

Environments for All



*Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland*

Environments for All provides opportunities for people from black and minority ethnic and marginalised or deprived communities to get involved in looking after their local environment.

Run by BTCV and supported by the Community Fund and Barclays PLC, this is initially a three year programme although our vision is of much longer term work and achievements.

We are asking:

- Communities to get involved in looking after their local environment
- Environmental and voluntary organisations to work with us to implement the lessons learnt and make environmental volunteering open to everyone
- Government, funders and supporters to understand the long-term commitment required when working with communities and the need for ongoing resources to achieve this.

The need to tailor opportunities

Most environmental organisations do not reflect the UK's multicultural and diverse society, often because the opportunities provided are not right for the people to whom they are offered. Barriers such as money, race, culture, language and background are not always taken into account.

BTCV identified the need to work closely with communities on the ground, listening to their needs and tailoring opportunities to suit.

Finding local solutions

As the UK's leading practical conservation charity, BTCV has over 40 years' experience of inspiring people to look after their environment.

Over 500 staff at 120 offices across the UK work at grass roots, developing opportunities and providing advice and support.



Chinese Welfare Association (CWA), Belfast

The Chinese community is the largest minority ethnic group in Northern Ireland.

Through consultation, barriers to participation in environmental activities were identified including language, the geographical spread of the community and lack of ownership of any green spaces.

Working in partnership with the CWA, the Environments for All team in Northern Ireland has offered talks and literature translated into Cantonese and Mandarin. Transport has been provided to environmental workshops featuring subjects such as willow sculpture, tree planting and making bird feeders.

The sessions have provided an opportunity to meet new people, share experiences and simply have fun. They have proved to be a successful catalyst in strengthening links with the community and stimulating interest in future practical environmental activities.



Holway Estate Project, Flintshire

BTCV is working alongside residents of the Holway Estate in Holywell, North East Wales to support local environmental activities. The estate is in a ward which suffers from high levels of financial deprivation, linking particularly to child poverty, and crime and disorder.

In the centre of the estate sits the Project House which serves as a meeting place for local people as well as a focus for activity. Residents have been working alongside an artist, The Prince's Trust and BTCV Cymru to give the garden of the Project House a well-needed facelift and bring together members of the community to work together on a common goal. The project also filled a gap left by the lack of activities for children.

Cobbles have been painted and varnished and assembled into patterns and designs outside the house, which adds a welcome splash of colour to the garden. Residents have designed murals for the community noticeboard and created a herb garden. In all over 30 young people and many adults took part. Many of the children have expressed an interest in getting involved in further activities.

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BTCV Environments for all...

There are also over 2,000 groups associated to BTCV through our Community Groups Network, giving us a wealth of expertise in community consultation and service provision.

BTCV's experience of working with unemployed people, socially excluded communities and in certain areas BME communities, placed us in a strong position to initiate the Environments for All programme.

On the ground

Specific Environments for All project teams are working in:

- Birmingham
- Leicester
- London
- Oldham
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Wales

Each team is piloting and developing different approaches suited to the local community's needs. Activities include working with people living in some of the most deprived communities in North Wales, the travelling community in Northern Ireland and the Somali community in London. (See additional case studies overleaf.)

We aim to involve more than 18,000 individuals and 5,000 groups in the first three years alone.

Driving community regeneration

Getting people involved in practical conservation benefits not

just the environment, but also helps individuals develop skills and confidence, contributing to employability.

Environmental action can therefore be a driver in helping communities to improve their quality of life, overcome social exclusion and regenerate their neighbourhood.

Spreading best practice

One of the priorities for Environments for All is to disseminate best practice:

- Within BTCV, to make us a more diverse organisation
- Across the environmental sector as a whole, enabling a far wider cross section of society to get involved.

This will be achieved through a variety of means including workshops, reports, the BTCV website and an Environments for All Conference in 2004.

Resources

The support that BTCV has received from the Community Fund and Barclays PLC has ensured the successful establishment of the Environments for All programme.

Working with communities takes time – the time to develop ideas, earn trust and see dreams turn into reality. This requires organisations like BTCV to make a long-term commitment to having a presence in the community. To achieve this, we will need ongoing resources and backing from government, funders and all our supporters.



Islam & Ecology Conference, Birmingham

Little co-operation or even information exchange appeared to exist between the various religious, cultural and environmental organisations operating at a local level in Birmingham. As part of an innovative approach to overcome this, BTCV organised an Islam & Ecology Conference which brought groups together to discuss environmental issues and kickstart future activities.

Speakers included international experts and local people giving feedback on their own experiences. Interactive workshops covered women's health, young people and the environment, recycling and gardening.

The result was constructive feedback which has guided future activities, such as the provision of women-only conservation projects, as well as promoting greater co-operation across the sector.



The Art of Trash, Glasgow

The Environments for All team in Scotland has established a series of environmental activity workshops turning 'trash into art'.

The workshops involve women from different communities, representing a wide range of ages and physical abilities. The re-use of waste has obvious environmental benefits, but the workshops also achieve a genuine cross-cultural inclusiveness that is helping to build both environmental awareness and an understanding between the communities.

The project is led by BTCV Volunteer Officers from Glasgow's large and culturally varied asylum groups. They are helping to ensure that BTCV stays aware of community opinions towards volunteering and the environment, bringing an additional perspective to the programme's direction and development.

"Our aim is to help improve the quality of life in the community and this programme is an innovative way of reaching those who really can make a difference."

Lady Diana Brittan, CBE, Chair of UK Grants Committee, Community Fund

"The relationship between Barclays and BTCV is long-established through the Barclays Site Savers Scheme. BTCV Environments for All is a natural extension of this programme and reflects Barclays aim to be an inclusive organisation."

Angie Tymkow, Community Relations Manager, Barclays PLC

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