

Gardens for Children – Report of our Activities in 2013

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 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.

The teachers of these children participate actively in the gardening project with the aim that they learn to maintain the patches on their own in the near future.



To strengthen this aspect, we included for the first time in our project two greenhouses for vegetables on the ground of two schools with the aim to teach teachers as well as children how to start the process of seeding and planting the vegetables for the garden patches in their respective schools. The greenhouses have the additional advantage that they provide the opportunity for the children to take care of the plants even during bad weather-periods (of which we regrettably have many in Hamburg).

Our new greenhouses on the compound of Schleemer Park and Rebus

Our vision and goal for the next years is 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.

In April 2013 we started our new garden season, sowing and planting the new vegetables and herb plants at four of our Schools. Unfortunately, the school at Steinbeker Marktstraße no longer exists, but the gardens at Rebus, Fritz Köhne Schule, Fuchsbergredder and Weddestraße were part of our project again.



Thanks to the generous donation of UWW/General Mills Foundation the garden team of Billenetz was able to provide a new fifth Garden for children at the school Schleemer Park.

The Garden at Schleemer Park School

The school Schleemer Park is a regular elementary school. The average class size is 20 students. During our regular period of the „Bille in Bewegung“ - project (2007 – 2009) there had been cultivated 14 patches, which were looked after once a week by two classes. During the last three years all these patches lay waste, as the responsible teacher retired in early 2010. All the teachers were absolutely enthusiastic about our offer to take care of their garden again.

In the frame of the annual “Earth Day” on April 19th the 14 patches at Schleemer Park have been revived with the repeated assistance of ca.15 volunteers of General Mills in Hamburg. Task was not only to clear the extremely feral garden area for the patches but also for our new greenhouse.



The volunteers of General Mills Hamburg at work...



... and after work.

Originally, we had planned to build only one big greenhouse at Rebus. Unfortunately a big greenhouse would have to be fixated very deeply in the ground with unforeseen administrative barriers. So we had to change our plans and decided to build two smaller ones, one at Rebus and the other one at Schleemer Park.

As these administrative barriers took some precious time, we could not start establishing the greenhouses before Mid-June, only a short time before the start of the summer holidays. We finished the greenhouse at Rebus at the end of June and the one at Schleemer Park in late July, just in time for this years second gardening season.

After April 19th, we took care of the patches at Schleemer Park regularly once a week. Only by the great assistance of the team of General Mills Hamburg this additional garden was possible. A new interesting activity could be offered to the children.

The feedback of the children and teachers is more than positive. The children love their “garden hours”. Since the end of April the patches have been cultivated with big enthusiasm by two classes (aged 8 to 12 yrs). The patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers.



In the picture you see the planting of salad in a garden patch at Schleemer Park at the start of the season.

Unfortunately nearly all children refuse to be photographed for religious reasons. Most 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.

During the last two months of the gardening season (August and September), the garden team arranged the new greenhouse for the season 2014 and took 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 2014.

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 third season of gardening.

Since the start of our garden course in early April 2013 the patches have been cultivated and been taken care of with big enthusiasm by several groups of six 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.

The last two months the children helped arranging their new greenhouse for the next season. They also took care of their patches and prepared meals out of the harvested vegetables and herbs.



As our work with the children at Rebus is very successful we were asked by the head of school if we could come a second day for another garden group in 2014. During our gardening hours we

often were surrounded by other groups of children wanting to help us. So we would gladly offer Rebus a second day of gardening.

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 second gardening season started in April 2013 and almost all children of last years "Environment Study Group" of 16 children (aged 8 to 12 yrs) participated again. The children simply love their "garden hours".

The patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers.

Here you see the first harvest of radishes:

When starting the second part of the gardening season in early August we were a little shocked when we saw our patches. Different from all our other gardens the patches were completely overgrown by weed. So we spent nearly six weeks to get rid of these plants by cleaning up six patches and the entire surrounding.

In order to make it not too boring for the children (doing the same again and again) we split our garden sessions in a truly hard working part (cleaning the patches) and little games like a garden rallye (the group divided into two teams complying several tasks), garden quizzes, etc. The last two weeks we spent in the kitchen preparing meals with "replacement" vegetables as there were no herbs and vegetable we could harvest on our own patches.



Nevertheless the children are looking forward to the start of a new garden season in April 2014 hoping for a more successful year.

Garden at School Weddestraße

The school Weddestraße is 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.

In the years 2007 to 2009 two patches had already been 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 ten 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 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. Due to the extra intensive pedagogical supervision needed by these children we limited the number of participants to twelve (third to fifth grade).

As in 2011 and 2012 we were welcomed very warmly in 2013 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 first weeks of the season, all three patches were planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers (method of mixed cultivation, suitable vegetables, herbs and flowers in one bed) by the children.

In the picture you see the planting of strawberries.



After the summer holidays the school Weddestraße was united with the School Hauskoppelstieg and moved into a new building. Because of this situation, we had to close down the patches and harvest all the vegetables during the summer holidays. Several children and teachers spent some extra hours in early July helping us to harvest the herbs and vegetables, which the children took home.



In August we started our gardening season at the new school Hauskoppelstieg, which is a “special school” as well and attended by the same group of children.

Unfortunately the Hauskoppelstieg has currently no patches for planting vegetables and herbs when we started. So all we could do were planting some flowers in front of their classroom and spending several hours in the kitchen.

As the great success of our gardening project is well known at almost every school in our project area the teachers of Hauskoppelstieg would very much like us to continue the gardening project in

2014. The head of school even asked us to be not only part of their “afternoon support service” but also to become a part of their regular morning classes twice a week. So we would like to install another greenhouse and several patches for vegetables and herbs at this school in 2014.

Garden at Fritz Köhne School



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

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 three classes. Until our restart of the “Garden for 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 were absolutely enthusiastic about our offer to take care of their garden again. All of the 12 previous patches were reactivated.

We started our new garden season in April 2013. Two classes (3. resp. 4. grade) looked after the patches. The children planted vegetables, herbs and flowers. And like last year two classes (about 40 children), divided in a girls- and a boys-group, were working one after the other for 1.5 hours in the garden. Our instructors asked for this arrangement in 2012, as they learned from 2011 experiences that a big mixed group is difficult to handle, as the boys often tried to dominate the girls.



During the second gardening season the children harvested

their planted vegetables and herbs and spent several hours in the kitchen to prepare healthy meals.

In the pictures you see our gardener Angela Sanmann with the girls- and the boys-group.

In the Fritz Köhne School, as well as in the school Fuchsbergredder, we organized botany lessons and cooking classes as part of the gardening project.

In this manner, the children get more knowledge about the herbs and vegetables from their garden, which they share and promote at home with their families.



A typical day in the Garden for Children

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

At the beginning the gardener explained 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 documented the course by photos, drawings and short descriptions of the activities and work steps.

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

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

Summary

Our gardening project was mostly 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. We were told that the children were looking forward to their gardening hours during the entire week. Teachers and children at all five

schools are looking forward to our gardening project being continued in 2014, especially to work and enjoy the new greenhouses.



Bettina Rosenbusch and Renate Arndt, February 2014