

# Progress in Practice

## Bolton's Gathering of Organic Growers

In Bolton, in the North West, the Gathering of Organic Growers initiative encourages healthy eating and exercise and improves access to healthy food, by involving members of the local community in growing fruit and vegetables.

### Summary

The Bolton Gathering of Organic Growers (GOG) project – a network of community organic food initiatives – is now five years old. It is supported by Bolton Wildlife Project and Bolton Primary Care Trust, both through the 5 A DAY programme and the Health for Bolton fund. The real support has come from the community in the form of the local people who themselves work in, manage and benefit from the services it provides.

The project targets disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups including women – one of the plots is women-only and involves mostly Gujrati-speakers.

There are now nine communal food gardens in Bolton which are organised through democratic plot meetings. Any local people can get involved in growing their own food, and they then share out the produce. Others might come along to learn on the plots for a couple of months and then use the knowledge gained to grow at home.

In addition to the food gardens, the gathering of organic growers has invited speakers to talk to residents about a range of food-related issues. Some groups have organised cookery and craft courses and have worked with the Wildlife Project to develop growing courses.

(continued overleaf)



**Links and organisations involved:** For more information about Bolton's Gathering of Organic Growers see [www.bolton-organics.org.uk](http://www.bolton-organics.org.uk). GOG is supported by Bolton PCT ([www.bolton.nhs.uk](http://www.bolton.nhs.uk)), and Bolton Wildlife Project, based at 125 Blackburn Road, Bolton BL1 8HF 01204 361847. Information about the Green House meeting place is available from Kath Baron –

### Contact:

Alan Brown, Bolton 5 A DAY Co-ordinator and GOG Treasurer, Bolton NHS Primary Care Trust, Silverwell Street, Bolton, BL1 1PP, 01204 907714, [alan.brown@bolton.nhs.uk](mailto:alan.brown@bolton.nhs.uk)

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The gathering of organic growers has also set up a model environmentally-friendly community meeting place – the Green House – a converted three-bedroom council house. The Green House recently organised a free weekend of workshops themed around sustainable living, and has appointed a centre manager.

GOG has just completed a two-year research project into community organic projects in the UK and Ireland with the aim of setting up a community farm in a disadvantaged area of town.

Hundreds of Boltonians have benefited from GOG activities which have served to increase the level of food-growing, preserving knowledge in the borough which is otherwise being gradually lost over time.

GOG has helped to promote healthy eating, environmental education and outdoor exercise.

The various activities have contributed towards rebuilding a sense of community in deprived areas and with isolated individuals.

GOG's Treasurer and Bolton's 5 A DAY co-ordinator, Alan Brown, feels that the GOG networks are a model of good partnership working between community groups and statutory agencies:

*“Essentially the PCT has encouraged the groups within GOG to work independently - applying for their own grants and seeking out advice and support when they need it. This lack of dependence has been key to the sustainability of the GOG groups.”*

In 2002, GOG was recognised as a model of good practice, in terms of sustainability, by the UN-HABITAT Best Practices Programme (Vienna Hub).

In the previous year GOG won the North-West Health Challenge Awards and was a runner up in the British Urban Regeneration Awards.



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