

# TRINITY NEWS

EST. 1953

(<https://trinitynews.ie/>)

[Features](https://trinitynews.ie/category/features/) (<https://trinitynews.ie/category/features/>)

30 March 2016



## How inner-city community gardening projects are making a difference

D. Joyce-Ahearne speaks to Rian Coulter, a founder of the NCAD Community Garden Farm, and residents of the Grangegorman Community Collective about urban gardens in Dublin city centre.

[D. Joyce-Ahearne](https://trinitynews.ie/author/d-joyce-ahearne/) (<https://trinitynews.ie/author/d-joyce-ahearne/>)

### FEATURES

The NCAD Community Garden Farm was founded on a site which, according to former NCAD Students' Union member and one of the garden's founders, Rian Coulter, was "a complete cesspit of absolute urban hazards". The garden, which is next door to the college, exists on a site which is owned by NCAD and which is part of the old Powers Distillery site on which the college is built.

The garden farm was set up by two Students' Union members, Coulter and Fabian Strunden, and community gardener Tony Lowth. Coulter says that when faced with a huge abandoned lot in the city centre, it just made sense to "to put some sort of urban gardening or horticultural project into it because it was the most accessible, doable and also positive thing to do."

## Support from NCAD

Strunden, who served on the Union from June 2012 to June 2013, did the initial research into the possibility of the project and presented the proposal to NCAD's senior management who, Coulter says, were "not so enthusiastic about such an ambitious proposal." Coulter, who served on the following year's Union, says that it was the involvement of Lowth in late 2013, and his taking responsibility for the project, that led to the college taking the proposal more seriously and giving it the go ahead. The onsite work began in March 2014.

Coulter has a background with the Green Party and An Taisce, while he says Strunden came to the project from more of "an art and design perspective". It was Lowth, in particular, who wanted the project to be, in part, a "social outlet, particularly for disadvantaged people in the inner city."

Though Coulter and Strunden were very enthusiastic about the project, he admits they had very little experience in the beginning: "It was kind of daunting but when you get down to it it's not that difficult. It's the oldest trick in the book. You put plants in the ground and they grow and you eat them." The ease with which the basic skills needed to partake could be picked up meant that the founders' shared desire for broad local community involvement was recognised from the beginning. With Lowth taking charge of the project, with help from Coulter and Strunden, the garden farm soon became a success: "It came to a stage where it was really impressive but no one knew about it or how to get at it."

So, to promote the garden farm, Coulter and Strunden held an exhibition in NCAD in January 2015 called Growing Closer, which focused on how far the garden farm had come and where it could go next. They also realised the importance of bringing in new people within the college community to take on the project after they had graduated. The exhibit highlighted the "art and design potential of plants and farming, and the social outlet that it provides to people." On the back of the exhibition, a diverse range of groups got involved from the Goethe Institute to Merchant's Quay.

Coulter stresses the social and community role of the garden. The garden backs onto Oliver Bond Street, a residential area of high density council accommodation. The area, Coulter says, has a "history of unemployment, poor social mobility and people's engagement with third level education is often minimal." He sees the garden farm as a "modest conduit" for opening up NCAD to the local community and makes the point that the college needs to be "conscious of a very proximate community and the residential neighbourhood around us".

Though he knows the garden farm "isn't a panacea for that", it does "encourage the college to be a lot more accessible and engaging and open to everybody." The garden farm also gains from its NCAD status. The art and design heritage combined with the social ethos behind it means that the project is "not just a community garden but a social space absolutely and unreservedly open to everybody, actively seeking out variety of groups to collaborate with."

While student involvement is irregular, the majority of people who consistently participate, says Coulter, have been from the wider Liberties community. Lowth's maintenance of the garden farm sees it open every day and according to the NCAD website, it has become the "largest food-growing garden farm in Dublin City Centre". The food produced is given to anyone who volunteers. The end product of the project is thus not ignored, giving people access to, what Coulter calls, "food with integrity" in which you can taste the difference and which doesn't come with an excessive waste of packaging.

The NCAD garden farm has benefited from various channels. "The goodwill from people in Dublin is extraordinary," says Coulter. "People in and around the Liberties area bring us things like compost and assist us in workshops." The garden farm has also been lucky enough in that, being under the auspices of the college, they have been able to progress without the intrusion of the bureaucracy of the city council. They are also the recipient of a Wave Change prize for young social entrepreneurs.

## Rebuilding Grangegorman

On the other side of the city, another urban garden has not been as fortunate. The Grangegorman Community Collective, one of Dublin's most prominent squats, social spaces and urban gardens was last month bulldozed by a company acting on behalf of receivers. Nearly everything that the collective had built was destroyed, including a wide range of raised beds growing an assortment of vegetables, flowers and herbs. The urban garden at the Grangegorman squat was a focal point of the community living there.

Joe, a new resident since the bulldozing of the original set up, sees the garden as an obvious addition to the site: "We have a big space, we want to use it and community gardens is the best way to go. And the food is good."



Joe sees urban gardening and squatting as going together very naturally: “I think an alternative lifestyle in a way has kind of brought the two things together. People don’t really trust where their food is coming from these days, so that influence combined with people not really trusting the system in general I think is why the two sort of go hand-in-hand and why the ideologies work well together.”

The urban garden, like the community’s other projects, is a collective effort and one that relies on the sharing of information, tools and expertise: “People have done little pieces here and there. There’s one individual who’s actually going to uni and doing gardening and horticulture and conservation work but I think it’s all kind of patchwork knowledge. But coming together with everybody makes it well-rounded.”

The policy at the Grangegorman garden is that food is expensive and it should be free. The food grown on site, says Joe, is all organic: “Pesticides and shit, I don’t think you should be putting that in you. I guess that’s the policy behind [the garden]: organic and free food. Whoever wants to use it should be able to use it, that’s my take on things. If people are hungry they should come here and take what they want.”

The bulldozers that destroyed the original plant beds left mounds of soil around the community’s grounds that still contained sown vegetables and, as a result, says Joe, “when we came back kale had pretty much taken over the piles of soil. So that’s the only food we’ve got now that’s survived.” The collective are currently making planting boxes and seed tents for propagation: “We’re pretty much getting in the role of things again, trying to get on top of it and trying to make it work really. And then once we do that we’ll be harvesting lots of things. Potatoes, carrots, everything.”

Both the NCAD and the Grangegorman gardens are focal points for social action, and both have been well received by the local community. However, whereas the NCAD project has benefited from organised funding and has certain institutional privileges, the Grangegorman Community Collective project (and their existence in general) has been vehemently opposed by the state and big money. Dublin’s urban gardens, it would appear, are a microcosm of larger questions currently being asked in the capital about culture, wealth and who is entitled to what the city has to offer.

*Photos by D. Joyce-Ahearne*

([/#facebook](#)) ([/#twitter](#)) ([/#whatsapp](#)) ([/#google\\_gmail](#))

(<https://www.addtoany.com/share?url=https%3A%2F%2Ftrinitynews.ie%2F2016/03/how-inner-city-community-gardening-projects-are-making-a-difference%2F&title=How-inner-city-community-gardening-projects-are-making-a-difference>)

0 Comments ([https://trinitynews.ie/2016/03/how-inner-city-community-gardening-projects-are-making-a-difference/#disqus\\_thread](https://trinitynews.ie/2016/03/how-inner-city-community-gardening-projects-are-making-a-difference/#disqus_thread))



**D. Joyce-Ahearne** (<https://trinitynews.ie/author/D.-Joyce-Ahearne>)

D is former Contributing Editor of Trinity News and Trinity Graduate. This website uses cookies to improve your experience. [Accept](#) [Privacy Policy](https://trinitynews.ie/privacy-policy/)

ALSO ON TRINITY NEWS

<b>UCD students set up encampment ...</b> 3 months ago Students at University College Dublin (UCD) have established an ...	<b>Government announce recognition of State ...</b> 2 months ago Government has announced it is to recognise Palestine as a state, alongside ...	<b>Listening to this urban soundtrack – Trinity ...</b> 2 months ago New York, Paris and London are capitals that leave you dreaming or perhaps ...	<b>Student bursary pulled in protest against ...</b> 3 months ago The Maurice Abrahamson Bursary, a law scholarship for disadvantaged ...	<b>TDs celebrate College decision to divest ...</b> 3 months ago Teachtaí Dála from across the party spectrum have celebrated College's ...
--	--	---	---	---

**Trinity News Comment Policy**

Please read our [Comment Policy](#) before commenting.

Got it

0 Comments

Login ▼

G

Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS

Name



Share

Best Newest Oldest

Be the first to comment.

[Subscribe](#) [Privacy](#) [Do Not Sell My Data](#)

## Recent Posts

**“Ireland Free Speech Summit” to be held in Trinity featuring right-wing and conservative guests speakers (<https://trinitynews.ie/2024/06/ireland-free-speech-summit-to-be-held-in-trinity-featuring-right-wing-and-conservative-guests-speakers/>)**

18 June 2024

**Antisemitic graffiti found on campus draws widespread condemnation (<https://trinitynews.ie/2024/06/antisemitic-graffiti-on-campus-draws-widespread-condemnation/>)**

13 June 2024

**Leading Trinity activist Conor Reddy elected to Dublin City Council (<https://trinitynews.ie/2024/06/leading-trinity-activist-conor-reddy-elected-to-dublin-city-council/>)**

9 June 2024

**Trinity ranks poorly for student-staff ratios but maintains top-100 position in world rankings (<https://trinitynews.ie/2024/06/trinity-ranks-poorly-for-student-staff-ratios-but-maintains-top-100-position-in-world-rankings/>)**

4 June 2024

**Law professor’s murder trial delayed to October (<https://trinitynews.ie/2024/05/law-professors-murder-trial-delayed-to-october/>)**

31 May 2024

---

# Most Popular

- 1 UCC opens sleeping pod in library (<https://trinitynews.ie/2018/09/ucc-opens-sleeping-pod-in-library/>)**  
The pod allows users to take a 20 minute nap
- 2 The struggles and contributions of Marie Curie (<https://trinitynews.ie/2017/03/the-struggles-and-contributions-of-marie-curie/>)**  
Katarzyna Siewierska writes about Marie Curie as a tribute to all female scientists, who made contributions to science, but also showed strength of character and determination in overcoming the challenges of being a female scientist, inspiring generations of female scientists
- 3 Eamon Ryan forced to use emergency exit as PWO protest outside lecture theatre (<https://trinitynews.ie/2023/03/eamon-ryan-forced-to-use-emergency-exit-as-pwo-protest-outside-lecture-theatre/>)**  
Ryan's address had already been disrupted by a group of student activists who condemned the government's policies.
- 4 Fifth Trinity student tests positive for Covid-19 (<https://trinitynews.ie/2020/03/fifth-trinity-student-tests-positive-for-covid-19/>)**  
Two cases were announced yesterday
- 5 "Adderall's quite popular in Trinity": an interview with a student drug dealer (<https://trinitynews.ie/2018/09/adderalls-quite-popular-in-trinity-an-interview-with-a-student-drug-dealer/>)**  
A Trinity student details the trials and tribulations of dealing
- 6 Outcry from student midwives over bullying "rife in our Irish hospitals" (<https://trinitynews.ie/2018/09/outcry-from-student-midwives-over-bullying-rife-in-our-irish-hospitals/>)**  
Reports of unfair treatment are growing amongst midwifery and nursing students on placement following new online anti-bullying campaign
- 7 Arrested Trinity student Conchúir Ó Ráidigh speaks out on his injuries (<https://trinitynews.ie/2018/09/arrested-trinity-student-conchuir-o-raidigh-speaks-out-on-his-injuries/>)**  
Ó Ráidigh went to hospital last night with multiple injuries after being arrested
- 8 Editorial: Bugging has destroyed the integrity of the University Times (<https://trinitynews.ie/2019/03/editorial-bugging-has-destroyed-the-integrity-of-the-university-times/>)**  
Any student is liable to bugging if the University Times does not face serious consequences
- 9 Bed bugs bite in Botany Bay (<https://trinitynews.ie/2018/09/bed-bugs-bite-in-botany-bay/>)**  
A student reports being bitten this weekend
- 10 USI pass emergency motion to support the Take Back the City protest (<https://trinitynews.ie/2018/09/usi-pass-emergency-motion-to-support-the-take-back-the-city-protest/>)**  
The motion was tabled by TCDSU

---

## Irish Press Council

Trinity News is a member of the Press Council of Ireland and supports the Office of the Press Ombudsman. For more information or to contact the Ombudsman visit the **Press Ombudsman's website (<http://www.presscouncil.ie/>)**.

Copyright Trinity News (<https://trinitynews.ie/>) 2024

Theme by Alden Mathieu (<http://aldenmathieu.com>)