

Growing bonds with seniors

Garden project blooms after funding boost from Lottery

BY KIERAN HUGHES
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A COMMUNITY garden project to improve the lives of isolated and vulnerable older people in North Belfast has been awarded a major grant from the Big Lottery Fund.

Grow has been awarded a grant of £199,743 from the Fund's Reaching Out: Connecting Older People programme which supports older people affected by issues such as bereavement, disability or long term illness or who live in residential care or sheltered housing.

The local community organisation will develop three community gardens at sites in Camberwell Terrace Road, Newington Day Centre and the Waterworks.

Older people who are isolated, lonely and stuck indoors because of issues such as health problems, lack of opportunities or lack of transport, will get the chance to take part in group gardening sessions where they will participate in activities such as garden



Siobhan Craig and Mary Connor from North Belfast

design, harvesting and innovative cooking workshops to eat the healthy produce they have grown.

"This project is not just about growing vegetables, fruit and flowers. It is about growing community, breaking down isolation and making older people feel part of something," said Director Siobhan Craig. "There are older people in this area who

are isolated and can't leave the house because they might have a disability, they are living with dementia or Alzheimer's, or they are caring for a loved one."

Mary Connor, 61, from North Belfast, has been involved in the Grow project at the Waterworks for the past three years.

"Before getting involved I used to just sit in the house

alone staring at the walls, feeling lonely and depressed," said Mary. "I had developed ME and had to retire from work early. It really knocked me for six, not just physically but I became quite

introverted too. Last month Belfast Zoo keeper, Allan Galway, travelled to Paris Daiza Zoo in Belgium to collect ten great white pelican chicks.

The chicks are now settling in to their new home and Allan expressed his delighted at being given the task of collecting



Zoo keeper Allan Galway

Pelicans cross from Europe to Bellevue

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A KEEPER from Belfast Zoo undertook a marathon pelican crossing as he drove from Belgium to North Belfast to deliver some special new arrivals to Bellevue.

Last month Belfast Zoo keeper, Allan Galway, travelled to Paris Daiza Zoo in Belgium to collect ten great white pelican chicks.

The chicks are now settling in to their new home and Allan expressed his delighted at being given the task of collecting

them in Belfast. Since their arrival, the team has been responsible for caring for these birds and we have to hand feed a total of six kilograms of fish to the chicks every day.

Great white pelicans are found in Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia and, when fully grown, can have a wing span of up to 280cm. Pelicans are recognised worldwide because of the large pouch on the lower beak. This beak makes them very good at catching fish in shallow water and, in the wild, this has led them into conflict with fishermen.

Zoo manager Mark Challinor

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