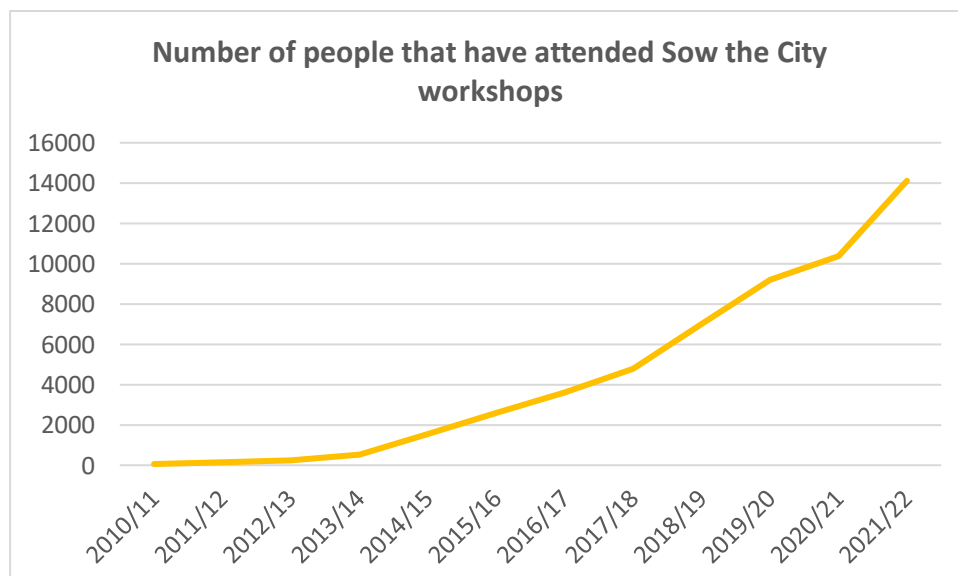




Figure 1: Workshop at the Boiler House in Moss Side showing local people how to repair electrical items to save money and reduce waste to landfill.

Growing

In 2021/22 a total area of **509m²** was converted into new green areas for nature and food growing. This is higher than in 2020/21. New food growing sites were set up in Newton Heath, plus various sites in Manchester including alleyways and groups that have recently joined the Growing Manchester programme. Much of the land was previously derelict and unused.

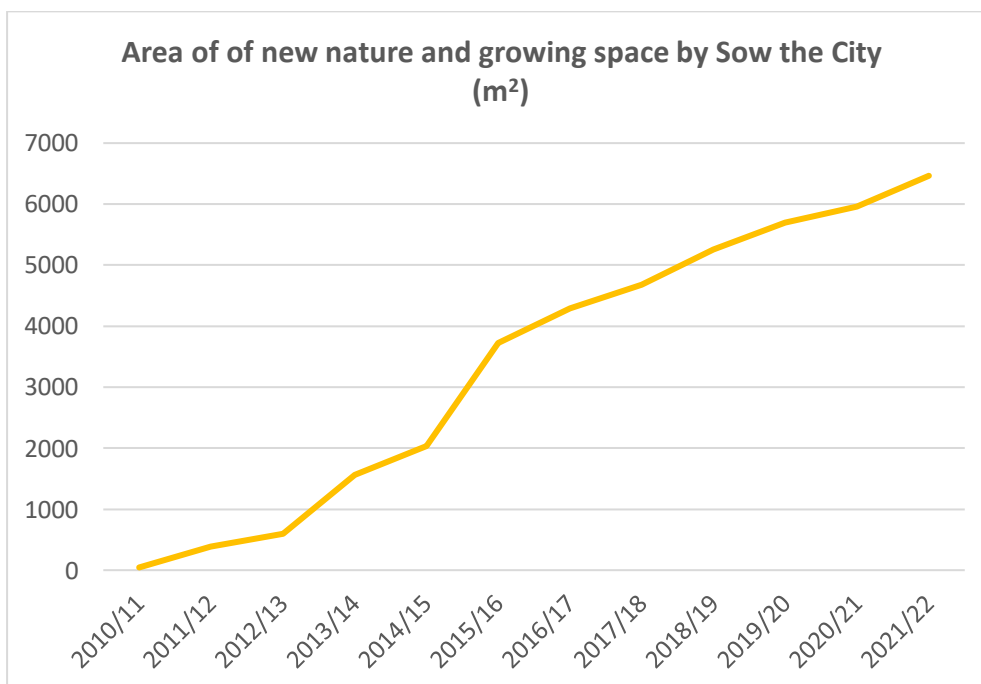




Figure 2: Allotment cleared for community use at Ossary St in Moss Side with Sow the City volunteers. The new allotment will be used by refugees.

Volunteering

In 2021-22 we provided **1591 hours** of volunteering opportunities. Sow the City office volunteers helped with project development, administration and provided practical help for projects (assisting with sessions, constructing and maintaining gardens, food growing, and helping with the refurbishment of the Boiler House). However, the largest contribution of volunteer time came from corporate groups. Businesses and organisations can join one of our partner projects for a team building or CSR day, to have fun, develop teamwork skills, and give something back to the local community.

