**Intergenerational National Network**

Meeting on 22 June 2016 at the Botanic Cottage, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

**Present**

Sutherland Forsyth Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Andy Cross Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Catherine Conway-Payne Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Roger Hyam Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Kirsty Alexander Stirling University

Anne Connor Outside the Box

Ruth Cape Outside the Box

Catherine Scrutton NHS Lothian

Ros Parkyn

Esther Craig Clyde Valley High

Andrew Keating Clyde Valley High

Ankale Denovan Falkirk Council

Moira Ross

John Buchanan

Kate McLean NHS Highland

Joan Wilson Trellis

Barbara Ramage North Lanarkshire Council

Jenni Inglis

Jo Cook Trellis

Jan Wallace

Pat Scrutton Intergenerational National Network

**Apologies**

Jenny Foulkes

Sue Waine

Anne Munro

Chris Dunhill

Anne Horn

Alan Hatton Yeo

Helena Barrett

Allison Galbraith

Gail Cassidy

Douglas Guest

**1. Lunch and introduction**

The meeting began with a lovely lunch on the first floor of the Botanic Cottage, including salad picked fresh from the garden; home-made scones; and jam made from produce from the garden.

After everyone had introduced themselves, Sutherland told us that the Botanic Cottage had opened officially in May 2016.

250 years ago, the Botanic Garden was on Leith Walk. At its entrance was a two storey house, and the head gardener, his wife and their three children lived there. In the 1860s the garden was moved, but the house remained. It became a family home, then a flat when the pavement was raised. In the early 2000s, it was the office of a van rental company when it went on fire, and was then at threat of demolition.

A community group researched its story, and discovered that it had been designed by John Adam and James Craig, and that its upper storey was one of the oldest surviving classrooms from the Age of Enlightenment. They also learned that there was an archive of related documents, including teaching diagrams and the names of the medical students who had been taught there.

They consulted a conservation architect, who told them that, in rare circumstances, it would be possible to move the whole building. The developer who had taken over the site agreed, and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) took on the project management to recreate it as a community facility.

In 2014 all the stones, beams, etc. were carefully numbered, and work began to move it to the RBGE where it now stands. The core building was erected in 2015, and in November 2015 the plasterers started work. As far as possible, they used the existing and historically appropriate materials.

The first students were taught in the classroom in May 1776, so the opening in May 2016 marked exactly 250 years of history.

The two wings now offer a potting shed; and a clear space for arts activities, etc.

It is already very well used. In the first two months there have been 94 different events, and 3,000 people have been involved. They are working with people with dementia; people with Parkinson’s disease; groups of young people with additional support needs; nurseries; schools; and community health projects. It is intended to be a resource for people across Edinburgh and beyond.

Their overall theme is health and wellbeing, which follows on naturally from the building’s original use as a teaching resource about the use of plants to improve health and wellbeing.

**2. Discover the Edible Garden**

After lunch Andy Cross took us for a walk for through some of the gardens in front of the Cottage.

A team of four part-time staff work in the Edible Garden with community groups, including some groups of people with additional support needs. Some attend regularly, and some for one-off sessions.

Primary and secondary schools also use the area on a regular or one-off basis, including “square foot” individual plots; and a whole new area is being planned for nursery school children.

In the area that was the builders’ yard, they are growing potatoes for the Cyrenians; and heritage (Swedish) wheat which they intend to thresh, mill and bake, working with Scotland the Bread (Andrew Whitley) in Scottish Borders.

They are also planning a garden which will be accessible for people with additional support needs.

There are a number of beds for specific community groups; for instance, Team+ groups of 7 – 8 young people with additional support needs, including autism. This project is now in its second year, and working well. Andy and a team of experienced volunteers work with them to grow vegetables and flowers; talk with them about where food comes from; and do some cooking. They used to have to use a tent and a gas stove, but now have the luxury of the Botanic Cottage! They also work with the support staff. The funding comes from the Postcode Lottery. The idea is that participants take the learning back home, and that it becomes part of their lives.

There is a demonstration garden which is looked after mainly by volunteers, some of them with support. They have some raised beds, but would like to create more, and higher, ones. They have particular demonstration sites, for instance, plants that thrive in the shade.

Students working towards an HND also have a particular area, where they look after the beds.

On Saturday there is a gathering, which is attended by some black and minority ethnic groups. They are especially keen on growing mooli and coriander. They learn techniques for using small plots and for growing things in pots.

The fruit garden, from which the lunchtime jam came, has been here for some time. They also have a polytunnel with a propagation area.

When community groups come in, they try always to have something to harvest, so that everyone can share food.

For instance, a group of Syrian refugees have been coming in (for a couple of hours over two months). Talking about food and growing is part of their English language learning.

For both ethical and practical reasons they do not use any chemicals. This makes the area attractive to and safe for wildlife. Frogs live in the pond and in the polytunnel.

They deliberately grow pollinator friendly plants, and do bumblebee walks with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, who are a partner.

There is an area of herbology and a patio garden.

The group thanked Andy for a lovely and fascinating walk, and returned inside the Botanic Cottage.

**3. Dementia Socials at the Botanics**

Sutherland Forsyth introduced this new programme, which began in autumn 2015 for people with dementia and their families and carers.

Many people have very fond memories of the Botanic Garden from throughout their lives: with parents; with visitors; with children; etc.

Many people also, as their health deteriorates, become less willing to go out. Younger people may still want to be active; but in a safe environment.

They were keen to develop a dementia programme which would be sustainable in its impact. They met with representatives from the other ‘national collections’; the Scottish National Gallery, the National Museum of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland. The National Gallery already had a very successful “Gallery Social Programme’. People come once a month and take part in activities, both hands-on and social. Rather than create something new, therefore, they all agreed to adopt this model and to run it as a pilot for two years.

They produced a joint leaflet, and are now running it on alternating Fridays at 10.30 a.m. for 48 weeks a year.

Conscious that the Royal Botanic Garden was set up 350 years ago as a physic garden, the RBGE socials have a strong focus on health and well-being through plants. Sutherland works with Catherine Conway-Payne. Catherine is a herbalist and runs herbology courses. Herbology is tactile and hands-on. They run a series of activities intended to give people a sensory-rich experience, including touch and, in particular aroma. Smell is a very important factor in memory.

They spend time in the garden, picking herbs, then bring them back into the classroom. Each session includes a range of activities. They work to keep the pace going, and include opportunities to move about.

Catherine added that although the sessions are planned, they are also designed to be adaptable and flexible. They adopt a creative approach, and ensure that there is a sense of fun, rather than being lectured to!

Catherine had gathered a range of herbs from the garden, and encouraged everyone to choose one and to talk about it.

Some people attending the sessions are very knowledgeable about plants; others know nothing, so they are careful neither to make assumptions nor to patronise people. They also take an equal interest in the person with dementia and their carer. They are clear that ‘dementia is not what defines you’.

The sessions usually have a loose theme, which may not be evidently connected with plants. For instance, all four venues adopted a Burns theme. At RBGE they looked at the plants and flowers in Burns’ poems. The curator at Inverleith is a guitarist, and he came and sang, ‘My love is like a red, red rose’.

The activities are usually quite simple; but they can have a big impact.

The sessions are planned on a six monthly basis. The RBGE sessions are currently supported by the Friends of the Botanics. All four venues are working together to secure funding for a longer term project which would include research on the benefits.

**4. Mindfulness**

Roger Hyam is a photographer who also works on digital projects. Over the next year he will also be leading a series of ‘mindfulness walks’.

We all have moments of connection with nature, but there is a risk that we become too involved in the practical aspects of conservation, preservation and cultivation, and forget about the spiritual side. This is important both for our physical and mental health.

Originally a botanist, he became interested in digital software in the context of plants. He is also ordained as a lay member of a Buddhist order, and sees potential parallels with Buddhist meditation.

There is abundant scientific evidence that spending time in green space has a positive and restorative impact on our lives. Even pictures of nature have more of an impact than street scenes!

He challenged Sutherland’s phrase about ‘keeping the pace going’, and said that sometimes we need time to stop and to absorb what is going on around us. Things that are ‘interesting’ are things we like to think about. But sometimes we need to stop thinking and start experiencing.

In our culture, we tend to assume that these magical moments happen by chance. But in fact anyone can develop the skill to choose to have and to enjoy these moments.

The mindfulness walks take two hours of slow walking, and the key is contact with one’s own breathing and with what is happening with one’s body. Anxiety produces shallow breathing, which, in turn, increases the anxiety. The psychological and physiological links are very powerful.

Roger led the group in a short breathing exercise.

He noted that adverts and recorded calls last about 29 – 30 seconds. This is how long it takes for a thought to register.

On mindfulness walks, people see something, stop and breathe, in order to create those moments and to establish a more powerful connection.

There is evidence that this approach is effective for people with anxiety and/or depression. They are planning to try it with people with dementia.

Roger’s final message was that we can all choose to be happy, and to engage with things that are important.

**5. Tea and further conversations**

At this point the group was invited downstairs to share afternoon tea, and to continue the conversations on a more informal basis.

**6. Date of next meeting**

6 October 2016 at PKAVS, Perth. The theme will be mental health and wellbeing in rural areas.