

MEETING: 28/01/2016

Ref: 12967

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Improving London's Environment

The Garden Classroom (TGC)

Adv: Sandra Davidson

Amount requested: £81,373

Base: Islington

Benefit: Islington

Amount recommended: £81,200

The Charity

The Garden Classroom (TGC) was established in 2008 as a social enterprise by a local founder member of King Henry's Walk Garden in Islington. It connects inner city children and young people to the natural world by providing creative outdoor experiences that inspire and educate while nurturing a respect for the environment. It provides bespoke learning outside the classroom – projects are delivered in local parks and gardens - to improve access to nature and to educate the next generation with the skills and values needed for an ecologically sound future. In addition, TGC delivers continuous professional development (CPD) training for teachers on behalf of the Royal Horticultural Society, to equip teachers with the skills and confidence to teach outside of the classroom. During 2013-14 TGC delivered 189 educational sessions and high quality outdoor events and activities, working with over 5,200 beneficiaries.

The Application

TGC has built up a good reputation for delivering high quality environmental workshops, teaching session and events. It creates innovative learning experiences in urban parks and gardens to inspire children and families to discover the joys of the natural world around them.

The Recommendation

TGC aims to build on and develop new programmes to match the changing school curriculum, improving the services offered to schools. The two proposed new posts will enable TGC to meet the increased demand for its services, without a reduction in quality.

£81,200 over three years (£26,500; £27,100; £27,600) for 4dpw of the Community Education Support Officer's salary costs; and 1dpw of the Finance Officer's salary costs.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
18/04/2013	£25,000 towards the salary and on costs of the Chief Executive to consolidate and deliver an environmental programme in North East London.
14/10/2010	£40,000 (2 x £20,000) over two years towards the salary and on costs of the Chief Executive, delivering an environmental education programme in North East London. The grant is conditional on the Trust not being the organisation's largest single funder in year 2.

Background and detail of proposal

The Garden Classroom has grown significantly since starting in 2008 and now works with over 40 primary, secondary and special needs schools in Islington, Hackney and Haringey. TGC has become a highly regarded ambassador for reconnecting

with nature and the outdoor learning movement in London. It has won a number of awards including two from the Forestry Commission, The Mayor of London and the Tree Council for their tree education programme. In 2012 TGC's chief executive (Marnie Rose) was named Best Learning Outside the Classroom Innovator at the national awards for Outstanding Contribution to Learning Outside the Classroom. In 2015 TGC earned, for the third time, the quality badge from Islington Council for Learning Outside the Classroom. TGC works closely with local stakeholders, Islington Council recently granted it the use of an ex park-rangers building in Newington Green, with the support of local business and funders to bring the building back into use. The hut is clearly visible and attracted wide attention

Having outgrown capacity for delivering bee workshops at King Henry's Garden, funding was secured from Awards for All to set up a new bee facility at Gillespie Park, Islington to be launched summer 2016. Workshops are led by facilitators trained by a number of organisations including the London Wildlife Trust and the Royal Horticultural Society. Workshops provide an opportunity for children to increase their understanding of the natural world around them and to understand precisely where their food comes from - and no, it's not the supermarket! TGC's innovative services have been recognised by teachers, who return year on year for curriculum linked workshops and the evaluation of the service from schools has been consistently high.

Financial Information

Total budgeted income for the current year to 31 August 2016 is £139,754, of which £72,036 (53%) had been confirmed by November 2015.

The organisation's reserves policy target is very low at approximately 2 weeks' worth of total expenditure. It considers this to be sufficient cover because it currently has the benefit of free office and meeting room space from Islington Council until the 1st of December 2018. The reserves target is therefore based on providing cover for other running costs, to run a basic service for three months, amounting to £2,900. It can be seen from the table that the actual holding of free reserves is ahead of this target and is forecast to increase to £33k by the end of the current year. Whilst free reserves are ahead of target, your officers do not consider the holding to be excessive as it equates to a 3.2 months' worth of total expenditure and because the charity may have to start paying for its accommodation by the end of 2018.

The organisation has not previously identified its cost of generating funds in its year end accounts but considers it a sensible disclosure to include in future. For the table below, estimates have been provided by the organisation. These costs appear low, which it explains is due to receiving a significant amount of voluntary fund raising help, which it estimates to have a value of approximately £5k per annum.

Year end at 31 August	2013/14 Accounts (Exempt from Audit)	2014/15 Draft Accounts	2015/16 Current Year Budget
	£	£	£
Income and Expenditure			
Income	71,815	101,121	139,754
Expenditure	91,056	90,875	124,848
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(19,241)	9,877	14,906
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	0	368	0
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	(19,241)	10,245	14,906
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	(26.8%)	10.1%	10.7%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	5,500 (7.7%)	3,000 (3.0%)	3,100 (2.2%)
Free unrestricted reserves			
Free unrestricted reserves held at Year End	8,695	18,572	33,478
How many months' worth of expenditure	1.1	2.5	3.2
Reserves Policy target	2,900	2,900	2,900
How many months' worth of expenditure	0.4	0.4	0.3
Free reserves over/(under) target	5,795	15,672	30,578