

An Interpretative phenomenological exploration of how people make sense of changes that happen when food is grown at home.

Introduction

Background: Harehills is a multiply disadvantaged densely populated suburb of Leeds. The 'Back to Front' (www.backtofront.org.uk) community group supports community members to grow food in the small gardens at the front of their 'back to back' terraced houses.

Objectives: To explore how people make sense of the experiences they have when they grow food at the front of their homes. To contribute to the academic literature and to the evaluation of the 'Back to Front' project

Design and methods: A qualitative study using an interpretative phenomenological approach. Interviews were held with six men and women living and growing food in Harehills. The people were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. None of the participants had lived in Harehills for more than ten years. Three people moved from small towns in England and three people moved from Asia or Africa. The participants were in middle adulthood. They had all been supported by 'Back to Front'. Interviews were analysed separately. Then in the cross case analysis four dominant themes emerged.



Findings

1. People felt more involved with the food they ate.

'This is a control of your life, controlling what you eat...not relying on anybody. (P2)

'You're always changing your meal and you're always eating something new and different.' (P4)

People felt in touch with values to live more sustainably. They became more aware of their nutritional needs because they had given attention to the plants' needs. They got enjoyment from eating a variety of fresh food.

2. Provided connection to generations past and present.

'The excitement that I had the first time my daughter and I, um, made a green salad tossed up together with our vegetables on it' (P3)

I've got that little bit of knowledge passed on through the generations (P1)

It seemed participants felt connected to positive memories of times spent in nature with family members in the past. People felt a renewed sense of their identity. The fresh food contributed to positive times with young people.

3. Growing is a skill that relocates well.

'I miss home so much...missing my herb patch and my veggie patch and stuff like that and I couldn't walk to the allotment because of my legs so we start in the front garden. (P4)

It seemed that being able to grow produce in whatever context the participants were living in supported their biographical continuity.

4. The green space added quality to life.

'A little urban oasis' (P6)

'They said when they passed the garden it smells so good, it smells like countryside'. (P4)

The space provided a calm and rejuvenating space. People who walked past had pleasant conversations about how attractive the small garden looked. Participants got to know like-minded neighbours.

Conclusion

Spider's web metaphor.

Infantino 's (2005) study used the metaphor of a spider's web as a way of describing the interconnection between practical gardening activity and the internal worlds of the participants.

The metaphor is a good way of describing the findings of this study too. The activity of gardening is at the centre of the web. The participants weave relationships; memories; emotion round the web.



Reference. Infantino, M. 2005. Gardening: a strategy for health promotion in older women. *The Journal of the New York State Nurses' Association*, 35(2), pp.10-7.

Growing fresh fruit and vegetables can be considered a useful 'systems approach' to address a variety of key public health objectives.

Recommendations

- Planning processes need to include space for people to enjoy growing food
- Access to small areas of green space supports emotional wellbeing and these should be built into densely populated areas
- More research on experiences of non English speakers in Harehills is required.
- Promoting gardening improves a communities' assets and the environment. More support for gardeners in inner city areas should be considered.

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