

## PATHWAYS TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Encouraging, Supporting & Recognising lifelong-lifewide action & learning on behalf of nature, the environment and sustainability

APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2023

### **How the Lifewide Education inquiry into helping nature, the environment and sustainability has affected me and my learning & development, August 2023**

As a final exercise, participants in this project were asked to reflect on their experiences of the last 6 months. The brief read:

Our health, sense of wellbeing and sense of who we are (identity) and who we are becoming (learning and development) are influenced by the way we live – our habits, our relationships, circumstances, problems, illnesses, achievements and how we deal with setbacks, and day to day experiences. These feelings emerge through our everyday living but they develop over the accumulation of lots of days of living. There are therefore two scales of involvement – the lifewide and lifelong. In our inquiry we focused on the question of what motivates us and how commitment to a belief or cause develops. We explored the diverse range of needs that compel us to do what we do. Being able to satisfy these needs, at least in part, helps us achieve a sense of wellbeing - feeling comfortable, healthy, satisfied, happy and or fulfilled that we are living a life with purpose and meaning. While tackling and making progress with challenges, or seeing and acting on new opportunities satisfies our need to learn and develop. Our inquiry is underlain by the proposition that by helping nature, the environment and sustainability we are helping ourselves and our stories of participation reflect the choices we are making to help ourselves in our own circumstances. As we move into the final stage of our inquiry it is important to reflect on whether or how this proposition was realised and manifested in our own projects.

Reflections were structured around 4 questions. They have been collated below and colour coded for ease of reading:

Red – Norman; black – Victoria; blue – Jenny; green – Dory; brown – Russ; turquoise – Melissa; purple – Catalina; grey - Jose; orange – Valerie; pink – Eleanor; bright green – Janet; maroon - Glynn

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**Q1 In what ways has your experience of trying to help nature, the environment and/or some aspect of sustainability contributed to your health, your sense of wellbeing or any aspect of your development as a human being?**

Being amongst people who share my attitudes, values and beliefs about learning and education, and who want to develop their own understandings through actions that are directed to living for a more sustainable future, is the fundamental reason why I participate in these inquiries. It's a journey with interesting and good people and the way I feel about the overall experience depends on my sense of whether my companions are gaining fulfilment from their experiences. Our monthly zoom meetings provides me with an opportunity to judge this and my general sense is that those who have shared their stories are benefiting from the experience.

Participating in an active learning process with others encourages me to reflect on my own situation and to be exposed to the perspectives of others, both of which help me learn and understand myself better. Quite honestly being part of a community of learners is so much more enjoyable than doing something by myself and that in itself contributes to a personal sense of wellbeing.

There is a second social dimension to my project. I am working with a small group of people in my village to encourage our neighbours to appreciate nature more than we do and to undertake specific acts to improve biodiversity in the area where we live. My sense of well being is to some extent tied up with the extent to which we are able to make progress with our community project. Over the last 6 months there have clearly been ups (40 people agreeing to sow wildflower seeds) and downs (few people attending our zoom meetings or responding to my invitation to give me feedback on whether their seeds have germinated or flowered). But overall my small team believes that we are doing something positive for nature and our environment and that makes us feel useful.

We have also received some recognition for our efforts from Surrey WildlifeTrust. Our community project has been captured in a video made by the Trust and we have just won a Community Champions Award - one of three awarded to the 30 community groups working for nature in Surrey. This external recognition makes us feel that we are doing something that this nature based organisation believes is significant and that makes us feel good about what we are doing. It might also enable us to attract more funding for our work.

My specific project, to cultivate wildflowers in my garden and an adjacent field, has required significant physical effort and financial cost and there have been many times when the words 'no gain without pain' have come to mind. The poor spring weather dented my enthusiasm and I had to adjust my expectations believing that the wildflowers would not flower this year. But slowly but surely they eventually blossomed in mid to late summer and seeing them, and the enormous number of foraging insects they supported has been a joy and the only feedback I needed to judge that my efforts have been successful.

The inquiry is founded on the belief that we have to act in order to have experiences through which we learn and develop – the more we act and the range of ways in which act creates the experiences and opportunities that enable us to learn.

Through my project I have learnt a lot about cultivating wild flowers for example, seed mixes for different sorts of soils, how to prepare the ground and how and when to sow seed, how to identify wildflowers, how to collect and look after seed, how to manage grasses that overwhelm the wildflowers, and the costs involved in creating wildflower meadows. I have also learnt a about the distribution of wildflowers in the countryside around my home as I spent time walking, observing, recording and making maps.

Through my project I have also paid a lot more attention to the invertebrates that use the wildflowers to forage. By photographing them and using simple charts I have been able to identify 16 species of butterfly and 10 species of bee.

I involved myself in an introductory gardening for wildlife course and next week I will participate in a scything workshop. This knowledge was acquired through direct experience of trying to grow wildflowers, watching YouTube videos and conversations with people more knowledgeable than me. I have met several people who have helped me and who I have formed good working relationships with and these will continue into the future. And I have shared my wildflower meadow with members of my community who have visited my garden on a wildflower wander and received appreciative feedback. I have benefited from all these interactions and I am now more confident in helping others to grow their own wildflowers.

My wildflower project has encouraged me to spend time observing and photographing the plants and insects as an aid to their identification. I have a long standing interest (hobby) in making short nature movies and during the course of my project I made 6 short movies (4 about wildflowers and 2 about insect pollinators). Making movies and setting them to music is an expression my love for nature and an expression of my own creativity. The process of making is always uplifting and it undoubtedly contributes to the way I feel about myself, my environment and my relationship with and connection to my environment.

Finally, I have tried to keep a record of my own process and learning through my Garden Notes Blog (16 posts to date) <http://www.normanjackson.co.uk/garden-notes> It is sometimes a chore to make myself write something but having written it – like this reflective essay, it makes me feel better. There is both a discipline and a therapeutic value in recording and writing.

In my case, as I shall outline in the September meeting, my focus on Goal 12 has broadened from sustainable practices in the staff development workshops that I teach to now including the development of a workshop on sustainability – badged as Education for Sustainable Development, and a growing network of critical friends and experts in this regard. It has contributed to my sense of my place in an organisation and role that are new to me and therefore to my confidence around having something new to contribute that will be meaningful.

My personal project was focused on wellbeing and the effect that my contact with nature had on my sense of wellbeing. Through participation in this project, I have been sensitised to the simplest of natural phenomena and have been inspired to take photographs or video recordings of these. For instance, I spotted a lone yellow poppy that had seeded itself in a hospital wasteland; a snail that had made its way more than five feet above ground to gnaw on a lush plum. Whilst abroad, I was able to enjoy contorted trees, snakes and peacocks coming into the garden and was moved to express my pleasure through writing and sharing such small events.

The monthly Zoom meetings have been a real source of inspiration and pleasure. The warmth and openness of fellow participants have encouraged me to persevere even when my motivation was flagging.

I have a long-standing academic interest in health and wellbeing but found that, enhanced by my reading of Joseph Campbell (see Q2, below), I was able to see nature anew, through the naïve lens of a child, rather than taking things for granted, unquestioning of their evolution.

On an academic level, I gained much pleasure from hearing and reading the experiences of fellow participants. I believe we have made important progress in our understanding of the process of motivation and I was intellectually stimulated by my work on the two surveys.

Since relocating back to Helensburgh in Scotland at the end of March 2023, the Pathway to Sustainable Development LWL project has created one way of helping me to reconnect with the house that has been rented out for 15 years, the garden, the neighbourhood and the town. It has encouraged me to search out groups active in the town eg. Plastic Free Helensburgh, in Scotland eg. the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network SCCAN <https://sccan.scot/> and nationally eg. the Wildlife Trust and the project, [mycoronationgarden.org](http://mycoronationgarden.org). There are just so many resources out there. At each of the catchups, there was always some useful advice and hints; the ones that come to mind are scaling down can also involve looking at things from different perspectives, looking at a tree from below and enjoy how the light catches the leaves, looking for and being fascinated by the details in a leaf, a frog, a patch of meadow. Another comment got me thinking about how I can engage with neighbours on the ideas we have been working on and to share learnings. We have a small walled garden which is quite private; engagement with neighbours happens at the front of the house and walking to and from the house.

There is no doubt that reflecting consciously on my most recent experiences in an informal, reciprocal relationship with nature and the environment has had a positive impact on me. Not having an extensive area of land, my modest efforts have included the following since living at this newly-built-at-the-time house:

- Creating the back garden. The involved buying some plants and trees and a grassy area. Over the years, some animals have made use of these: a toad; a hedgehog; a rat (!) - all three of these having since vanished, access having been denied by stronger fencing in neighbouring areas and the gradual occupation of neighbouring houses; bluetits, a wren and great tits all having used the two nesting boxes installed on the side of the house and on a shared fence, and rowdy house sparrows and a variety of less frequent but exciting visitors (robins, starlings, wood pigeons, doves, long-tailed tits, coal tits, magpies, goldfinch, sparrowhawk, kestrel, great spotted woodpecker, song thrush, treecreeper, nuthatch, jay).

Here is an early picture of the garden:



Here is one from today:



The period from the first to the current form of the garden has engaged me in several useful ways:

Imagining a future garden

Physical exertion

Experiential learning

Developing mutually helpful relationships with neighbours

Enjoying the environment itself as a peaceful and interesting place in which to sit, potter, savour and chat

Through this Inquiry, I have been reminded of perspectives and skills relating to change projects, used and developed in my career, but which I don't usually make use of in my ordinary life. I am also reminded of my preference for the resource investigator role (<https://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles>) as I notice and seek out references, ideas and inspiration to inform, interpret and enhance my efforts.

Our monthly meetings and discussion, occasional exchanges on LinkedIn etc, and e-mail correspondence have given me a feeling of connection and collaboration with others across the globe. So I don't feel alone.

Over recent months I realise my concept of being a grandmother as morphed alongside my thinking about my project has developed. I have found moments of real joy from my grandchildren's (unwitting) involvement in the project.

I am finding greater purpose and meaning for my life, through being involved in something bigger than my own daily existence.

The possibility of creating strategies with the community thinking about the common good, leads to the feeling of contributing something to improve society, which generates meaning and purpose in the actions we do, and that feeling of purpose and contribution to the universe. It moves hope and therefore personal well-being.

The initial lack of response of people I wanted to involve in my projects regarding awareness of the multiple situations in which they could make a difference in some of the sdg's, was disappointing. But after 3 years of persevering in projects regarding the sdg's, with the periodical support and enthusiasm of the life wide learning group, the unexpected response of some participants regarding activities that were being developed as a consequence of my first proposals with university colleagues, gave me a boost of energy and motivation. These little results made me reappraise the little initiatives and see them with new eyes. It made me see the proposals with happier eyes, and made me rethink the time that change can take. It made me review the expectations and reminded me that, just as the results you see in children (when you are a parent or a teacher), change may be happening without one being aware of it.

From a communications and 'news' perspective it sometime seems as if the issues aligned to nature, the environment and the climate crisis are unsolvable. On a regular basis we are faced with examples of all that we are 'not' doing and how we need to do more. As my work is aligned to learning and teaching about the SDGs and supporting greater engagement, media presentations can sometimes cause me to pause

and consider if what I am doing is also futile. In particular there can be a significant divide between those whose work or personal interests mean that they have greater exposure to and knowledge of issues of sustainability and those who seem to be unaware. While this is a bald and somewhat linear interpretation, it can promote frustration and colour any sense of achievement.

Despite this somewhat narrow perspective, it is the human element of what I do that evidences not only the interest and intent of individuals and groups from many different backgrounds, but also the underlying principles of hope and care. Having an opportunity to share experiences with interested peers has been valuable and inspiring, and the diverse international perspectives have highlighted not only commonalities in aspiration, but also the importance of sharing and collaboration in the work we do.

This inspiration is twofold – from both a knowledge perspective and from a peer inquiry approach. While I can continue to do the work I do at a local level from a practical perspective, the experience of the last six months has provided a broader perspective and enhanced my own learning. The collaboration has provided an enlightened viewpoints and some tangible evidence that we are all striving towards an aligned goal. Knowing on a personal level that something is important and right is only one element, hearing that perspective from others in many different ways, both individual and collective has contributed to the development of my work. On a personal level it has highlighted the importance of the human element in what I do and affirmed the potential impact we really can have on ‘living well’.

I think it has helped me to realize every little bit of action in the direction of maintaining a sustainable environment is worthwhile. The fact that I can contribute to a project that will benefit those coming after, is quite fulfilling. This had benefitted my health in knowing that I am reaching out to others and assisting them on a path of accomplishment. That sense of well-being that is so elusive to describe – just thank God for this day and that I can do something- to be enjoyed by others. If anything, I think that’s a very self-actualization kind of feeling.

I have been quite surprised at what I have learned during the process of this inquiry. My thoughts at the beginning of the growing season have dramatically changed in ways I couldn’t have envisioned. I have had mixed results to my experience, none of which I could have anticipated. Overall, the experience has been a positive one, and I have learned a lot. Not the least of which is that I need to investigate and research more into home gardening and growing veggies.

My health and sense of well-being has been improved by being outdoors and watching the vegetation grow. I have loved the sense of nurturing the plants and trying to give them the optimal growing conditions. I also found the aspect of ‘possibility’ very cathartic to my well-being. Meaning, thinking, my imagination and planning what I might be able to cook/use and/or create with the plants that I am growing as well as looking at them in an aesthetic sense, seeing plants growing into each other as they grow more mature.

A few things have hindered my experimentation a little. First the weather. In south-western Ontario, Canada, it has been a very wet season this year, so some vegetable leaves turned yellow prematurely and have spoiled due to the lack of sun in favour of gloominess. Second, I seem to be feeding the wildlife instead of my family! Where I live, we have more than our fair share of Chipmunks and black squirrels along with birds, rabbits, and Racoons etc. Some of the fruit that I have in the garden seem to be being enjoyed by the wildlife. I haven't had a strawberry all season as the Chipmunks are getting there first and the birds enjoy the Blackcurrants. So, I have decided to reframe my thinking and saying that is my way of giving back to nature and the environment. I am still gaining from the enjoyment of the beauty of the plants and taking photographs of their development. The strawberries for example have a beautiful bright pink flower before they continue their lifecycle into fruit. By taking pictures of the flowers, I can use them for my journaling, and I have some on my apple watch and in my art practice, while the Chipmunks eat them.

My art practice has also developed as I have now begun creating jewellery, art pieces, and coasters with my flowers. I dry the blooms and press them before encasing them in resin. This has been very therapeutic for me and my creativity. I love seeing how the stems and blooms look in resin, I am also using some ephemera and elements such as glitter or beads to enhance the aesthetic value.

I plan to continue my home gardening and going forward I will perhaps organize the space so that it is more sustainable and has areas where I can feed the wildlife as well as my family and art practice. The benefit to my mental health and well-being has been well worth any effort I have put in. Even just sitting in the garden is a joy and uplifting. As a family sitting in the garden, instead of getting a mass-produced snack from the kitchen we have been picking the peas and enjoying them – even the dog likes raw peas! So another win.

There are so many different ways in which humankind (as an unnaturally, separately-thinking part of nature) can contribute to supporting both nature and sustainability. To be a part of any such initiative is both challenging and enriching. My commitment as a retired and disabled, vegetarian pensioner to reduce consumption (that is, food intake to first only two meals a day and then for the last part of the project just one meal a day) and thus to reduce demand on natural resources, reduce car travel to the shops has not impacted my physical health at all and my mental health has so improved that I can now walk past the supermarket aisles where lie chocolates or other tempting sweet delights without feeling the need to purchase. I now buy more wisely for just my meal(s) to ensure a diet that is sufficient and balanced over a week.

Since I am required to take prescribed tablets each morning after eating, my meal is my breakfast. Nearing the end of the project, I now have no feelings of hunger and drink more water, tea, coffee and an occasional beer or wine (which beverages *plus* contain their own life-sustaining minerals and nutrients).

My brain is no less alert and I no longer feel sleepy after a midday or evening meal (because I do not eat then).



As a human being, I have become more aware of the over-consumption of the late 20th century in the West and my own socialised approach to when one must eat. One good meal a day is more than many other human beings have as part of their lives. If I have been compelled to eat more to retain peace in my home - my partner is not in favour of my "medically-foolish" experiment - then I fast for a whole day to compensate.

As a human being I have increased my knowledge and awareness not only of necessary nutrition but also how determination - a natural phenomenon demonstrated also by other creatures - can reset one's attitudes.

Not having to prepare so many meals per day has also given me more time to sit and wonder as well as to listen to the birds and the bees, to appreciate the plants in my garden and the microworld that exists in and around them. I have been fortunate to have been able to photograph some of these and being able to appreciate these images also occupies some of my time, diverting me from thinking about food and eating.

Since I have more time, I have increased my exercise regime without any ill effects. In fact, my energy levels seem enhanced and my ability to think and plan has not suffered.

**Q2 In what ways has your experience affirmed or conflicted with the beliefs and values you held prior to the inquiry?**

I believed that we all have capacity to help nature and our environment but it requires effort and the use of our resources to do so. This belief has been reaffirmed and deepened through my experiment. Another belief I have, that we can do more by working together, has also been reaffirmed and this motivates me to extend my efforts to engage my village community in nature-based projects.

The tensions for me are around my own knowledge base as to what can be recycled, what can't, where can it be recycled, what to buy if not that (in its non recyclable package). There is also a tension (lack of understanding and inability to quickly search and find answers that I can action) around sharing of files and version control and use of sites like a virtual learning environment, email, teams etc.

As the project progressed, I was coincidentally re-reading and expanding my acquaintance with the work of Joseph Campbell, an authority on comparative mythology, belief and religion. I found that he had presciently expressed what I had been working towards in my own lifelong attempts to make sense of life. Speaking before his death at the age of 83 in 1987, he observed

*... when you are in accord with nature, nature will yield its bounty. This is something that is coming up in our own consciousness now, with the ecology movement, recognising that by violating the environment in which we are living, we are really cutting off the energy and the source of our own living*

Suddenly, the SDGs coalesced with my spiritual quest and assumed a greater meaning. Throughout my life, I have instinctively felt empathy towards other forms of life, hence I became a vegetarian at the age of 7. Now, I found solace in Campbell's suggestion that *"the essence of life is that it lives by killing and eating"* not literally for my diet but spiritually, recognising that everything is finite but recycled. I was quite unprepared for this metaphysical experience which has given me a new sense of oneness with nature, and in consequence a greater appreciation of the SDGs.

As regards the issue of motivation, my understanding has been affirmed and expanded.

*Campbell, J. (2003) The Hero's Journey. Joseph Campbell on his life and work. New World Library. New York. p.22*

I had initially thought I might look at how to scale down the National Park City concept to the garden as I had been working on a briefing note on the topic. As time went by and as I considered various options, I decided to start with the garden, take stock of what was there and figure out what I could do to complement the pathway to sustainability brief. At the start of the project, my belief in the SDGs as a framework was already strong; the key merits are its focus on the inter relatedness of everything. The overriding value I held prior to the enquiry was the need to protect the environment; and to do this to understand it better. I would say the experience has affirmed these.

All of the above have affirmed my beliefs. They have linked well with other activities, such as being paid-up members of Wisley and other gardens, where research is constant and funding essential.

Affirmations – I have remembered that change can be tricky, slow and more “organic” (how appropriate) than logical, systematic or mechanical.

My focus on developing my legacy, prompted by previous Inquiries, has been reaffirmed.

Conflicts – I came into my project hoping to achieve overt and practical actions, outcomes etc. I have slowly realised that this project is more about engaging with hearts and minds before many concrete actions can be achieved.

I have confronted time constraints and conflicts: mine and my family’s, so that even a 6-month timescale gives only few real opportunities to focus on the project.

This experience has taught me that when it comes to changing mindsets, you have to persevere and never give up. Because sometimes it is easier to think that someone else will do it or that small actions are not going to change the world, but when you reflect and remember the purpose and impact it can have, you regain the motivation to keep going. Well, it is observed how the initial group with which one works begins to influence other members of the community and promote environmental awareness and knowledge expand, at least concern for environmental care.

In my case it had to do with my expectations regarding how you could persuade, inspire or promote change. I hadn’t feel a sense of professional inefficacy as clear as this, and the belated results of my proposals gave me back the sense of efficacy, but with a humble, realistic

view. I also seem to have developed a new belief regarding education, and human relationships: they take time, they "brew" , and they may take their own shape, not always the one i expected . As obvious as this statement may have been rationally, this experience made me see it this way also emotionally.

The experience in the main has affirmed with my prior beliefs and values, but has also developed them in a more rounded way. While at their core the participants in the Lifewide education inquiry are anchored around a common desire, the sharing of experiences, thoughts and dilemmas provided an additional layer of perspective to my thinking. In particular the notion of community collaboration came to the fore, not just aligned to the Lifewide collaboration, but also in relation to the projects and activities presented and how they provide evidence of the lived experience of sustainability. The importance of the 'day to day' elements of interactions and in particular the impact on health and wellbeing were particularly pivotal. We often hear about climate and environmental issues as a macro challenge. The experience of the last number of months has demonstrated how a positive impact on health and wellbeing, particularly on a personal level, may prove to be a an influential key to how we make individual changes which subsequently address those macro challenges.

The only conflict is about beliefs - I did not believe that I could do something that would have long lasting effects. Planting aspirational seeds in young minds will allow them to grow and in turn make proper judgments about the environment and keep passing on that philosophical baton to other generations. I always had high values when it came to upkeeping the world, we live in. I am the one who takes up pop corn boxes and drink can form the theatre after people around me just walk out and leave them there. So, it's no surprise that this project I am engaged in is special to my heart.

Overall, the values and beliefs I held before the inquiry have been strongly affirmed. I already knew that being and sitting in nature has many health benefits and I experienced them intentionally for myself through this project. As a living being, I resonated with the living things around me indeed, I enjoyed and revelled in the experience of the growth and development of the plants around me. I watched as the cycle of the season transpired over several months. I am always amazed at the naturalistic circle of life and seeing that every year I have been alive is magical to me.

I had thought that I could feed my family on the crops from the garden, however, that has proved not to be the case. Not every seed germinates and grows, sometimes they crowd each other out or the conditions for germination are not present. Some plants I wanted to grow would just not grow from seed, so I had to offset a few herbs with store bought seedlings. Even when I had a decent amount of one type of veggie it turned out that it was only enough for one meal. I had thought that I could get way more than one meal from each vegetable, so was disappointed when this did not happen. Herbs may be the exception and my blackcurrants this year have been quite prolific (though they are now 4 years old and more established). I am particularly saddened with my tomatoes, I have yet to get any, there are a few promising fruit now

late in the season, though not nearly the amount I should yield with 4 hearty plants. I was further disheartened this past weekend when I went to the grocery store and saw a huge bushel (50 – 60lbs) of tomatoes for \$19.99! (£11.68). In fact, the same grocery store had a large pots of Basil and Rosemary for \$7.99 (£4.67) each. I haven't had too much luck with my Basil either, so I broke down and bought both a pot of the Basil and one of the Rosemary. With these pots of herbs, I plan to harvest them and use them in cooking however, I do feel a bit like a fraud or a cheat!

I still believe that there is a strong merit to home gardening even though my garden may be a little small for the type of yield's I am perhaps looking for and for me to become more sustainable than I am currently. On a different note, it does make me think – how can we entice people to grow their own, when some items are so cheap to buy and don't need the looking after that tending a garden requires. Young families are so busy with the day-to-day life, it seems near impossible to go an extra mile to grow their own. It seems to me that we need a radical mind shift as a society. Part of my love of gardening was watching my father grow things in his vegetable garden when I was growing up in the UK. I am not sure that the focus of society now is this type of sustainability and patience.

Involvement in the project has re-confirmed my belief in my status not only as a 'citizen of the world' but as a part of the natural world with the capacity by my words and actions to work with the rest of nature or to contribute to destruction of the rest of nature and thereby 'self-destruction'. Recognising that co-dependency leads to survival is essential. Symbiosis is often 'win-win'. Parasitism leads to there being a 'loser'.

The project has strengthened my beliefs and values.

In the history of humankind, three meals a day is a relatively new habit! Just because, in the relatively affluent Western world, we are used to doing something in a particular way does not mean that we should continue in doing so forever. It is also essential to question the status quo even before new knowledge emerges.

Humankind needs the rest of Nature. The rest of Nature does not need humankind. Life goes on!

**Q3 Are there specific things you would like or plan to do in the future that have grown out of this inquiry?**

Yes, with my small village team we have recently met to plan the next stage of our B-Line project. In the next few weeks we plan to re-engage our community with the aim of extending our B-Line south through the village. Thanks to our experience we have the confidence to expand our vision for a biodiversity corridor from 3km x1km to 5km by 1km.

We are now able to demonstrate results from our initial sowing and we are all happy to commit more time and energy into engaging more people in our community. There is also the prospect of growing our enterprise through our neighbouring parish and I am trying to facilitate this process through encouragement, practical help and finding donations of wildflower seed.

Knowing that I can cultivate wildflowers and seeing that these attract many more insects than the adjacent field makes me more committed to expanding my wildflower meadow. Over the next 6 to 8 weeks I am planning to 1) collect seed from my own wild flowers and 2) extend my 300 sq m plot further into the field 3) sow the seed I have collected on prepared ground and 4) buy and sow more wildflower seed to extend my meadow. My target is to double the area of wildflower meadow over the next 10 months.

I'd like to continue with my small personal steps (reducing waste at home and being more proactive in workshop development to model sustainability). The project for the future has become a professional one soon to be 'live' as a bookable workshop for 23-24. I'm already thinking about the next version of the workshop which is to be an introductory offer in the first instance while I continue to research and find out about the pockets of excellent practice and embedded research in my organisation.

My future plans are twofold but not directly linked to the SDGs:

1. Specific to the issue of motivation, I will return to my analysis of the 2 surveys we conducted and turn the material into an article for the next magazine.
2. On a personal level, I intend to read further into the philosophical ideas of e.g. Schopenhauer who influenced Joseph Campbell. This will positively affect my attitude towards the SDGs.

Yes, there are specific things I would like to do that have grown out of the inquiry. In the short term I will be converting a lovely old kitchen sink into a little pond using some ideas from the Wildlife Trust.



<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/MINI-WILDLIFE-POND-2019-RGB.jpg>

We will be maintaining a large part of the garden as a meadow and using an old bath as a raised planter for veggies and herbs inter planted with flowers. I have visited Geilston Gardens, a national trust garden with a walled veggie garden and it has given me lots of ideas about what to plant when and how. It is accessible by local bus and so a great resource and source of inspiration.

I have no direct plans from here, but will continue to spread the word in my family and to support the SDGs, despite ever-present wars and natural disasters...

My idea of being a grandmother/legacy has grown, and will be shaped by these few months of continuing to try to take an active, local role re SDGs.

I feel that I am now wearing SDG (sun)glasses and I notice that others are seeing me as someone committed to the SDG agenda. I think that this has occurred less through me talking about the SDGs, and more about me doing (another version of tending: relating to regular or frequent behaviour) and seeking out information and possibilities.

From this inquiry, new projects have grown. The initial group was to improve the separation and disposal of waste, for which a strategy of new cans with clear designs was created and thus promote the proper use of these in the entire community. On the other hand, was bought a compost bin for the entire educational community and this is the organic waste collection center, education has been done with students from PK to seniors to teach them how to use it and the compost that is collected is used as fertilizer for the bushes and the school garden. Furthermore, a green leader or environmental leader will be chosen for each classroom, who will ensure that their classmates generate awareness and environmental actions. Such as: the proper disposal and separation of waste, saving paper, water and energy. Additionally, carrying out activities that promote environmental awareness within their classmates and teachers, this will expand to their families and therefore to the community.

I feel i need to ask more on how people want to develop this ideas, and also keep expectations on small, realistic scale

The sharing element of this inquiry has demonstrated for me the cohesion that can be achieved when engaging with nature and the environment. Hearing about different approaches and outcomes, has caused me to consider the opportunities to share and engage with sustainability outside of the formal education sector. While my work/programme targets educators, I am conscious that the learning will only flourish further if students can see their experience in action, both in the local and wider community. As a result, I would like to support non-formal and informal engagement with schools and community groups who may be considering commencing or already commenced their own journey on sustainability. To this end, I hope to engage with both the local town council and councillors, and the local library services, with the intention of planning and creating opportunities for participants to experience the impact of collaborative and incremental engagement. I hope this will not only demonstrate the impact of collective engagement but also highlight the interconnected nature of environmental and sustainability challenges.

Yes, I would like to continue to plant those seeds in the minds of elementary school children I firmly believe that those simple little projects are what builds children to become more responsible adults.





Stemming from this inquiry, I plan to continue to with my home garden. From what I have learned I plan to give more intention to the planning of my planting. For example, I didn't know about "companion planting" before this exercise and would like to learn more about that. Companion planting makes a small area of garden more efficient as some vegetables can be grown in the same space. For example, radishes and parsnips. Radishes are a spring veg whereas parsnips are a fall veg. Radishes grow near the top of the bed and are harvested early making space for the parsnips to grow and mature. Companion planting can also refer to two plants being grown together for the benefit of either one or both plants; for example, growing flowers near veggies to attract pollinating insects. Indigenous peoples are masters at companion planting, their "3 sisters" technique is renowned.

Thomas, L. Cornwall Island, Canada. *The three sisters legend*. Recorded Oral Teaching. n.d.

### **The Three Sisters**

Every child of today knows these sisters and needs them just as much as the little Indian boy did. For the little sister in green is the bean. Her sister in yellow is the squash, and the elder sister with long flowing hair of yellow and the green shawl is the corn.  
—A Mohawk legend

By the time European settlers arrived in America in the early 1600s, the the “three sisters” for over three centuries. The vegetable trio sustained physically and spiritually. In legend, the plants were a gift from the gods, eaten together, and celebrated together.

Each of the sisters contributes something to the planting. Together, the diet from a single planting.

As older sisters often do, the corn offers the beans needed support.

The beans, the giving sister, pull nitrogen from the air and bring it to the all three.

As the beans grow through the tangle of squash vines and wind their way up the cornstalks into the sunlight, they hold the sisters close together.

The large leaves of the sprawling squash protect the threesome by creating living mulch that shades the soil, keeping it cool and moist and preventing weeds.

The prickly squash leaves also keep away raccoons, which don’t like to step on them.

Together, the three sisters provide both sustainable soil fertility as well as a healthy diet. Perfection!



Iroquois had been growing the Native Americans both always to be grown together,

sisters provide a balanced

soil for the benefit of

I will continue learning and developing my skills as a home gardener. I have loved the process of watching the plants grow and found out that I had a need to care and nurture them. Every time I go out to sit in the garden, I find myself tending to the plants, deadheading, or picking off shriveled leaves, moving the growth to get maximum sunlight, etc. As I reflect on this I am wondering if it is also my time of life, my daughter is grown, and yet I still have a need to nurture something young (my dog is already spoiled!).

My story around this project is but a single individual. I shall also write my project story for a wider audience than just the project members and, if others are inspired to test out their own capacity to reduce consumption healthily and without any ill effects, then perhaps the experiment will have been worthwhile.

I shall continue: to have no more than a maximum of two meals a day; to eat slowly; to relish, to savour and to appreciate the aroma, flavour and taste of each foodstuff and drink that enters my mouth; to think about and appreciate all those factors and beings involved in producing (including from my own garden) and delivering to my table all that I consume; to reduce consumption of fossil fuels but also maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Eating slowly and steadily has been a personal feature since I learned many years ago that people were encouraged to chew their food 32 times (one time for each of their adult teeth). This approach is intended to reduce the size of food entering the stomach so that it can be processed more quickly and efficiently – I do not know that this is true for all. It does, however, ensure that food is in the mouth longer and allows taste phenomena to be more accessible. Wisely, it also should prevent choking on large objects!

**Q4 As a result of your experiences has your understanding or attitude to the SDGs changed? Are you more or less committed to the idea of living your life in ways that are consistent with the principles of the SDGs?**

My interest in sustainability and living for a sustainable future has grown out of my interest in the ecological nature of all life, and our living and learning. I believe it is important to try and live for a more sustainable future and this hasn't changed. I also believe in helping nature and my experiment has shown me that what I am doing is a simple but effective way of helping nature in my own environment and in this respect my commitment has been reinforced. At the community level I remain committed to the work of our RE-Betchworth charity to help nature the environment and sustainability and I intend to support our Wildlife Trust and other wildlife conservation groups like Buglife and Butterfly Conservation Society, and offer help and advice to other communities that would like to do something similar.

The bottom line is that I know my wildflower project nested within my community engagement project has benefited me greatly.

More committed. That is coming through not only the project but also my interactions with colleagues (as a result of me formulating a desire to develop a staff development workshop on ESD). It has in fact become something that I need to embed across my work and promote and discuss. To that end, I'm hoping to develop an informal community of practice next year in my organisation for those who attend the workshop.

Yes, I am more committed to the SDGs but in a spiritual rather than necessarily practical way and it is difficult to disentangle the impact of the project from that of the philosophical reading I was engaged in at the time of the project.

Accepting Campbell's premise that "*the whole world is intentional protoplasm, with consciousness and energy*" he has led me to an understanding that has changed my attitude to life, our individual lives. This is illustrated here:

*What is called the Buddha consciousness is the one consciousness of which we are all manifestations. We are all Buddha things. We are all separate manifestations of this great consciousness that informs the whole universe. The plants are conscious. The stones are conscious. All things are conscious*

The perception that all of life is recycled 'dust from dust' is profound and forces me to be conscious of the effect of everything we do on our environment.

My attitude to the SDGs has always been positive. I helped advocate for SDG11 as part of the General Assembly of Partners and the Research and Academic Partner Constituent Group. The SDGs were developed as a UN framework and adopted by world leaders on Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, to focus national governments on the challenges ahead. Individuals have often struggled to figure out where they fit. Because climate change is one of 17 SDGs, this may not have helped the world focus on this overriding issue. Nonetheless, there is so much we can do as individuals to adapt the way we live, support local initiatives and influence governance at the local, regional, and national levels and to do this in a way that is inclusive.

I am more committed to the SDGs, and I shall continue to battle with my sense of scepticism about the negative aspects of human nature - apathy, lack of concern with the wider aspects of life and the environment, and the duplicity and greed of those in power (whether political or not).

More committed but realistic about scale and rate of progress. Perhaps slightly more pessimistic about our likely success as a planet, but not less determined.

My understanding of the SDGs has transcended, I have understood that I must take them into account in any educational project that I undertake regardless of its theme, since they are the way in which we can ensure the sustainability of our planet. In my case, I work with 1,000 girls between the ages of 3 and 18, I have the responsibility of generating environmental awareness and social awareness in them, since they will be the leaders of society later on. This is how, at the School, we have incorporated the SDGs into entrepreneurship projects, innovation boot camps, global perspectives projects, degree projects for seniors, science and social areas, science fairs, among others. This means that the SDGs at Marymount are transversally reflected in the daily lives of the students, their actions, the academic curriculum, and in addition to the decisions of the school as an organization.

On the other hand, I firmly believe that the Inner Development Goals, which are connected to the development of the self, are essential for the SDGs to be met. My objective, then, as an educational leader, is to keep in mind from a strategic perspective and with my participation in the macro projects of the School, the SDGs and the Inner development goals as drivers of the processes of the Educational Community. Therefore, my own life and my family 's are also permeated by responsible actions in relation to the SDGs.

I feel that the commitment in my case is the same, although i have developed a more "patient ", respectful view, of the way others are committed, or decide to live.

As a result of the shared experience I have had an opportunity to think about the SDGs and sustainability in different ways. While my primary engagement has been with formal education, sharing knowledge has highlighted how the formal experience can not only impact on the wider community but also demonstrate the ‘practice’ of sustainability as it is lived day to day. Equally I have been exposed to a range of practices and practical activities aligned to the SDGs and living sustainably that I would not have considered previously. Sharing the enquiry process has not only exposed my thinking to new ideas and a peer review group but has also reaffirmed my commitment to sharing engagement with the SDGs.

I don't think they have changed. Before even hearing about the terminology SDGs – I was on a plight to keep the world clean. As least my sphere of influence as best as possible. Finding out that the UN has made this a priority has now concretize my activities and allow me to support including it in school curricula and other ancillary activities in higher education – where I work.

As I reflect, I have find that the SDG's are written in a way that is difficult to be totally accessible to the individual. They are, understandably written in a more global, aggregate fashion. For example, *SDG Number 3, Good Health, and Well-being* – is written very differently to how I would interpret it as an individual. I have spoken about good health and well-being in this project on a personal level, however the SDG speaks of health and well-being on a scale and in a way that I cannot help with, reducing the infant mortality rate for example. The same goes for a lot of the other goals. I can do my part and that is what am doing and something I will continue to do, however, I think the SDG's need to be adopted on a more societal level. In my city, I have heard nothing about how we, as “Guelph,” are working toward attaining some of the SDG's. Guelph is a city which does partake in a lot of sustainable practices, and we do promote some sustainable living, no more plastic bags, bring your own water bottle and a comprehensive waste management system for example. However, I think more can be done, especially in the communication and transparency of what we could be doing and what is already being done.

I do think that perhaps I am seeing the SDG's through a “first-world” privileged lens and that as such I can do my best to live a life congruent with sustainable practices. So, I would say my attitude has changed somewhat – I need to be ok with what I can do and to believe that by doing that, the effect will pass on and up somehow.

*The SDG's that I was working with are:*

**Number 3, Good Health and Well-Being** – though after reading the description I am not sure this is a fit for this project.

**Number 12, Responsible, Consumption and Production** – I think this is the goal that most fit and the one I most align with. The food waste, even in our own house needs to be better controlled. Though I was not looking at this aspect very intentionally.

**“Goal 12.8** By 2030 ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.”

All in all I think the project I undertook was successful and I will continue to work with my home garden and use more sustainable practices.

My understanding of the SDGs has increased. My recognition that the SDGs can be interpreted differently to meet particular situations and/or initiatives.

Following the project, I am even more committed to the idea of living your life in ways that are consistent with the principles of the SDGs?

Sustainability has many meanings. It is essential for humankind to recognise that human beings are also part of nature and that the actions of human beings should be to recognise the co-dependency of this living planet; the planet and other parts of what is deemed nature are not purely for consumption by human beings. The concept of stewardship is an Important one which should be revived and implemented.

Sustainability is an issue which should be taught in schools and, within the curriculum, should be emphasised Nature's interdependency. I shall promote this approach through networks both public and professional.

Jenny Willis

30 August 2023