

St Mary's Secret Garden: Ensuring safety during Covid-19 pandemic

Current situation

As lockdown is easing and vulnerable people are starting to return from shielding, it is vital that we can keep our clients, volunteers, staff and visiting members of the public as safe as we possibly can.

Our statements and procedures described below are to inform you of the steps the charity has taken to ensure everyone's safety as best we can. These steps will continue until medical, scientific and local government advice changes. A few people may feel that some of these procedures are overly cautious but as the vast majority of our clients, volunteers and staff are deemed clinically vulnerable to Covid19, the charity has to act to ensure their safety and which remains our top priority.

Steps we have taken to improve hygiene and cleanliness

Our main indoor venue, the portakabin, has been professionally deep cleaned.

We are having the portakabin and its disabled accessible toilet professionally cleaned twice a week

We have extra, portable handwashing facilities in the garden.

Hand sanitiser, personal face masks, gloves and aprons are available and used by all – particularly those deemed vulnerable.

We will be installing a ceiling fan in the portakabin to improve ventilation through the summer months.

We have revised all risk assessments; especially for people who are deemed vulnerable to Covid-19.

Steps we have taken to improve safety of beneficiaries, volunteers and public

All face to face staff and supporting volunteers have had at least one dose of their Covid19 vaccine and in most cases there second.

All face to face staff and key volunteers are undertaking weekly Covid PCR tests.

We are continuing to work with smaller sized groups for the time being and not currently letting the public enter when we have vulnerable clients or volunteers on site.

Entrance to the Garden

We request that anyone feeling in the slightest way ill should not come into the garden for the sake and safety of our vulnerable clients, volunteers and staff.

We have a QR code that can be scanned at the entrance gate and we urge people to use this resource on entering the garden.

Groups/Clients - Entry to the garden is by timed appointments, timed and pre-booked sessions.

General Public – Members of the public can visit the garden and buy plants & produce please see our website and social media for times of public opening.

Numbers of people in the garden are to be kept at a lower rate for health and safety reasons.

Consequently, there may be times when visitors are asked to wait or return another time (by the gate supervisor). We expect you to accept their instructions.

Everyone entering the garden will be asked to wash their hands. Gloves will also be available for use.

We are maintaining a strict 2 metre spacing rule in the garden. If people are not able to do that, for example, due to cognitive impairments or mobility support needs, then other safety measures will be employed including extra personal protective equipment.

We will maintain the right to refuse entrance – particularly at times when we are working with vulnerable clients or groups.

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Methods of working

We are starting to return our **isolated, individual clients** to their services as a priority once we have been advised that it is safe to do so by the Integrated Learning Disabilities Service London borough of Hackney. Our usual group size will be reduced to 6 including horticultural therapist and supporting volunteer. We will be keeping a daily log of who has been in attendance on each day to support 'Track and trace' initiatives.

Pre-booked groups will be required to provide us with their risk assessment for their group and will be expected to be responsible for their group members throughout their stay in the garden. This will include enforcing handwashing, social distancing measures and other hygiene precautions. Groups are currently required to bring in their own drinks and snacks as needed. We advise group leaders to keep a record of who has attended as a precaution for track and trace initiatives. We also require working groups to be no more than 6; if your group is larger we would expect you to divide the group into smaller breakaway groups – our garden is big enough for you to spread out. We also expect group leaders to assess the health of their members prior to accessing the garden - anyone who is unwell should be advised to go home.

Our **other services**, such as our horticultural training groups, will be returned once we are advised it is safe to do so by specific funders e.g. LBHackney. As there remains a risk that a member of staff will need to self-isolate due to catching Covid-19 we will try and arrange staff cover but at times we may have to cancel sessions on short notice for individuals or pre-booked groups.

We will definitely contact anyone affected by cancellations or who may be at risk as soon as possible.

Other hygiene precautions required by individuals and groups

We have one accessible toilet, which is situated in the portakabin. We require everyone to sanitise the toilet and sink after use. Individual clients are supported to do this and we will instruct group leaders, who, we will require to pass this information to their group members.

Future developments

The charity and its beneficiaries have for many years been aware that the existing portakabin is no longer fit for purpose especially as the need for our services has increased over recent years. We have already been working towards rectifying this including:

- Working with London Borough of Hackney (the landlords) to gain a longer lease so we can begin to raise Capital funding so we can build a fabulous new accessible wellbeing centre.
- Working with a local architect firm <http://cuozzo-fleming.com/> and our beneficiaries to design and plan this wonderful new space.

The need for this new building is now our top goal, as we know the garden will be a vital space for vulnerable, isolated and lonely groups to meet safely. If you would like to know more or support us in this initiative (fundraising, building, or just spreading the word) – you are welcome to contact Paula Yassine (CEO) via the gardens usual methods.