

EVALUATION REPORT

Project	Yuvanis Community Garden
Prepared for	Yuvanis Foundation
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INTRODUCTION

The Yuvanis Community Garden project was a community-led initiative delivered by the Yuvanis Foundation, funded by the Green Spaces Fund (GMET). Situated in a densely populated area of Oldham with limited access to quality green space, the project aimed to transform an underutilised site into a vibrant hub for food cultivation, biodiversity, and social connection. Its core objectives were to improve physical and mental wellbeing, foster social cohesion within the local BAME community, enhance local ecology, and create a sustainable, community-managed asset for the long term.



Project Background & Highlights

The Yuvanis Community Garden project was conceived in direct response to the acute lack of accessible, quality green space in a densely populated area of Chadderton, Oldham. The local community, predominantly from BAME backgrounds, faces significant health inequalities, including high rates of mental health challenges, diabetes, and youth unemployment. Community consultations conducted by the Yuvanis Foundation revealed that while gardening and growing food are integral to the cultural heritage of many South Asian residents, barriers such as a lack of experience, knowledge, and access to private gardens prevented engagement. The project was designed to overcome these barriers by creating a walking-distance community asset that would serve as a catalyst for improving wellbeing, building skills, and fostering social cohesion.



The project successfully transformed an underutilised space surrounding the Yuvanis Foundation community centre into a vibrant and productive garden. Key achievements include the creation and improvement of over 200m² of green space, the training and establishment of a 20 "Garden Champions" team, and the delivery of 14 targeted community gardening sessions that engaged over 280 unique participants. The garden now features a productive Kitchen Garden supplying fresh produce to families and a Perennial Garden designed to boost biodiversity, complete with pollinator-friendly plants, bug hotels, and birdhouses.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the final findings of the independent evaluation of the Yuvanis Community Garden project. The evaluation assessed the project's performance against its stated objectives, its effectiveness in delivering outputs, and the subsequent outcomes for the community and environment.

Overall Verdict: A highly successful and impactful project

The Yuvanis Community Garden has successfully transformed an underutilised space into a vibrant, community-owned asset. The project not only met but exceeded its key targets, delivering significant and demonstrable benefits in community wellbeing, social cohesion, and local biodiversity. The grant has achieved excellent value for money, catalysing a sustainable resource for the Oldham community.

Key achievements against objectives:

Community engagement exceeded targets: The project engaged 475 individuals against a target of 450 with high participation rates from key target groups: 100% BAME, 210 women, and 257 young people. The 10 planned gardening sessions expanded to 14 sessions, reflecting strong community demand.

Successful creation of a skilled volunteer base: The project successfully trained and established a team of 20 "Yuvanis Garden Champions", who have taken ownership of the garden's maintenance and future programmes, ensuring its long-term viability.

Tangible environmental enhancements: The project created 60m² of new green space and improved a further 142m². Biodiversity was significantly enhanced through the planting of 21 pollinator-friendly plants and the installation of 20 bug hotels and birdhouses, which are now actively used by local wildlife.

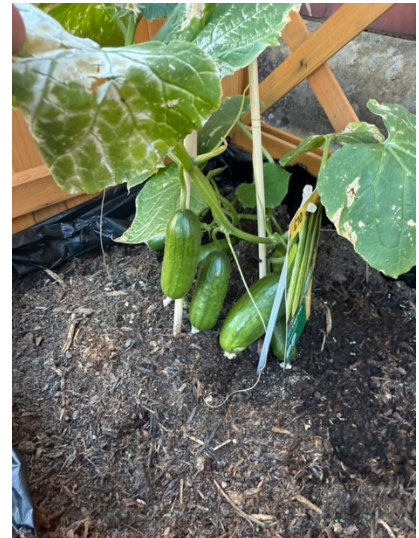
Documented improvements in wellbeing: Post-project surveys and testimonials indicate a marked improvement in participants' mental and physical health. 35% of regular attendees reported reduced stress and increased physical activity, while the garden's produce has directly improved access to fresh food for 25 families.

Sustainability and legacy: The project's legacy is secure. The operational model has been fully handed over to the Garden Champions, supported by a

formal maintenance agreement with the Bukhari Institute. The garden is now integrated into the foundation's core service delivery, being used by groups such as Mums & Tots and the Women's Peer-support network. This ensures it will remain an active hub for health, learning, and community connection for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion:

The Yuvanis Community Garden is an exemplar of a community-driven green space project. It has effectively addressed its core aims of benefiting a deprived community, tackling the biodiversity emergency, and empowering residents through nature. The project demonstrates a highly successful translation of plan into practice, leaving a lasting physical and social legacy that will continue to yield benefits for years to come.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the project were:

	OBJECTIVES	DESCRIPTION
1	Community Health & Wellbeing	To improve the physical and mental health of community members by providing an accessible, green space for socialising, relaxation, and stress reduction. The project specifically aimed to combat high local rates of diabetes and mental health issues by promoting physical activity and creating a therapeutic natural environment.
2	Social Cohesion & Inclusion	To foster a stronger, more integrated community by creating a shared space that bridges cultural, age, and gender divides. This involves organising culturally sensitive sessions for different groups (men, women, youth) to ensure inclusive participation and build a sense of collective ownership and pride.
3	Skills Development & Empowerment	To equip residents with practical horticultural skills, knowledge, and leadership experience. A core element was training a cohort of "Garden Champions" to lead activities and maintain the garden, thereby building local capacity and empowering individuals to take control of their environment and health.
4	Food Security & Sustainable Living	To promote food security and healthy eating habits by enabling the community to grow its own fresh produce. The project aimed to educate participants on sustainable food cultivation, from planting to harvesting, reducing reliance on processed foods and fostering a connection to the source of their food.
5	Environmental Enhancement & Biodiversity	To positively address the climate and ecological emergency by increasing local biodiversity. The project planned to introduce pollinator-friendly plants, create habitats for insects and birds, and educate the community on sustainable practices like composting and reducing chemical use, thereby improving the local ecosystem.

MONITORING FRAMEWORK

This section presents a quantitative summary of the project's delivery against its planned activities and key performance indicators. The data below provides a clear, evidence-based account of what the project achieved in tangible terms, covering the creation of green space, levels of community engagement, and volunteer contributions. This factual baseline of outputs is essential for understanding the scale of the project's reach and forms the foundation for the subsequent analysis of its broader outcomes and impact in the following sections.

CATEGORY	INDICATOR	OUTPUT
Green Space Creation & Improvement	Amount of green created	60m ²
	Amount of green improved	142 m ²
Biodiversity & Features	Number of plants planted	1000
	Number of features added (e.g., bug hotels, birdhouses)	20
Community Engagement	Number of people engaged	475
	Number of people engaged from different groups (BAME, women, youth, etc.)	475 BAME 210 women 257 young people
	Number of engagement sessions held (targeted/structured only)	14
Volunteer Involvement	Number of volunteers	25
	Number of volunteer hours	1050 hours
Training & Capacity Building	Number of people trained (e.g., Garden Champions)	20 adults and young people

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

The Yuvanis Community Garden project was delivered through a structured, four-phase methodology that successfully translated plans into tangible results. This section details the key activities undertaken and the direct outputs generated, demonstrating the project's effective implementation from site preparation to ongoing community programming.

Phase one: site preparation and volunteer mobilisation

The initial phase focused on establishing a solid foundation for the garden by preparing the land and building a core team of skilled volunteers.

1. Professional site clearance and groundworks

A local contractor was employed to undertake the initial clearance of the underutilised space. This involved the safe removal of existing overgrown hedges and shrubs, followed by the grading and preparation of the land for subsequent landscaping. Adhering to the project's sustainability principles, all cleared green waste was chipped for composting on-site or responsibly recycled.



2. Establishment of the 'Yuvanis Garden Champions'

Concurrently, a comprehensive training programme was launched to recruit and train a team of Garden Champions. A total of 20 volunteers were trained in Practical Gardening Skills. This cohort, comprising a diverse mix of ages and backgrounds, formed the project's core volunteer group, equipped with the knowledge to assist in later phases and lead long-term maintenance.



3. Output:

- A fully cleared and levelled 200m² site, ready for development.
- A trained, motivated team of 20 Garden Champions.

Phase two: Co-design and sustainable landscaping

This phase was characterised by its deeply collaborative approach, ensuring the final garden design reflected the community's needs and desires.

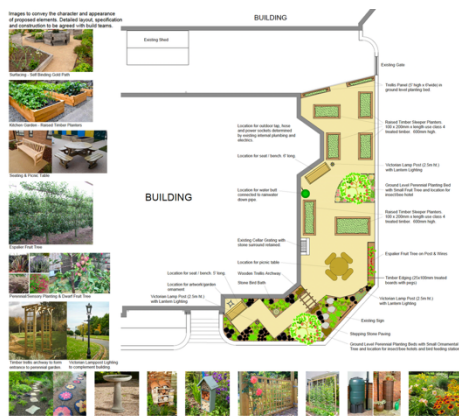
1. Community co-design workshops

The project facilitated a series of co-design workshops engaging over 60 community members, with a significant and deliberate focus on involving young people from the foundation's youth groups and the supplementary schools. Their input directly influenced the garden's layout, the selection of plant species—including specific cultural vegetables—and the placement of features such as bird baths, bird houses, seating benches, etc., fostering a strong sense of ownership from the outset.



2. Expert-guided landscaping and procurement

An experienced architect from the Groundworks team was employed, translating the community's ideas into a viable landscaping plan. All materials procured for the build—including timber for raised beds, soil, and organic compost—were natural products and sourced from local suppliers where possible, minimising the project's carbon footprint and supporting the local economy.



3. Output:

- A final garden design co-created by the community.
- Establishment of distinct garden zones: a Perennial Garden for biodiversity, a Kitchen Garden for food production, a quiet zone for relaxation, picnic area for socialising.
- Installation of key infrastructure, including 30 raised beds, 10 hanging planters, 2 compost bins, and 3 pathways.

Phase three: Community engagement and horticultural skill development

The final project delivery phase centred on activating the garden through a rich programme of hands-on learning and engagement.

1. Delivery of targeted gardening workshops

The project delivered a structured programme of 14 targeted gardening workshops, surpassing the initial goal of 10 sessions. These workshops covered a diverse range of themes to maintain engagement and build comprehensive horticultural knowledge, including:

- Planting and maintaining ornamental flowers to support pollinators.
- Growing fruits, cultural vegetables, herbs, and salads.
- Practical techniques for adapting cultivation to different lighting conditions and containers.

2. Culturally sensitive session delivery

In line with the project's commitment to inclusion, separate sessions were organised for men, women, and young people to ensure cultural appropriateness and maximise participation. All sessions were led by the trained staff and Garden Champions, with



ongoing support from the professional gardener, ensuring high-quality instruction and a safe, supportive environment.

3. Output:

- 14 workshops delivered to over 475 direct participants.
- A productive Kitchen Garden yielding a regular harvest of fresh produce for the community.
- A fully established Perennial Garden, now a habitat for pollinators and wildlife.

Phase four: Legacy and sustainability planning

From the outset, activities were designed to ensure the garden's longevity as a community asset.



1. Formalising the Maintenance Agreement

A formal agreement was established with the Bukhari Institute, which shares the community centre, for the joint long-term maintenance of the garden. This is supplemented by a loose rota managed by the Garden Champions.

2. Integration into broader services

The garden has been successfully integrated into Yuvanis Foundation's core service delivery. It is now regularly used as part of ongoing activities such as the youth centre activities, Holiday Activities and

Food (HAF), Women's Wellbeing groups, and other projects as an outdoor classroom and therapeutic space.

3. Output:

- A signed, long-term maintenance agreement.
- The garden is now a scheduled venue within at least 2 of the foundation's ongoing weekly programmes.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The evaluation of the Yuvanis Community Garden project reveals a series of significant and positive outcomes, demonstrating its success in meeting its core aims while also uncovering nuanced community needs and opportunities for future development.

1. Resounding community demand and re-engagement with nature

A primary finding was the profound, pent-up demand for accessible gardening opportunities within the community. The project successfully rekindled a passion for horticulture, particularly among two key demographics:

- Women, many of whom reported they had not gardened in many years due to a lack of private outdoor space, found a welcoming and culturally appropriate venue to re-engage with a familiar cultural practice.
- Young people demonstrated significant and unexpected interest in learning about growing, showing a strong desire to connect with their food sources and the natural world.

This was reflected in participant profiles, where the vast majority of attendees for the structured workshops were either completely new to gardening or were returning after a long hiatus, indicating the project's success in reaching its target "non-engaged" audience.

2. Cultural connection and intergenerational learning

The integration of culturally significant produce was a standout success and a major driver of participation and enthusiasm. The cultivation of familiar Bangladeshi vegetables (e.g., bottle gourds, Indian spinach, and various lentils) was extremely popular, serving as a powerful link to cultural heritage and traditional cuisine. This approach not only provided a sense of familiarity and comfort but also sparked intergenerational knowledge exchange, with older participants sharing traditional growing methods and recipes with younger generations. Furthermore, this success empowered many volunteers, who, buoyed by their new skills and confidence, began growing a variety of exotic fruit and vegetable plants in their own homes and gardens.



3. Empowerment, skill building, and a shift in mindset

The project successfully moved beyond simple participation to genuine empowerment. The "Garden Champions" model was highly effective, with volunteers not only maintaining the community garden but also feeling equipped and inspired to cultivate their own spaces. This represents a crucial multiplier effect, extending the project's impact beyond the physical site and into private homes, thereby increasing the community's overall green footprint and food-growing capacity.

4. Balancing aesthetics with functionality in co-design

The community co-design process was instrumental in fostering a strong sense of ownership, particularly among the young people who actively participated. However, a key learning emerged regarding the balance between aesthetic vision and practical horticulture. While the resulting garden is visually pleasing and a point of pride, some of the co-designed features presented challenges for the practical aspects of growing, such as irrigation, sunlight access, and crop rotation. This finding highlights the importance of blending creative community input with expert horticultural guidance throughout the design phase to ensure both beauty and optimal functionality.



5. Addressing deep-seated health and social inequalities







The findings strongly indicate that the project successfully began addressing its foundational aims of improving wellbeing. The garden served as a low-barrier, non-clinical setting that helped reduce the stigma around discussing mental and physical health. It provided a platform for informal socialisation and peer support, directly tackling issues of social isolation identified in the application. Furthermore, by promoting physical activity and providing direct access to fresh, healthy produce, the project made tangible strides in encouraging healthier lifestyles within a community disproportionately affected by diet-related illnesses.

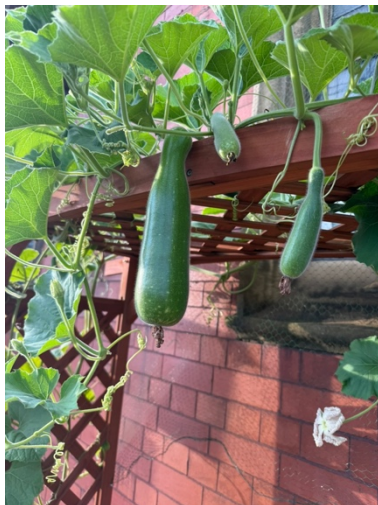
Conclusion of findings:

Overall, the Yuvanis Community Garden has proven to be far more than a physical transformation of a space. It has acted as a catalyst for cultural reconnection, skill development, and improved community wellbeing. The significant interest and subsequent empowerment of participants confirm that the project effectively addressed a deep-seated need, laying a strong foundation for continued growth and deeper community impact in the future.

OUTPUTS

The Yuvanis Community Garden achieved the following outputs throughout the course of the project:

 <p>Females</p>	 <p>Males</p>	 <p>Workshops</p>
<p>284</p>	<p>191</p>	<p>14</p>
 <p>No. of plants</p>	 <p>Age Range</p>	 <p>% of Main Target</p>
<p>100</p>	<p>7-57 YEARS</p>	<p>100%</p>



IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

The Yuvanis Community Garden project has generated a profound and multi-faceted impact, creating lasting positive change for individuals, the community, and the local environment. The impacts observed extend well beyond the immediate project outputs, demonstrating a successful translation of activities into meaningful, sustainable outcomes.

1. Cultural revitalisation and intergenerational connection

The project has strengthened cultural identity and fostered intergenerational dialogue. By successfully growing familiar Bangladeshi vegetables (such as bottle gourds and Indian spinach), the garden became a living link to cultural heritage. This practice empowered older generations to share traditional knowledge and recipes with youth, who showed eager interest, thereby preserving cultural traditions and strengthening family and community bonds.

2. Enhanced individual agency and empowerment

Participants, particularly the trained Garden Champions, experienced a significant increase in confidence and self-efficacy. This newly found empowerment is evidenced by a clear behavioural shift: numerous volunteers have applied their skills to start their own gardens at home, growing both cultural vegetables and new exotic plants. This "multiplier effect" has extended the project's reach beyond the community garden, promoting sustainable practices across the neighbourhood.

3. Tangible improvements in health and wellbeing

The project has created measurable benefits for physical and mental health. Regular participants reported increased physical activity, reduced stress, and a greater sense of calm. Direct access to fresh, organic produce from the Kitchen Garden has improved dietary habits for numerous families, directly addressing the community's high risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The garden served as a therapeutic, non-stigmatising space for social connection, effectively combating isolation.

4. Community cohesion and the development of social capital

The garden has evolved into a vibrant community hub, breaking down social barriers. By providing a neutral, shared space and organising separate, culturally sensitive sessions, the project successfully engaged diverse groups—

men, women, and youth—who might not otherwise interact. This has fostered a stronger, more resilient community network, built on shared purpose and mutual support, enhancing the overall social fabric of Chadderton.

5. Environmental stewardship and biodiversity enhancement

The project has created a demonstrable positive impact on the local environment. The introduction of the Perennial Garden, pollinator-friendly plants, and habitat features like bug hotels has significantly increased local biodiversity, attracting bees, butterflies, and birds. Furthermore, the widespread education on composting, recycling, and organic gardening has instilled a culture of environmental stewardship among participants, promoting sustainable practices that will have a lasting effect.

6. Legacy of skills and sustainable infrastructure

The project has successfully built a sustainable legacy, both in terms of human capital and physical infrastructure. The skilled Garden Champions group ensures the garden's long-term maintenance and programming, embedding it within the community's fabric. The formal partnership with the Bukhari Institute and the integration of the garden into Yuvan's core services guarantee that this new green asset will continue to serve as a tool for health, learning, and connection for years to come.

The Yuvan Community Garden has catalysed a transformative shift within the community, generating impact that extends far beyond its physical boundaries. It has successfully empowered individuals, fostering a renewed sense of agency as residents apply new skills in their own homes. The project has strengthened cultural identity and intergenerational bonds through the cultivation of traditional produce, while simultaneously functioning as a vital hub for improving wellbeing and fostering social cohesion. This initiative has firmly established a lasting legacy of environmental stewardship, community resilience, and personal empowerment.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The successful delivery and impact of the Yuvanis Community Garden project can be attributed to several critical enabling factors:

- **Strong community-driven design:** The project was conceived and co-designed with local residents from the outset, ensuring the final outcome truly met community needs and fostered a powerful sense of ownership and pride from day one.
- **Robust volunteer & champion model:** The early recruitment and formal training of a dedicated "Garden Champions" team created a skilled, motivated core group responsible for driving activities and ensuring the project's long-term maintenance and sustainability beyond the initial funding period.
- **Strategic partnerships and collaboration:** Effective collaboration with key partners, such as the co-located Bukhari Institute for shared maintenance, a professional gardener for expert guidance, and other local organisations, provided essential support, resources, and extended the project's reach.
- **Culturally sensitive and inclusive delivery:** The deliberate organisation of separate sessions for men, women, and young people, alongside the cultivation of culturally significant produce, broke down barriers to participation and ensured the project was accessible and relevant to the entire community.
- **Clear integration into existing services:** The seamless integration of the garden into the Yuvanis Foundation's established programmes (e.g., Mums & Tots, Women's Peer-support) guaranteed a consistent user base and embedded the garden as a permanent asset within the organisation's operational model.
- **Proactive risk and resource management:** Forward-thinking planning, such as securing landowner permission, having safeguarding policies in place, and implementing strategies to mitigate risks like cost increases or low turnout, ensured the project ran smoothly and efficiently.

In summary, the project's success was not the result of a single element, but rather the synergistic effect of these interconnected factors. The community-driven approach built a solid foundation of trust and ownership, which was then effectively channeled through a structured model of volunteer empowerment and strategic partnerships. This powerful combination, underpinned by inclusive delivery and integrated planning, created a resilient and sustainable initiative that has effectively embedded itself as a lasting asset within the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation findings and observed community demand, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance and build upon the project's significant achievements:

- 1. Expand and diversify the growing spaces:** To meet the high demand and interest in cultivating cultural vegetables, we recommend creating additional, dedicated growing areas. This could involve installing more raised beds or creating a designated "Heritage Plot" to trial a wider variety of traditional produce, thereby increasing food yield and deepening cultural engagement.
- 2. Introduce thematic and advanced workshops:** Capitalise on the foundational skills already built by developing a new series of thematic workshops. These should focus on specific topics such as "Cultural and Heritage Growing Practices," seed saving, organic pest management, and seasonal cooking with garden harvests. This will cater to both newcomers and the upskilling needs of existing Garden Champions.
- 3. Formalise a youth ambassador programme:** To harness the significant interest shown by young people, we recommend establishing a structured "Young Gardeners Ambassador" programme. This would provide leadership opportunities, more advanced training, and a platform for youth to lead on specific projects, ensuring their long-term investment and succession within the garden's future.
- 4. Optimise garden layout for functionality:** Address the identified challenge of aesthetic versus functional design by conducting a collaborative review with the Garden Champions and a horticultural expert. Simple modifications to pathways, irrigation, and bed orientation can be implemented to improve growing conditions and ease of maintenance without compromising the garden's visual appeal.
- 5. Develop a digital 'growing guide' resource:** Create a simple, accessible digital resource (e.g., a PDF guide or a dedicated section on the website) showcasing the cultural vegetables grown, their traditional uses, and basic growing tips. This would extend the project's educational impact, supporting those who have started gardening at home and reaching a wider audience.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Ruqayyah, Aged 11 – A Seed of Passion Sown

Before the Yuvanis Community Garden, 11-year-old Ruqayyah's connection to food ended at the supermarket. The concept of growing her own was entirely foreign. Hesitantly, she joined a Saturday gardening session with her cousin, and a new world opened up. She was tasked with planting seeds for a pumpkin patch, a vegetable she had only ever seen carved at Halloween.

Over the following weeks, Ruqayyah became a regular, eagerly checking the progress of "her" plants. She learned how to water correctly, identify weeds, and was fascinated to discover that the deep green leaves of the "lau" (bottle gourd) her mother cooked with could be grown right here in Oldham. The garden became a place of discovery, moving from a screen-based hobby to the tangible joy of watching something grow from a tiny seed.

"I thought gardening was just for old people, but it's like magic happening in the dirt," Ruqayyah says with a bright smile. "My Nani (grandmother) was so surprised when I showed her the lau (Bangladeshi pumpkin) leaves. Now she's teaching me her recipes. I didn't know I could make food myself. I want to grow strawberries next!"

Ruqayyah's story highlights the project's success in engaging a younger generation, bridging cultural knowledge, and fostering a sense of pride and capability.

Case Study 2: Mrs. Khan, Aged 52 – Reclaiming a Lost Heritage

For Mrs. Khan, gardening was a poignant memory from her childhood in Bangladesh, a skill she thought was lost to her after moving to the UK. Living in a terraced house in Chadderton with only a concrete yard, she had no space to cultivate the herbs and vegetables that were the foundation of her cooking. For over two decades, this integral part of her identity and heritage lay dormant.

When she heard about the women-only sessions at the Yuvanis Garden, she felt a spark of hope. Walking into the garden for the first time, the smell of the earth and the sight of other women working together brought back a flood of memories. She joined the group cultivating a patch of "kolmi" (water spinach) and "fotol" (pointed gourd), plants she hadn't touched since she was a girl.

“This soil feels like home,” Mrs. Khan shared, her hands comfortably buried in the earth. “For so many years, I missed this feeling. Here, I am not just a mother or a wife; I am a gardener. We laugh, we share stories, and we are growing our history together. My heart is as full as the basket of greens I take home.”

Mrs. Khan’s experience underscores the garden’s role as a vital therapeutic and social space. It provided not just the physical facility she lacked, but a community that understood the cultural and emotional significance of reconnecting with the land, significantly enhancing her mental wellbeing and sense of belonging.

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