

## Gardens for Children – Final Report, March – October 2012

### Introduction

The garden project addresses children aged 6 to 12 years at elementary schools of Hamburg's east. Children, instructed by gardeners, look after a garden / a patch on the terrain of their institution. They learn how to cultivate vegetables, salads, herbs and of course flowers. The children gain practical gardening skills suitable for daily use. The project links age-appropriate physical exercise with basic knowledge on healthy nutrition. The project runs from April to October, once a week for 2 or 3 hours. By this means the children are able to watch the development of plants during the entire crop cycle.

### Aims

- To train the apperception (to see, to smell, to taste, to feel) by dealing with plants.
- To excite children's curiosity towards nature. To convey biological coherences by dealing with garden plants. To sensitize the attention on the natural environment.
- To experience the results of joint and own activities without grades pressure.
- To gain knowledge on cultivation and usage of food plants and herbs.

Thanks to the generous donation of UWW/General Mills Foundation the garden team of Billenetz is again able to provide five Gardens for Children. Since starting the second project season in March 2012, we have planted and cultivated patches of garden in four elementary schools, where these gardens were already in existence from prior activities. Additionally, we have created a new garden, thanks to the enthusiastic volunteer-help from the team of General Mills in Hamburg.

### General Mills Hamburg, Garden Team 13.04.2012

#### Elementary School Fuchsbergredder – a new Garden for Children comes into existence:



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

But there has been no garden group so far as two already existing small patches in a more or less dark internal courtyard would have been too insufficient for that many children. So the head of school was very enthusiastic about our offer to create four new patches in order to enable them to establish a new afternoon gardening class.

Although that small internal courtyard had not much sunshine, the new garden had to be set up there, as the school had no other place to offer. Which meant: The best and only place for our patches were just in the middle of the courtyard. Unfortunately a small garden shed stood right in the middle. And the only other place to transplant it was an extremely feral area with big bushes and small trees around it.

But as there were no other options, we decided, that the garden shed had to leave the only sunny spot in that yard and had to be transplanted to the area occupied by scrubby ugly bushes and ramshackle trees.



The school caretaker was willing to chop down the trees and big bushes before the team of General Mills would come, but not to clear up the area (to get rid of the roots and all the other brushwood).

We very much appreciated the repeated assistance of ca.15 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg which built the new garden (4 patches) at Fuchsbergredder in April 2012.

The feedback regarding the new garden was more than positive. The children loved their “garden hours”. Since the end of April the patches had been cultivated and been taken care of with big enthusiasm by the “Environment Study Group” of 16 children (aged 8 to 12 yrs). The patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers.

At the end of the crop cycle the children spent many hours in the school kitchen to prepare meals with the vegetables and herbs harvested in their garden.



Unfortunately nearly all children refuse to be photographed for religious reasons. 99% of our garden children (not only at Fuchsberg but at all the schools in our project) are children with a migrant, Islamic background, which bans to take pictures of human beings. Therefore it will be absolutely impossible to get a permission of any of the parents for taking pictures (not to even think of publishing them) of their children.

### **Garden at Rebus**

Rebus Billstedt is an institution of the school authority in which students, absconding from normal school instruction or showing such extreme behavioural disorders that they can not 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 second season of gardening.



Since early April the patches had been cultivated and been taken care of with big enthusiasm by several groups of 6 children (aged 8 to 12 yrs) at a time. The patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers and even around the framed patches the children found places for additional plants and bushes.

At the end of the crop cycle the children spent many hours in the school kitchen to prepare meals with the vegetables and herbs harvested in their garden.

### **Garden at the Elementary School Weddestraße:**

The school Weddestraße is a so called „special school“, where slow learners and children with behavioural 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.



In the years 2007 to 2009 two patches had been already established in the frame of the project „Bille in Bewegung“. With the guidance of a gardener the patches had been taken care of once a week in the afternoon by a garden group of 10 children. After the end of the regular project period these patches were cultivated by several teachers and garden groups. However, only flowers were planted as no teacher at this time had the expert knowledge of vegetable gardening.

Thanks to the great donation of General Mills Foundation since the end of March 2011 the patches are used for vegetable again. In addition to the two already existing patches a third one was needed and built by the children in 2011, as our gardening course was remembered so fondly, that almost 20 children wanted to participate in our gardening course. Due to the extra intensive pedagogical supervision needed by these children we limited the number of participants to 12 (third to fifth grade).

As in 2011 we were welcomed very warmly in 2012 again. As so many children wanted to participate in our garden course the school decided to split the course into two groups, each taking care of the patches every other week.

During the gardening season all three patches were planted with vegetable, herbs and flowers (method of mixed cultivation, suitable vegetables, herbs and flowers in one bed) by the children. At the end of season the children prepared meals of the harvested vegetables and herbs in their school kitchen.

### **Our 3 patches at Weddestraße**

As in 2011, the first bed is planted with herbs (rosemary, sage, thyme and lemon balm), and vegetable: turnip cabbage, corn, beetroot, and different sorts of salad. All plants in this patch were bought as little baby plants. Before the decision was made what to plant, the children had gone to a nearby supermarket to get some inspiration of what they wanted to cultivate.

In the middle bed vegetable and herb seed were sowed (e.g.: carrots, radish, peas, parsley, etc.) and flowers were planted around them.

The triangle bed was planted with baby strawberries and flowers. The children themselves decided (with some advice by the gardener) what to plant and where to plant it.

### **Steinbeker Marktstraße School**

The school Steinbeker Marktstraße is a so called „special school“, where slow learners and children with behavioural 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.

In the years 2007 to 2009 four patches had been already established in the frame of the project „Bille in Bewegung“. With the guidance of a gardener the patches had been taken care of once a week in the afternoon by a garden group of 10 children. After the end of the regular project period these patches were cultivated by several teachers and garden groups. However, only flowers were planted as no teacher at this time had the expert knowledge of vegetable gardening. The school appreciated our re-engagement in April 2012 very much.



Since early April 2012 we started to use the patches for vegetable again. Due to the extra intensive pedagogical supervision needed by these children we limited the number of participants to 10 (third to fifth grade).

The Steinbeker Marktstraße “gardening day” was every Tuesday. Unfortunately nearly all Tuesdays of the last years season were extremely bad weather days, starting with snow in April and

going on with heavy rainfalls during May and June. So we had to spend more gardening days in the school kitchen, preparing meals with those vegetables we originally planned to cultivate in the four patches than being outside in the garden. According to this the harvest in June was extremely disappointing.



Although there were some sunny days in August and September and the tomatoes were growing nicely, it was too late to start planting vegetables again. We planted flowers instead and again spent most time in the kitchen.

This experience with our “Hamburg weather” made us think of the use of a greenhouse during the coming garden seasons to become more independent of bad weather.

### **Garden at Fritz Köhne School:**

The Fritz Köhne School is a regular elementary school. The average class size is 20 students.

In the photo you see our gardener, Angela Sannmann, with this years “boy group” on their way to the garden patches.



During our regular period of the „Bille in Bewegung“ project (2007 – 2009) there had been cultivated 12 patches, which were looked after once a week by 3 classes. Until our restart of the “Garden of children” in 2011 more than half of these patches lay waste after the end of our project, as most teachers have not enough knowledge about vegetable gardening. All the teachers are absolutely enthusiastic about our offer to take care of their garden again. All of the 12 previous patches are reactivated. Two classes (3. resp. 4. grade) look after the patches. The children plant vegetable, herbs and flowers.



In April 2012 we started our new garden season, again with 2 classes (about 40 children), divided in a girl and a boy- group, working one after the other for 1.5 hours in the garden. Our instructors asked for this arrangement, as they learned from last years experiences, that a big mixed group is difficult to handle, as the boys often tried to dominate the girls.

In this photo you see our gardener with the “girls group” working on one of the patches.

### **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 will 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.



All of the participants – children, teachers, pedagogical assistants and gardener – are looking forward to the coming garden season 2013 to start a new crop cycle.

Bettina Rosenbusch and Renate Arndt, April 5th, 2013