

Gardens for Children – Report of our Activities in 2014

Introduction

Since its beginning in 2011, our garden project promotes nutrition and creates an awareness of the origin of our food and biological coherences to the youngest members of our community. Project location is the area of East Hamburg as it is a social hotspot within our community. The garden project addresses social disadvantaged children aged 6 to 10 years at elementary schools of Hamburgs east. In general, in their families exists nearly no knowledge about healthy food.

In the garden project, the children are instructed by gardeners to look after a garden/a patch on the terrain of their school. They learn how to cultivate vegetables, salads and herbs, and the project links age-appropriate physical exercise with basic knowledge on healthy nutrition. Additionally, the children use the school's kitchens to prepare healthy meals of the vegetables from their gardens.

The children gain practical gardening skills suitable for daily use and get to know the vegetative diversity of vegs and fruits and how this becomes their daily food. As a consequence, the children will get a new and healthy attitude towards food, nutrition and health in general as well as a lot of physical exercise - of all this they will profit during their whole future life.

Thanks to the generous donation of UWW/General Mills Foundation the garden team of Billenetz was able to provide four gardens for six groups of children. From April till October 2014, we have planted and cultivated patches of garden in three elementary schools for four gardening groups, where these gardens were already in existence from our prior activities. Additionally, we have created a new garden with greenhouse for two groups at school Hauskoppelstieg, thanks to the enthusiastic volunteer-help from the team of General Mills in Hamburg.



The teachers at the schools with our gardening project participate actively in the gardening project with the aim that they learn to maintain the patches on their own in the near future. In addition to our schools we supported the staff of a kindergarten to make good use of their already existing garden and how to teach these very young children aged three to six years about gardening and healthy nutrition.

Our vision and goal for the next years: to maintain the existing gardens and even to create additional new gardens, while some of the existing gardens of the project are gradually turned over to the responsibility of teachers and children, to be maintained on their own without further help from the project. As of this year, our garden at Fritz-Köhne-School is in the hands of the teachers and children of the school, as we are sure that they have gained enough knowledge during the past years to handle the garden project on their own.

For 2015 we plan a new garden at school Steinadlerweg, a regular primary school with a huge unused area that we will turn into a new garden with patches for three groups of children of the age of 10 to 12 years.

In April 2014 we started our new garden season, sowing and planting the new vegetables and herb plants in the existing gardens at Rebus, Fuchsbergredder and Schleemer Park. As the school Weddestraße moved to the grounds of school Hauskoppelstieg, we built new garden patches and an additional greenhouse at their new location

Thanks to the generous donation of UWW/General Mills Foundation the garden team of Billenetz was able to provide this new Garden for Children, along with a new greenhouse, at the school Hauskoppelstieg.

As we had only two weeks left from our Interim Report of September 2014 to the end of our gardening season (October, 14th) there is not much left to report for the two remaining gardening weeks. At all schools we spent the last hours in the kitchen, cooking, eating, asking children and teachers for their feed-back and making plans for the next season 2015.

General Mills Hamburg, Garden Team 25.04.2014

New garden at school Hauskoppelstieg

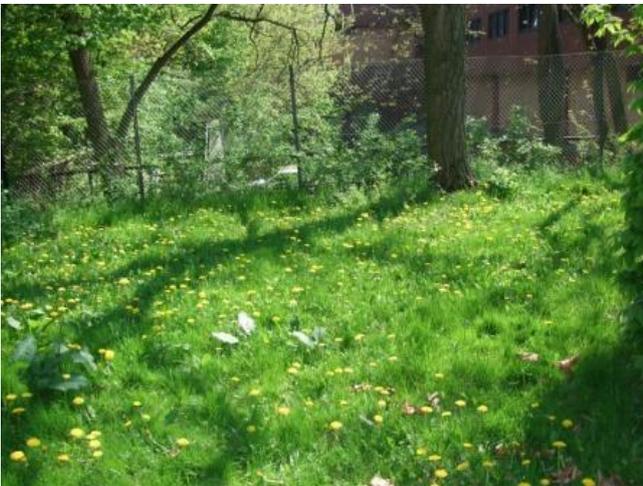
As already mentioned in our final report in 2013 our school Weddestraße moved into a new building as it was united with the school Hauskoppelstieg. The school Hauskoppelstieg is also a „special school“, where slow learners and children with behavioral disorders are looked after. For these children all forms of practical instructions are a big enrichment, as most of them have severe problems with theoretical lessons.

As the head of school asked us to be not only part of their “afternoon support service” but also become a part of their regular morning classes twice a week, we have taken care of two groups in the morning since late march and still do till the middle of October.

Unfortunately the school Hauskoppelstieg had no patches for planting vegetables and herbs when we started last year. So we had to install another greenhouse and several patches for vegetables and herbs at that school this spring.



Volunteers of General Mills Hamburg at School Haus koppelstieg during the building of the garden patches.



In the frame of the annual "Earth Day" on April 25th six patches have been built with the assistance of ca.15 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg.

Their task was not only to install the new patches but also to clear the ground for our new greenhouse.

In the picture you see the meadow before the building of the greenhouse ...

... and some weeks later the completed greenhouse.

During the first four weeks, before the patches and the greenhouse were completed, we spent most time cooking vegetable meals with the children to decide what we will plant upon completion of our patches.

As we were part of the regular classes we also spent some hours with theoretical lessons on gardening during the first four weeks.

Since early May we took care of the patches regularly twice a week. Unfortunately nearly all children refuse to be photographed for religious reasons. 99% of our garden children at all schools are children with a migrant, Islamic background, which bans to take pictures of human beings. Therefore it is absolutely impossible to get a permission of any of the parents for taking pictures (not to even think of publishing them) of their children.



Only by the great assistance of the team of General Mills Hamburg this additional garden was possible. A new interesting activity can be offered to the children. The feedback of the children and teachers is more than positive. The children love their “garden hours”. The six patches have been cultivated with big enthusiasm by two classes (aged 8 to 12 years). The patches were cultivated with vegetables and herbs. After the summer holidays the children and our garden team were busy with arranging the new greenhouse for the season 2015 and with taking care of their patches, including harvesting the plants and the preparation of meals in the kitchen.

Garden at school Schleemer Park

The school Schleemer Park is a regular elementary school. The average class size is 20 students. During last year we started the garden project at this location with new patches as well as a newly installed greenhouse. All the teachers were absolutely enthusiastic about our offer to take care of their garden again.

We started our garden season in early April by cultivating vegetables and herbs in our last year built greenhouse. In early May the plants could move outside into the patches, were we also planted some flowers.



Patch with salad and herbs at school Schleemer Park

Red peppers growing in the greenhouse at Schleemer Park

The feedback of the children and teachers is more than positive. The children (a group aged 8 to 12 years) love their garden hours. During the August and September the children and the garden team were arranging the greenhouse for the season 2015 and taking care of their patches, including harvesting the plants and the preparation of meals in the kitchen. The children and teachers as well are looking forward to their next gardening season hopefully starting in April 2015.

Garden at Rebus Billstedt

Rebus Billstedt is an institution of the school authority in which students, absconding from normal school instruction or showing such extreme behavioral disorders that they cannot be instructed in regular school classes, are taken care of.

The aim of this institutional care is to reintegrate these children into regular schooling. In order to do so, numerous project activities are offered. In this spirit our „Garden for Children“ is a true enrichment for the concept of Rebus and everybody, teachers, instructors and the children are very enthusiastic about their fourth season of gardening.

Due to the consolidation of most “special schools” in the district of our activities, Rebus has got a lot more students this year than the three years before. So we were asked to come twice a week for two garden groups.

The gardening started in early April cultivating the four patches and preparing the greenhouse for the season to come. Just after we had disseminated the seed and had planted little germ buds into the patches in the middle of May, we were told that we had to move our patches to another place as the exterior wall of the school where our patches were built had to be restored very urgently.

So we tried to rescue all our seed (with the soil) and germ buds by replacing them into the greenhouse and moving the patches to another place.



Unfortunately some of the wooden walls of the patches had to be compensated. And we also needed a new fence around the new ground.

Different from April 2011, when we had the great assistance of General Mills Hamburg, this time the children had to do all the work by themselves (building new patches and a new fence) and were truly hard working till July.

As you can see in the picture, the tomatoes and other vegetables were growing very well in the greenhouse.

The plants in the greenhouse could mostly be harvested before the summer holidays (due to the warmer climate inside the house) so after the holidays the classes spent most time in the kitchen preparing tasty and healthy meals out of the harvested vegetables. As the school was responsible for all the trouble with moving the patches, they absorbed the costs for the additional groceries.

For the next season the school plans to put the older and younger children together into one garden group instead of two groups. This will enable us to start the new garden at Steinadlerweg.

Elementary School Fuchsbergredder

The Fuchsbergredder School is a regular elementary full time school with several afternoon classes, attended by an average of 15 children.



The third gardening season started in April 2014 and most of last year's "Environment Study Group" of 16 children (aged 8 to 12 years) participated again. The children simply love their "garden hours".

The patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers.

In order to get rid of the weeds which had overgrown all our plants last year we renewed the soil

completely at the beginning of the season. And this time we were rewarded by huge vegetable plants, such as corn, zucchini and cucumber, when we started our garden hours again after the summer break.



We harvested the vegetable, prepared meals and planted flowers in the empty patches in September.

A typical day in the Garden for Children

Each unit starts with an address of welcome by the gardener and the pedagogical assistant and the introduction of today's activities.

At the beginning the gardener explains in an age appropriate way the theoretical basics of the actual work, the development of the plants, etc. This theoretical introduction is best done directly in front of the patches, where everyone can see what is talked about.

Then joined practical work at the patch (to sow, to plant, to weed, to care, to water, to crop, etc.)

The children document the course by photos, drawings and short descriptions of the activities and work steps.

The unit ends with a feedback (what was done, what was learned) and the planning of the next unit.

At the end of the season the children prepare the cropped vegetables, herbs, and berries (herb butter, jam, etc.) and celebrate a common meal of the prepared ingredients, and/or the children take the recipes and products home.

Summary

Our gardening project was carried out as planned and was resoundingly successful. All participants – children, teachers, pedagogical assistants and gardener – enjoyed the weekly garden sessions and the results of our gardening project. The installation of greenhouses at three schools proves to be very helpful because the plants are growing much faster inside the greenhouse and the children are protected when the weather is bad.

We are told that the children are looking forward to their gardening hours during the entire week and that the gardening-experience is also helpful for the children to be more concentrated and perceptive during their regular classes.

