

A Year in Our Garden

Exploring arts, processes, and our surroundings over four seasons in Cranmore Community Co-Op Garden with Kids' Own Publishing Partnership.

1. Executive Summary;
2. Introduction/background;
3. Outline of team and key participants; including the number of Creative Practitioners/Artists that received funding through this agreement;
4. Outputs and outcomes (as per Sections 4 and 5 of SLA);
5. Public Engagement outcomes, e.g., levels of audience engagement and participation (if appropriate), media coverage, social media analytics, etc.;
6. A summary of the Project evaluation;
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8. Conclusion.
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1. Executive Summary

The "A Year in Our Garden" project, held over the past 2 years at Cranmore Community Co-Op Garden in collaboration with the local community, was a climate-focused, arts-integrated initiative developed by Kids' Own Publishing Partnership. It engaged an intergenerational group from the community in exploring the environment, climate change, and biodiversity through a mix of art, science, and dialogue. This initiative aligns with Creative Ireland's efforts to promote creativity for societal wellbeing and addresses the profound need for collaborative, locally grounded approaches to climate action. Throughout the four seasons of this project, community members, artists, and scientists collaborated to create a unique garden yearbook, documenting their insights and creative outputs in both print and digital forms. The project's ultimate goal was to foster meaningful conversations on climate action and sustainability, leading to behaviour change at a community level. This report provides a look at the project's execution, the outcomes achieved, community engagement efforts, and key findings, concluding with reflections and future opportunities for further impact.



2. Introduction/Background

The "A Year in Our Garden" project was conceived as a collaboration between Kids' Own Publishing Partnership and Cranmore Community Co-Op to address climate change and environmental issues within an urban, community-based context. The project emerged in response to a government initiative aimed at harnessing creative practices to support climate action, foster public engagement, and build resilience within communities. Grounded in Cranmore Community Co-Op's garden; Sligo, the initiative served as a site for four artist-and-scientist residencies, each tailored to a specific season, and encouraged both young and older participants to reimagine their relationship with the natural world.

Cranmore, a large urban housing estate identified as disadvantaged, provided the setting for the engagement with diverse community members, many of whom may not otherwise have access to discussions on climate or environmental science. Over the year, residents participated in hands-on workshops, scientific explorations, and creative exercises facilitated by Kids' Own associated panel of artists and scientists. This unique partnership introduced participants to a wide array of environmental concepts while encouraging reflection, community connection, and solutions-oriented thinking. As a culmination of this process, the publication of the book *'A Year In Our*

Garden’ explores the project’s learnings, making them accessible to a broader audience while celebrating the voices of those involved.

This project also afforded Kids’ Own the time and resources to investigate the most effective and sustainable print practices. We envisage this project being the foundation of a long-term collaboration between Kids’ Own and Cranmore Co-Op, as well as having a network in place that will make this project scalable and adaptable in other settings nationally.



3. Outline of team and key participants; including the number of Creative Practitioners/Artists that received funding through this agreement;

Cranmore Community Co-Operative Society LTD – Community Development workers: Lisa Wallace, Carolina Pena Navarro and Connie Nell.

Cranmore Community Co-operative Society Ltd known locally as ‘the Co-op’ is a charity that provides community development, youth services, and community support for Cranmore and all communities in the Sligo East City Area and beyond.

They work to include, empower, and build the capacity of community members in a variety of ways. Acting as a hub for all ages, they provide a range of activities, events, and facilities to encourage local participation.

Kids’ Own Publishing Partnership – Director and CEO: Ciara Gallagher.

Project Manager : Lorna Kavanagh. Design Manager : Martin Corr. Marketing Manager : Lorna Golden.

Kids’ Own is Ireland’s only dedicated publisher of books by children. Through a range of local, national and international projects, we connect children with professional artists and publish the work that they create.

Kids’ Own work in defence of children’s right to culture and believe passionately that children should have a space to express themselves through the arts. Kids’ Own give visibility and status to children’s artwork and writing within mainstream culture.

An ethos of social justice underpins the work. Lots of Kids’ Own projects have involved children and families from diverse cultures, such as Traveller culture, migrant, intercultural and multilingual populations, and children who are homeless, socially excluded, or part of a minority group.

Panel of associated artists whose arts practices centre on the environment, the natural world and ecological themes are - Ruth Le Gear. Sarah Ellen Lundy. Naomi Draper. Brenda Kearney. Karen Webster.

Panel of associated scientists and experts in the field of environment, natural world and ecology- Dr Agnieszka Piwowarczyk - Soil Scientist. Dr Róisín NigFhloinn - Ecologist. Martina Kilian – Educator. Dr Ruth Quinn - Assistant lecturer of Civil, Environmental and Water Engineering at ATU Sligo.

Artistic and environmental project advisor and liaison between artists/scientists – Vanya Lambrecht Ward. – artistic practice looks at perception, decay, and relationships to space, place and environment are central. – Lecturer Fine Arts at ATU Sligo and Kids’ Own Associate Artist.

Twenty-three community members from ages 7 to actively retired participated, coming together to explore sustainability through art, science, and collaboration.

4. Outputs and Outcomes (as per Sections 4 and 5 of SLA);

Agreed Outputs

A. Create a panel of Kids’ Own Associate artists-in-residence in Cranmore Co-Op Community Gardens across four seasons (autumn 2023 to summer 2024), including artists, subject matter experts and scientists: a. Sarah Lundy b. Brenda Kearney c. Vanya Lambrecht Ward d. Karen Webster e. Ruth Le Gear f. Ruth Quinn g. Aga Piwowarczyk h. Fiona Britton j. Martina Killian.

B. The artist/scientist pair will collaborate with the local intergenerational group from the community for 6-8 week period (per season) to formulate questions, explore and experiment, through scientific experiments and experimental arts practice

C. These artists and scientists will connect with visual artist Vanya Lambrecht Ward, a Kids’ Own Associate Artist since 2008, and whose practice focuses on ecology and the natural world.

D. Dr Fiona Britton is a lecturer in Sustainability and Regulatory Affairs in the Department of Environmental Science at ATU, Sligo, specialising in sustainability, resource management and stakeholder engagement.

E. Dr Ruth Quinn is a lecturer at ATU Sligo, teaching environmental engineering. Ruth is a water engineer specialising in community water management.

F. Dr Aga Piwowarczyk is an experienced researcher who has worked on a variety of soil and environmental projects in academic and community contexts.

G. Dissemination of artist work through seasonal exhibitions and pop-up events. These events will be towards the end of each season residency period. They will also act as an

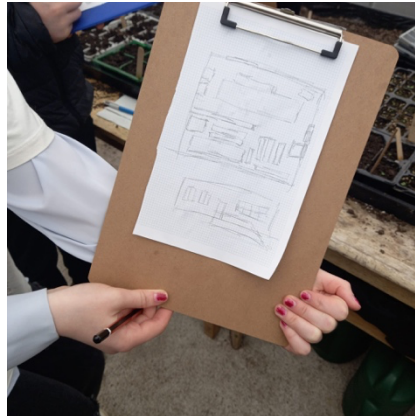
advertisement and information station for the next season's residency. They will invite and draw in new members of the community to engage with the project.

H. A Garden Yearbook will be produced at the end of this project and disseminated widely both locally and nationally.

Agreed Outcomes

The outputs of this project are dependent on the following:

- A. The purpose of the yearbook publication is to provide a record of and insight into the year's project and learning.
- B. To reach a wider audience and readership, both locally and nationally
- C. Provide a foundation for the continuation of this partnership and a model and template for other community groups.
- D. Provide an opportunity to explore sustainable publishing practices.
- E. Ensure that we listen to a community's intergenerational voice, which will have a lasting effect on both Kids' Own and Cranmore Co-Op's work long into the future.



The primary output of "A Year in Our Garden" is the garden yearbook—a carefully curated collection of artworks, reflections, and scientific insights discovered by participants throughout the year. Each season contributed to this yearbook, capturing the evolving understanding of biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable practices as they unfolded in real time.

The project's seasonal exhibitions and events allowed participants to showcase their work, inviting feedback and drawing in new members of the community. Each artist-and-scientist residency also produced a series of workshops and discussion forums, resulting in unique, season-specific art pieces.



A short breakdown of the seasons are as follows:

Season 1. Artist Ruth Le Gear. This season imagined a world where water responds to emotions, exploring how our thoughts might influence its structure. Through techniques like freezing (inspired by Masaru Emoto), marbling with seaweed, and painting with ice, the group connected creatively with water in all its forms. Working with Dr Agnieszka Piwowarczyk the group examined soil's relationship to water, studying textures and dynamics using methods like the jar shake and microscopic analysis.



Season 2. Artist Sarah Lundy. The group explored the concept of a “wild and precious life” by working with and being inspired by preserved wildlife specimens. This enhanced their connection to nature. Through many various creative activities like drawing, deep looking, sounds and deep listening, walks, planting, dissecting and discussion, the group examined their empathy for the environment. A hands-on experience of nature walks in the local forested area with Ecologist Róisín NigFhloinn encouraged the group to reflect on their role in protecting habitats and the creatures within them.



Season 3. Artists Naomi Draper and Brenda Kearney. A theme of “welcoming who and what shows up,” emerged from this season. The group spent their time exploring the community garden through workshops in drawing, print-making, and lots of observation. Together, they embraced new visitors both human and animal/insect to the garden. Welcoming all with enthusiasm to see what they can bring to the space. A large focus of this season was a gathering event in the garden. Making pizza in the outdoor oven, creating snacks from ingredients in the garden, hosting tours of the polytunnel and flowering beds and offering all that came a refreshing drink of mint sparkle! The group got to show off the fruits of their labour from this season and explore it with the local community that came to visit. A fun and insightful talk was hosted by Martina Kilian - environment educator, on what fauna and flora we see and welcome to our garden. Armed with magnifying glasses the group explored in-dept the garden, not all slugs eat our greens and some actually help our vegetables grow!



Season 4. Artist Karen Webster. This season was lush and abundant—just like nature itself! The group explored the use of cyanotype, delving into ideas of transformation and alchemy. How do sunlight and water alter a cyanotype image? Deep discussion on how sunshine transforms soil and water to nourish our plants and provide food, were had. Reflecting on the many gifts plants offer, the group wrote their

thoughts on labels. Discussions centred on abundance versus scarcity and the circular economy versus consumerism.

The group created handmade paper from nettles. The season invited everyone to reflect on what a garden gives and, in return, what we can give back to a garden.

We can be growers, gardeners, gatherers and guardians.

Learning about rainwater facts in an urban setting, what happens to rain in a town, where does it flow, where does it collect, what benefit or damage does it cause. These questions were presented and discussed with Dr Ruth Quinn - Assistant lecturer of Civil, Environmental and Water Engineering at ATU Sligo.



The sustained engagement over each season fostered a sense of ownership and pride among the participants, who contributed ideas, created artworks, and explored scientific activities. The project's structure—focusing on specific themes like soil health, water management, flowers and fauna, food from the garden and biodiversity—enabled a comprehensive exploration of environmental issues that resonate locally but have global significance.

Another significant outcome was the establishment of the strong partnership between Kids' Own Publishing and Cranmore Community Co-Op. Cranmore Community Co-Op serves a large intergenerational remit within their community. Fostering relationships with key organisations means Kids' Own can continue to comfortably work with this community on future engaging and dynamic projects. Kids' Own and Cranmore Community Co-Op are committed to continuing to work together and have been assessing different funding possibilities.

5. Public Engagement Outcomes

Public engagement was a core component of "A Year in Our Garden." Seasonal exhibitions drew in audiences from within and beyond Cranmore, making connections and inspiring new members of the community to participate. Each season concluded with a pop-up gathering/sharing event the collaborative outputs of that residency period, generating excitement and curiosity for the next seasonal residency.

Each public engagement event was designed as a gathering—a space for shared learning, hands-on experiences, and a celebration of the work created. These gatherings were not just opportunities to showcase activities to the public but also moments of connection, exchange, and collective discovery.

After Season 1, the gathering took place in January 2024, welcoming the local community to explore topics such as soil health, garden fauna and flora, and the often-overlooked yet vital role of worms in a thriving garden. With an in-depth look at composting and a hands-on experience with the ‘wormy’ compost bin, visitors gained a new appreciation for these tiny but powerful garden allies.

Another example is Season 3, the gathering moved outdoors, taking full advantage of the warm weather and bright evenings. This event centred on sharing—the recipes and artworks created throughout the season were showcased with the community, fostering conversations around sustainability, creativity, and food. Young participants led tours of the garden, proudly guiding visitors through the green spaces. Thoughtfully designed tablecloths welcomed guests, setting the scene for engaging discussions between participants and their invited guests.

Each season had its own unique gathering where the group and members of the public were invited to reflect, respond and react to the seasons finding.

Towards the end of the engagement when the book was in its design phase a new type of gathering developed. The participants got together with Vanya Lambrecht Ward and Kids’ Own staff to discuss early design drafts of the book. The input and feedback from the group was vital in the design evolution of the book.

Another such gathering with the group was around the book launch, handing over ownership to the group in how they would like the evening to unfold, what they would like to display from the past years’ worth of artwork, what food they would like to serve etc. This was all carefully discussed and confirmed with smaller gatherings between the group, Vanya and Kids’ Own staff.

These gatherings were more than just events—they were celebrations of learning, collaboration, ownership and the joy of growing and creating together.

The final showcase event and book launch, celebrating the incredible achievements of the group and the wider impact of the project, took place in December 2024, marking a truly special moment.

Curated by artist Ruth Le Gear and artist advisor Vanya Lambrecht Ward, this event was a carefully designed celebration of the entire project artwork.

Artist Brenda Kearney worked with young members from the group on recipes to create and make, serving the event audience a rich and tasty menu with locally sourced ingredients. Unlike previous gatherings, which focused on individual seasons, this event highlighted the full two-year journey, bringing together the depth and brilliance of the work created. Every aspect of the project was displayed with prominence, reflecting the dedication, creativity, and hard work of all involved.



The project successfully reached intergenerational audiences, welcoming an age span of 6yrs to actively retired, portions of this age group can often be excluded from mainstream discussions on climate change. Participation was intentionally designed to be inclusive and welcoming, encouraging contributions from individuals with varying degrees of familiarity with science and art. As a result, each season saw increased attendance and engagement, building a sense of collective ownership within the community.

The outcome book 'A Year In Our Garden', extends the reach of the project further. Its distribution through local networks, including schools, libraries, and community centres, ensures that the insights and stories generated by this initiative resonate with wider audiences, potentially inspiring similar projects in other communities.



It was a particularly proud moment to launch the book 'A Year In Our Garden', a publication that encapsulates two years of artistic and scientific exploration. More than just a record, this book serves as a lasting resource, sparking new conversations and inspiring future engagement with the themes of nature, transformation, and

sustainability. Sharing this milestone with the participants and the local community was a testament to the project's impact and legacy.

The event's significance was further recognised when it was featured in *The Independent.ie* and *The Sligo Champion*, shining a positive light on the participants and the community, and ensuring the reach of the project extends far beyond its initial scope.

Figures for website and social media reach:

Social Media Reach 34,569

website page views – 260



6. Summary of Project Evaluation

The evaluation of "A Year in Our Garden" focused on the project's impact on participants, community engagement, and the efficiency of the interdisciplinary, arts-based approach to climate education. Feedback from participants, collected through informal discussions, indicated a deepened sense of environmental awareness and a stronger connection to the community. Many expressed newfound interest in both the arts and environmental sciences, particularly through the hands-on, exploratory nature of the workshops.

"Some people have worms for themselves, I don't really know. I just think I learned that there is a lot of people who really care about nature close to me, not far away from me."

"I've really enjoyed ice, the water season. I enjoyed how it looked, doing it was simple and easy and it turned out really beautiful. It was wild, you never knew how it was going to turn out, it still looked really nice. It was messy and you were free to do anything you wanted"

By integrating art and science, the project created accessible entry points into complex environmental issues, allowing participants to see how their everyday actions impact the larger ecosystem. Observations from project facilitators indicated that participants not only gained knowledge but were inspired to make practical changes, such as

adopting sustainable gardening practices and reducing their use of single-use plastics, recycling and using what is seasonally grown in the garden to eat.

“I’d be more conscious of litter and of separating recycling. Making sure you bring back your cans and bottles and that you don’t pour anything like white spirit down the sink. Water was a principal of the project. I wouldn’t be going vegan or anything, but it makes me think more about things.”

“It’s very professional looking [the book]. It looks like something you’d see in a library. It’s a good effort, a good job.”

Finally, the success of the book as a unifying project outcome provided a tangible, lasting record of the year’s activities. It is anticipated that the book ‘A Year In Our Garden’ will have continued educational value, serving as both a reference for future community projects and a model for intergenerational, arts-based climate action initiatives.

Some final reflections on the project from the participants:

“It was a life saver for me because my mam and dad were sick at the time and come over here once a week and tell my folks not to ring me because I’m going over to Cranmore to do the project with the ladies over there, to come out and do the project I got some great ideas for my own work.”

“Also when I’m over the town doing the shopping I hear someone calling my name and it’s the guys from the project and its so heartwarming. I never had kids so its lovely to feel you’ve made an impression. With so many negative influences out there you’d hope you have made a positive impression.”



7. Relevant Findings

This project highlighted the transformative potential of an intergenerational collaboration, supporting a sense of shared purpose that extends beyond the project's duration. New friendships and companionships were formed. This approach not only enriched the creative outputs but also strengthened social bonds within the community, laying the foundation for ongoing climate action and future integrational projects.

The initial stages of the project were marked by a degree of disorder, which ultimately provided valuable new insights into the nature of working within a community context—an environment that is inherently dynamic and subject to continual change. As well as each space and group dynamic needing time to settle into itself, members rightly possess a sense of ownership over the shared space, this can sometimes manifest as inconsistent or minimal commitment to projects, as individuals participate according to their personal schedules.

Although the project engaged with an older demographic, it can prove challenging to encourage their participation. Possible reasons for this included a reluctance to leave the comfort of their homes, shyness, and perhaps apprehension about collaborating with younger participants.

The inclusion of a different artist each season greatly enriched the project, broadening the group's exposure to new ideas and skills and kept it fresh and new. However, this structure also presented challenges, as the group often appeared to have just become accustomed to the working style of one artist before transitioning to another, with each bringing a distinct approach and rhythm.

Collaboration with Cranmore Co-Op was of significant value, particularly regarding community engagement. Their established relationships and deep understanding of the local population played a crucial role in both participant recruitment and sustaining interest in the project. The expertise of community workers in this regard proved to be an invaluable resource.

As a positive legacy of the intergenerational aspect of the project, the teenage participants have since established an independent youth group in partnership with the Co-Op. They continue to meet regularly within the space and have successfully welcomed new members.

Furthermore, one of the participating artists, Brenda Kearney, has developed an ongoing relationship with the Co-Op and intends to return to collaborate with the local community as part of her individual artistic practice. Her future work will focus on the community café, with particular attention to themes of food and the garden space.



8. Conclusion

"A Year in Our Garden" has demonstrated the potential of arts and community-driven initiatives to engage, educate, and inspire action on climate issues. By combining scientific knowledge with artistic expression, this project provided an accessible and inclusive platform for exploring environmental challenges, ultimately nurturing a sense of agency and resilience within the community. Through its innovative structure, the project has shown that meaningful climate action can begin in local spaces, transforming ordinary community members into environmental advocates. The garden yearbook will stand as both a culmination of collective efforts and a roadmap for future initiatives. It offers an accessible resource for environmental education and serves as a testament to the impact of creativity in building community resilience. Moving forward, "A Year in Our Garden" could serve as a model for other communities, demonstrating how creative approaches can bridge generational divides, deepen understanding, and inspire hope in addressing the climate crisis. The success of this project affirms the power of collaborative, arts-based climate education and the vital role of community gardens as spaces for connection, learning, and change.



9. Impact.

The "A Year in Our Garden" project had a profound impact on the individuals and the community involved, fostering a stronger awareness of climate change, biodiversity, and sustainability. Through collaborative, intergenerational sessions in the Cranmore Community Co-Op Garden, participants—ranging from 6yrs to actively retired—experienced a meaningful shift in both behaviour and attitudes toward environmental responsibility.

The impact can be understood across several key areas:

1. Increased Awareness and Understanding of Environmental Issues

The project successfully raised awareness of pressing environmental challenges, particularly the biodiversity crisis and the interconnectedness of human and natural ecosystems. By engaging in workshops with scientists and artists, participants deepened their understanding of soil health, water conservation, garden plants and food, seasons and what they bring, flowers and fauna and the importance of sustainable gardening practices. This experiential learning approach made complex issues accessible, particularly for those who may not have been familiar with or inclined toward scientific topics. Consequently, individuals became more informed and motivated to consider these issues in their everyday lives.

"I have a question. Is water wet? Yeah, it is wet. Well it makes other stuff wet but is it wet?"

"Did you know, birds spread plant seeds by eating them and then pooping them out somewhere else where they grow away from the parent plant"

2. Behavioural Shifts toward Sustainable Practices

Practical, hands-on activities—such as soil science demonstrations, water exploration, and communal gardening—encouraged participants to incorporate eco-friendly practices into their routines. For example, participants explored seed saving and appreciated the value of native plant species for supporting biodiversity. The seasonal, recurring structure of the project reinforced these behaviours, as participants returned to the garden with a new awareness each season. This ongoing involvement helped to solidify these sustainable practices as habits.

"I enjoyed drawing and sketching and looking at different things in the garden."

"Our gardens bring colour into our lives after the Irish Winter."

3. Attitudinal Changes and Collective Responsibility

The intergenerational and community-based nature of the project supported a shared sense of responsibility and a collective mindset toward climate action. Working alongside both artists and scientists, participants became more open to interdisciplinary solutions to environmental issues, realising that both science and creativity are essential in tackling the climate crisis. This blending of artistic and

scientific approaches shifted attitudes, helping people to see themselves as active contributors to environmental change rather than passive observers.

A parent and child took part in the project together: “ I liked sitting across from her and doing the art together that was really nice. She learned loads and came back with loads of facts. She was picking up on stuff and she’s been asking us lots of questions since.”

4. Empowerment and Climate Action Advocacy

By providing a safe and supportive space for conversations and learning, the project empowered individuals to feel that they could contribute meaningfully to climate action. Participants, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, felt included in critical discussions on environmental challenges and were encouraged to voice their ideas and concerns. This empowerment was visible in the enthusiasm of community members to share their learnings at seasonal exhibitions.

“The first week we came here, we had bees in little jars that we got to draw. We each had our own little bee to draw. I know they’re a large amount of the pollinators in Ireland. I remember we had conversations about the fact that not all bees sting, some people don’t believe that”

“I like the group. It doesn’t matter to me what age group. I will show the book to family and friends. Thank you very much for having us every Wednesday. I really enjoyed it.”

5. Social Cohesion and Community Resilience

The project built a stronger, more resilient community network, where participants supported each other in their shared commitment to sustainability. By bridging generational and socio-economic divides, the project fostered connections between community members who may not typically interact, thereby enhancing social cohesion. This newfound unity is crucial for community resilience, as members are now more likely to continue working together on future initiatives.

“I enjoyed being around people, not just people my age, which is what this is about as it is an intergenerational project and people from different backgrounds. It was nice to meet them talk to them and find out more about them.”

