

**LEARNING VISIT REPORT**  
**South London Botanical Institute 13140**

<b>1.1 Date of visit:</b> November 14 <sup>th</sup> 2017	<b>1.2 Name of visiting Grants Officer:</b> Joan Millbank	<b>1.3 People met with:</b> Caroline Pankhurst, Education Manager. Volunteers.
<b>1.4 Programme Area &amp; Outcomes:</b> Improving London's Environment 'More Londoners with a greater knowledge and understanding of the 'green' environment and biodiversity' and 'more young people understand the benefit of growing local food and its nutritional value'.		
<b>1.5 Purpose of the award:</b> £76,500 over three years towards the salary of an Education and Outreach Coordinator, Project Manager and running costs of Botany on the Plate programme.		
<b>MONITORING INFORMATION</b>		
<b>2.1 Project Outcome 1:</b> 90% of children and young people participating (at least 625 pa) show greater understanding of the importance of food plants and want to grow more food plants. <b>Progress made:</b> In year one 18 primary schools visited the Institute and participated in the project (Botany on Your Plate). A total of 540 children benefited from activities including looking at food plants under microscopes, drawing parts of food plants, identifying food plants in the garden and tasting fruits.		
<b>2.2 Project Outcome 2:</b> 90% of children and young people (at least 625 pa) are more interested in plants and the local environment as a result. <b>Progress made:</b> See above.		
<b>2.3 Project Outcome 3:</b> 90% of educators (at least 100 pa) are enabled to better utilise their food garden in and out the classroom. <b>Progress made:</b> No feedback or evidence available.		
<b>2.4 Project Outcome 4:</b> 90% of participants (at least 810 people) discover new skills and knowledge about food plants (from Saturday workshops). <b>Progress made:</b> 13 workshops were organised in year 1; of which 2 were family sessions and 7 were adults only sessions. Positive benefit was implied from visitor feedback.		
<b>2.5 Project Outcome 5:</b> Food trail available as resource for taught discovery sessions and for casual visitors with 25% of visitors discovering new information about plants (2250 people over the 3 years). <b>Progress made:</b> The Food trail leaflet, which outlines all edible plants in the garden was produced and labels for some of the food plants in the garden made. Discovery of new information by visitors was implied from visit feedback from 13 adult/family Saturday workshops undertaken in year 1.		
<b>GRANT OFFICER COMMENTS</b>		
The South London Botanical Institute (SLBI) is a lovely example of how an enduring bequest can contribute to public education. The house and garden offer an unusual		

– albeit small – setting for South Londoners to engage in environmental education, connect with their local natural environment and be inspired. SLBI was endowed by one Allan Octavian Hume in 1910 to be a working men’s rival to Kew Gardens. Housed in a large Victorian house in Tulse Hill SLBI holds an extensive botanical library, a herbarium of some 100,000 pressed plants and a small garden which includes a moss trail, poisonous border, medicinal plants, dye garden and a wildlife pond. The institute is run by its trustees, 3 part-time employees and 40 volunteers.

SLBI has been awarded a 3-year grant under ‘Improving London’s Environment’. While the grant contributes towards the cost of a project titled “Botany on a Plate”, it is more in effect a core grant. ‘Botany on a Plate’ seeks to help audiences of all ages to understand the botany of plants - local and more exotic - and their different uses. It provides a setting for school children, families and local residents to explore food plant physiology, uses and production. On the day of the learning visit a Year 3 school party (c.30 children, teachers and helpers) from Peckham visited the Institute. Split into 3 groups, each child participated in a range of activities including examining the leaf structure of herbs under a microscope, undertaking a plant identification and learning quiz in the garden, and learning the structure of a plant through a ‘cut and paste’ exercise. The initial introduction and conduct of each session was really engaging, information was pitched at a level appropriate to the age of the children and it was clear from the children’s reaction that they really enjoyed the activities. The teachers and helpers also made positive comments.

More difficult to gauge – if not near impossible - is the measurable benefit to the children (and adult learners at the Saturday sessions). Measuring the educational and personal learning outcomes are particularly challenging because SLBI’s interaction with the children is limited e.g. up to 2 x 2 hour sessions only, and the activities are delivered through a group rather than a one-to-one setting. Feedback is sought from the teachers (and the adult participants on the Saturday sessions) but by necessity the questions focus on customer satisfaction/ views on session delivery/approach and gathering ideas for future work. It also allows SLBI to gather demographic details, although details need to be more systematically collected.

Another challenge is widening participation. SLBI has responded positively to your grant officer’s suggestion to target traditionally under-represented groups. In the last year it has made contact with a local learning disability organisation and adults with learning disabilities have attended structured sessions at the gardens. However, SLBI states that it reaches a wide cross section of residents through the Saturday sessions but it does not have the data to show this in practice. The Education Manager agreed to discuss a strategy for widening participation with the trustees and colleagues.

Your grants officer discussed in detail at the visit how monitoring and evaluation systems could be improved, despite the challenges discussed above. Progress towards these improvements will be expected in the organisation’s year 2 monitoring report, due later in 2018.