

## HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

### Lambeth GP Food Co-op working with London Borough of Lambeth

## Supporting patients self-isolating through a Gardening at Home Scheme

### Background

The purpose of this initiative was:

- provide practical help and support through gardening at home to patients managing Long Covid or stroke
- telephone and email support from expert garden buddies
- reduce isolation and increase sense of belonging through growing vegetables

### How it started

This work started from scratch, and our first step was to recruit a cohort of buddies. Two members, a nurse and a nutritionist became the first garden buddies, and we recruited three buddies through the Lambeth Council's network. This was followed by designing a quality framework for the buddying scheme that met national coaching, mentoring, and buddying standards. One of our members drew on his experience with developing a similar scheme for the NHS, which was then adapted for use for the gardening at home initiative. We went live in November 2020 and continued to support a growing community of people who were self-isolating during last winter and into Spring 2021. Patients were referred to us by clinical staff attached to the Lambeth Community Stroke Team (Guys & St Thomas's Hospital) or local GP's. As all patients were self-isolating, our gardening buddies provided telephone and email support during and after lockdown, which provided sufficient contact to ensure that they felt well supported and became active gardeners whilst remaining at home. Packs of seeds were posted to patients at regular intervals and recipes that could be used with the vegetables being grown. Sutton seeds provided seed packs free of charge. A small grant from the London Community Response Fund helped us design, deliver and support the scheme. We are aiming to continue this work in the autumn and winter of 2022. In the words of one patient:

"...the Covid-19 Pandemic struck, and I was told to shield. The isolation and idleness...damaged my physical and mental health...I found myself spiralling into depression...I was in a very dark place. I joined the

gardening at home/garden buddy scheme, receiving seeds and regular contact from Hilda (buddy), who helped me through the lockdown."

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**For further information contact:**

Ed Rosen

Director, Lambeth GP Food Co-op

[gpfoodcoop@gmail.com](mailto:gpfoodcoop@gmail.com) | <http://lambeth.gpfoodcoop.org.uk/>

**Caption 1: Lambeth GP Food Co-op founding members**



**Caption 2: NHS courgette grown by a patient grown by King's College Hospital**

