**Connecting Choices Participant Project Case Study**

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| Partner Name | Addaction |
| Participant Project Title | Secret Garden |

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| Describe the context of the project: *Activities involved, benefits to the participants, what outcomes will be achieved etc.* |
| The Secret Garden is a plot of land that has been ‘loaned’ to us by Stoke on Trent City Council. We have turned this into a project aimed at helping our clients with various aspects of their individual journeys in returning to employment, education or volunteering.  Activities that they have been involved with are –   * Redesigning the garden * Mass clean up of all the overgrown and old garden equipment * Maintenance of the garden, involving weekly attendance and commitment * Local litter collection for the area aroung the garden, helping the community * A couple of the guys who come to the garden have also started to make furniture from donated pallets and other materials * Annual community open days, we have already held an Easter Party for clients and the local residents and will be looking at putting events on over the summer holidays as well as Halloween   We have other ideas in the pipeline and very much want to be a part of the Fenton in Bloom bid for 2019. We may also be working with the Letting in the Light ‘Greening Stoke’ project and hope to run some craft sessions with their support in the coming months.  The clients who take part at the garden have all expressed how much enjoyment they have got from being there. They benefit from being able to work in an outside environment completing activites they haven’t had the chance to do for a long time. One client has taken charge of planting and maintaining the flower beds, he loves to ‘get lost in his thoughts’ when he does this. Another is getting the chance to put his carpentry skills to the test and has built some fabulous furniture pieces from pallets we have had donated. He is als showing some of the others how to do this and we have talked about the possibility of running workshops at the garden around basic DIY type skills. Their confidence has risen so much and has helped to give them other ideas for where their future will lie employment-wise. They also get a sense of satisfaction by being able to see something through to the end – if the garden didn’t have these guys I doubt it woud be a garden at all!  Overall, we want to engage with the local community, raise the name of Connecting Choices and be a live example to anyone who visits us so they can see for themselves just what they can achieve with the right support! |

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| Who else is involved in the project? *Project is running in conjunction with* *(organisation name), describe their involvement, what is the benefit to the organisation of getting involved with our participants? What support are they providing etc.* |
| Stoke on Trent City Council – they provide help with environmental issues like removing rubbish and providing certain materials free of charge  The local businesses have been absolutely amazing in supporting our events. They have donated goodies that we could use as prizes and even a raffle. The money raised went straight back into the project.  Stoke Recovery Service – we had a small pot of money that was from donations specifically for the garden |

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| What difference will this make to the participants that get involved? *Consider improved confidence, building new skills, making new friends, social inclusion, transforming lives, potential to gain employment, improving the community etc.* |
| All clients who have engaged with this project so far have said how much they love being a part of it. One gentleman was feeling quite negative and ashamed of his past, struggling to see any light at the end of a tunnel. He really has transformed over the last few months and is now a much happier and livelier individual who is thriving. He has more aspirations and ideas about returning to employment which are different to what he was doing before.  When we are at the garden, we work in a relaxed atmosphere which encourages natural conversation within the group. These conversations are honest, light hearted and help others who might be struggling. Each person offers support to their peers, sharing experiences, wisdom and if needed a shoulder to lean on. There hasn’t been one day at the garden where we have gone away down hearted which cab only be a massive plus. We encourage anyone on Connecting Choices to get involved with the garden.  The garden sits between two residential houses and was previously used as a childrens play area. One of our aims is to make this space suitable for children to come and play as well as holding art and craft events (also for adults). Because the space is in a residential area we are keen to engage with the community and involve them in what happens at the garden. The events we have held there have helped to raise our profile but we would like to raise this even more. By working with the community we hope to show them that there is support out there and anything can be possible if you put your mind to it. |

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| Project evaluation: *What worked well and what could have been better, what has been achieved, has the local community benefitted from the project etc.* |
| So far everything seems to be coming along and we haven’t really had any issues. We have a great support network and some committed individuals who really make a difference to how this project is developing.  The local community are involved and we are working on making our presence more known by holding events at the garden and promoting them through the local channels i.e. Facebook, Council website |

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| Comments from Participants: *How did you feel before taking part in the project and how do you feel after?* |
| Direct quote from participant –  “A little bit of a daunting task as I have never done anything like this before but with the guidance of Emma we soon settled in to a good way of working. Myself and Nigel come together and mixed our trades to try and progress with the garden to reach the stage we are at now and to maintain this.  I really love it because it helps to relax me and it helps with preparing me for returning to work.” |