The City of London Growing Localities Awards 2014/15

A. About the Awards

Lemos&Crane working with The City of London Corporation's Charity, The City Bridge Trust presents The Growing Localities Awards. Total prize money of £2,500 is offered for projects based in London that demonstrate excellence in using nature to enhance and improve local communities and in particular the lives of vulnerable or socially excluded people, generating positive outcomes such as health and well-being, new skills and knowledge, new relationships, and a sense of purpose and belonging.

To apply for the award you will need to describe what your project already does and to explain how the prize money would be spent to further your work.

This year entries are invited for projects and initiatives in any London borough that involve any one or combination of:

- **Gardening and growing food**: for communal eating and small-scale enterprise
- **Introducing young people to nature**: encouraging young people to develop an interest in nature through bird-watching and similar activities
- **Keeping animals**: bees, chickens, pigs, etc for the experience of care but also to farm
- **Nature-themed arts and crafts**: woodcraft, photography, film-making, writing, etc
- **Reclaiming and developing wasteland**: especially led by residents and tenants
- **‘Green’ exercise**: groups for walking, cycling, running, etc with a nature theme
Entries are invited from non-profit organisations such as:

- Homeless agencies
- Supported housing (providing mental health services, substance misuse, etc)
- Social housing providers
- Residential care providers
- Health organisations
- Hospices
- Prisons
- Churches and faith groups
- Other community-based and voluntary organisations.

Entries will be judged based on criteria including:

- **Originality** – the distinctiveness and memorability of the project idea
- **Replicability** – how others could be inspired by and run similar projects themselves
- **Reach** – the numbers of people involved in the project, particularly in engaging the wider community
- **Diversity** – of people engaged, particularly those who are ‘hard to reach’ or have challenging needs and who are brought together with the local community
- **Impact** – of the project (demonstrated qualitatively or quantitatively) on people’s health, well-being, relationships, skills, knowledge, sense of purpose and belonging.

**B. Timetable**

- Deadline for entries – **Wednesday 17 December, 2014**
- Shortlist announced – **End of March 2015**
- Winners announced – **June 2015**

**C. Rules and procedures**
1. Entries must be completed using this entry form and submitted electronically here.

2. Receipt of all entries submitted online will be automatically acknowledged.

3. Entrants may be asked to provide further information.

4. The judges' decision is final. Awards will be made at the judges' discretion and no correspondence will be entered into concerning any decision. Not all the awards advertised may be awarded if the judges consider the criteria have not been met. Additional commendations may be made at the judges' discretion.

5. The content of any entry may be used for informing other practitioners and also for publicity purposes unless the entrant withholds their consent to this in writing.

6. Entrants are deemed to have accepted these rules and procedures and to have agreed to be bound by them when entering this competition.
D. Your Entry

Please do not exceed 1500 words in total.

1. Name of project you are entering for The Growing Localities Awards

   Teaching pupils with complex autism through the medium of nature

2. Describe your project in one sentence

   Pupils with complex autism are designing and making their own wildlife garden and sharing this with peers from local schools.

Specify the setting(s) where your project is delivered (e.g. homeless agency, social housing, prison, community, etc.)?

We are an autism charity based in North London and run various services including TreeHouse School where our project is based. The project to create a wild life space is being delivered on previously unused land at the front of our building. This has been specifically chosen for its visibility. Our experience is that there is a lack of understanding around complex autism. Many of our families tell us that they are very socially isolated, particularly as their child gets older. Brothers and sisters struggle with being embarrassed by their sibling when outside their home environment, but wanting to protect them from hurtful comments and looks. By making our work very visible within the local community we hope to show the talents and skills our young people have as they work to create a vibrant ecological environment. Part of our plan includes extending our existing ‘integration’ work with local schools. We will do this by inviting their pupils to enjoy and learn about nature through our wildlife project with our pupils. This is particularly important as we are unusual locally in having access to ‘green’ outdoor space within our
school grounds. Many of our pupils live in flats with no outdoor space and it is hard for their families to take them to woods and parks as many have a tendency to run off and have no sense of danger.

3. What are the project’s objectives?

Autism affects 1 in 100 people. Our pupils are at the complex end of the spectrum and have challenging behaviour, erratic sleep and learning difficulties. Societal aspirations for this group are low. Our project is part of our overarching organisational objective to challenge these expectations. Specific project objectives are:

- To create an outdoor ‘classroom’ where our 90+ pupils can learn to be aware of and to respect the natural world

- To provide an alternative and motivating environment for integrating the teaching curriculum including science, maths, PSHE, art and literacy.

- To improve pupil health and well being through providing opportunity for them to be regularly involved in outdoor physical activity. This is important as many prefer sedentary, lone activities.

- To equip pupils with knowledge and skills that have vocational potential eg in horticulture/landscaping.

- To provide an opportunity for pupils from other local schools to spend time with our pupils in the natural environment, potentially reaching 500 pupils

- To make our work tangible to the local community and so provide a positive picture of the potential of people with complex autism
4. **What are the project’s activities?**

- Pupils are involved in the planning and creation of the space. 80% of our pupils are non-verbal and a range of imaginative, replicable methodologies have been developed to capture their views in a way meaningful to them.
- Creating all of the infrastructure eg fencing, decking, making bird houses, insect hotels etc.
- Learning techniques including pond dipping and surveying wildlife.
- Learning safety in relation to being near water, not eating berries etc. Our pupils have limited understanding of danger.

5. **What has been the impact / achievement of the project?**

Five years ago our pupils had extremely limited growing/nature opportunity as the organisation had been based in a succession of temporary buildings with very limited external space. In 2010 following the move to our permanent building a small unused part of the playground located on a steep slope was used to develop vegetable growing activities. This was followed by participation in ‘Fruitfull Schools’ and as a consequence we now have a small orchard on our site. From this came the idea of creating the wildlife garden and pupils have been working on this over the last year. It is constantly evolving (see attached photographs).

Notable achievements are included below and these are constantly being added to as the project evolves.

- A previously unused and unsightly part of our site is being transformed into an ecologically interesting and visually attractive nature environment.
- Our pupils are having the opportunity to learn skills and push the boundaries in ways which would not usually be considered possible for young people with their level of disability. For example a number are now proficient at using hammers, drill and saws.
Pupils are learning to tolerate wearing appropriate safety clothing as and when necessary. Rigid behaviour patterns and problems with understanding the sequence of dressing, results in this apparently straightforward activity being challenging for our young people. For example one pupil who was initially unable to even hold a pair of work gloves can now, after 4 months of desensitizing work, put on gloves willingly and wear them for full sessions.

We are starting to compile a range of relevant information which can be replicated and available free via our website for others wanting to undertake similar projects

We have had a number of enquiries from visitors and members of the community who have seen the project, asking us to make bird boxes, bird feeders etc for them. Based on this we see potential to set up a small social enterprise in the future

Pupils are feeling a sense of control and ownership of the space they are creating. This is particularly valuable as people with complex disability are more often in the role of passive recipient rather than active creator.

Second place in ‘Capital Growth’ competition. We were the only special school selected.

Pupils are learning valuable vocational skills in a real life environment which will be a foundation for potential future further education and employment

The project provides a visible window showcasing the work of the organisation within the local community

6. How would you spend any prize money to further your project/initiative?

Many people with autism have related sensory issues. They can be hypersensitive to noise, smell, texture in a way that is hard for many of us to comprehend. Fabric next to the skin can feel like barbed wire, certain sounds can induce nausea. This can have a huge negative impact on quality of daily life which in turn can result in challenging behaviour. An important element of our work is helping our pupils learn to tolerate sensory triggers and control their sensory overload. Our plan is to create a ‘sensory path’ entirely based on the theme of nature along one side of our site. This will have a number of offshoots leading to ‘rooms’ focusing on particular senses. The path surface will incorporate a range of different textures eg bark,
cobbles and will in part be enclosed by a willow tunnel. ‘Rooms’ will cover each sense. For example hearing will include wind chimes and bird song recordings. Texture will include large pots of pine cones, smooth pebbles, mud. Smell will incorporate a range of aromatic plants. Design of the new space will be overseen by our horticulture and landscaping teachers who will work closely with our Occupational Therapist and Speech Therapist who are able to provide specialist advice around sensory issues. Pupils will be fully involved in design and creation of the new area and we shall also invite pupils from local schools to come and help our pupils with the construction.

A number of notable key features will be used in combination to achieve this innovative development to our project including total involvement of pupils with complex disability, tangible opportunity for them to work together with mainstream peers and use of natural materials in original ways to address sensory issues associated with autism in a natural environment.

Progress will be recorded through a photograph diary and recording of quotes and comments from all involved.

E. Submitting your entry

Please return this entry form by 5pm, Wednesday 17, Dec 2014 by uploading it on this page

Please add any documents, photos, videos or other media that are relevant to your entry and email them to awards@lemosandcrane.co.uk quoting ‘Growing Localities award entry’ and your organisation name in the subject heading.

If you have any problems uploading your entry please also email awards@lemosandcrane.co.uk
Thank you for your time and effort which is much appreciated. Good luck!