IMPACT REPORT 2018
“NEVER HAVE THERE BEEN MORE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE THE CHANGE THEY WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD THAN THERE ARE TODAY”

PAM WARHURST CBE
When Mary and I sat around the kitchen table, talking, we thought of a different future, a kinder prosperity. When we gathered some friends and had a public meeting we never thought of ourselves as pioneers, just people with the potential to make a difference in the place we called home, through the power of small actions.

Those moments are ten years ago now and that fire still burns strong, not just in our hearts and in our home town, but in thousands of people around the world. We never really aimed to galvanise a movement of change-makers... it was just an experiment to see what ordinary people could do, out of the power of their imagination and the strength of their will. The things that troubled us then for our planet and our world, trouble us, and even more people today. But the good news is that never have there been more people who want to be the change they want to see in the world than there are today.

In streets, villages, towns and cities around the world people are making change real. Here in the UK, our Incredible Edible network goes from strength to strength and I’m delighted to welcome you to the Incredible Edible Network’s 2018 Impact Report, which celebrates the work of thousands of grass roots activists around the UK. Never has the power of small actions been more obvious or the need greater than it is today. Thank you to all of our Incredible people for your work and commitment in building kinder, confident and connected communities, through that power of small actions.

Pam Warhurst CBE
Founder, Incredible Edible Network
Incredible Edible is a movement of ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Incredible Edible has always been a bottom-up movement for grass roots change and through the last decade, the Incredible Edible network has been a loosely federated group of friends committed not by structure and constitution but by hearts and passion to create a different future and a kinder present.

There are no rules, just a set of principles – a story of three plates and an inclusive welcome that reminds us every day that if you eat, you're in. In 2017 the National Lottery Community Fund were kind enough to invest in us so that we could build a team of committed practitioners to support existing groups to thrive and catalyse new groups into action. Each week, that team of people share the vision of Incredible Edible with people who feel that same passion within themselves.

This report attempts to capture, in numbers and stories, a snapshot of our network in the last year. A document can never really do justice to the thousands of conversations shared, of people inspired, of dreams realised, but it does contribute to the unfolding story of ordinary people writing a new story of what it’s possible to do when people dream big dreams. The Regional Facilitators and I are proud to serve this network and privileged to amplify the network’s amazing achievements.

Gary Stott, Director, and the Regional Facilitator team
Our vision is to create kind, confident and connected communities through the power of food.

This is founded on the connection between three core ideas. The three plates, like lots of our inspiration, came out of a story. We live in communities that are often disconnected. If communities connect together and believe in their potential, people start to do good, kind and loving things in the world around them.

At Incredible Edible we believe this starts by agitating three plates. Imagine that you are a plate spinner. There are three plates and if you use your will and passion to spin all three, the energy they create not only puts on a great show but helps everyone who sees it to think differently about the future.

**COMMUNITY**

**WE GALVANIZE OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH GROWING AND CELEBRATING LOCAL FOOD**

Community is at the very heart of Incredible Edible’s work and our growing patches are edible attractions to get people talking. From its inception, Incredible Edible sought to show how ordinary people can transform their own landscapes and turned disused plots into abundant sources of healthy food.

Working with whoever is willing, we create powerful connections through food, which lead people to believe that when we act together each of us is stronger for it.

**LEARNING**

**WE BRING LEARNING TO LIFE FROM PLOT TO PLAYGROUND**

We believe in the lost arts. The art of growing and soil science, the art of cooking and preserving and the connection that is made to our planet when we learn about food. Incredible Edible believes reviving our hands-on knowledge of food is essential for all our futures.

Schools are natural places to start, with food playing an increasingly important part in the curriculum. Our groups work with schools and their gardening clubs to pass on skills and get them growing. But of course learning doesn’t end at the school gates, and groups across the country provide training through adult gardening clubs, training courses and workshops such as chutney making, pickling and frugal cooking.

**BUSINESS**

**WE SUPPORT LOCAL AND WE BUY LOCAL**

In the UK we are a nation of shop keepers. Proud, industrious people, making a living, giving back to the community and making the local high street vibrant. Incredible Edible believes in business and its positive impact in our communities.

The business plate is nothing at all to do with sponsorship or asking others for help. It’s everything about what we as individuals can do to support a local food economy. Getting pounds into the pockets of small local food businesses so that over time they might be able to produce more and employ more people. It’s dead simple. If it’s possible, the more people shop for local food, the stronger our local food economy is and the stronger our communities are. We support local and buy local, we promote ‘green routes’ that celebrate local growing and walk past local business. That way, we all contribute and we will benefit – we make money sticky.
The bedrock and heart-beat of the Incredible Edible movement is our network of groups. Some are a small number of committed friends, caring for one unloved patch of ground in their street. Some are networks of groups, spanning a whole city. All of them share a common DNA. Growing food for free in public spaces, we help people to think differently about those spaces, about food, about the planet and about how we can connect together to make a difference. We believe in one shared vision, to create kind, confident and connected communities through the power of food. We express this through our actions around our three plates of Community, Learning and Business. There is no one-size-fits-all for human beings or communities, the Incredible Edible recipe tastes slightly different in every place that it is made and we celebrate that diversity and difference.

In Scotland, Incredible Edible Bute has been supported in its first year by Fyne Futures who promote environmental sustainability on the island. Seeing the Incredible Edible model as a way to engage community members in considering the carbon footprint of food, Fyne Futures have supported a group of enthusiastic community members to start growing food in public places around Rothesay. The council were going to grass over the rose beds by the sea front until the group volunteered to plant some hardy fruit bushes and a range of edible plants which could withstand the sea front location. And a derelict piece of land has been converted into an accessible growing area where local school children come to learn about food growing and get to share the produce. As well as supporting the growing activities, Fyne Futures are support the Incredible Edible Bute steering group to gain the skills they need to run the group independently and continue to develop these Incredible activities. Steering Group member John won the Regional Hero for Cowal and Bute at the 2018 Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface Volunteer Awards and the group was shortlisted for the Rural Innovator Awards at the Scottish Rural Parliament too, demonstrating the enthusiasm and impact of the group’s work.

Our groups start in different ways, all inspired by the aim to create kind, confident and connected communities. In Knowsley, Merseyside, Karen and the team were really keen to look at how the Incredible Edible model could support health and wellbeing in the area whilst being led by the wants and needs of the community, as they worked together to increase the amount of food grown and eaten in the borough. Raising the profile of the new group to community members and local stakeholders in the area was important, so a local Councillor was invited to cut the red tape at the formal launch of the group. At the event Councillor Graham Morgan pledged to look at how there must be a change in planning regulations in Knowsley to support more growing projects by ensuring anyone building homes in the borough includes the community in the planning procedure and creates growing space in new estates and developments. This demonstrates how the small action of growing food in public places can start discussions which have ripple effects way beyond the planting of carrots and beans.

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At the end of Dec 2018, in the UK, we had

82 GROUPS
+ 32 FRIENDS

who are independent groups aligning themselves with our vision and values.

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Incredible Edible has always been about people as much as plants, about communities as much as compost. Organic growth is not just about that which is in the ground but about the connections created by the people whose hands tend that ground. From increased activity, transforming the food system, accessing fresh fruit and vegetables and increasing health and well-being, our Incredible Edible groups give so much more to our communities than just beautiful places. Celebrating our people is at the heart of our vision to create kinder communities and to redefine prosperity.

Our groups connect people; everyone engages for their own unique reasons, travelling their own incredible journey, creating positive change for them and those around them. For Amy*, a series of challenging life events had kicked off a bout of depression and she didn’t want to leave the house or be around people. As part of her recovery, Amy wanted to ensure she was eating chemical free fruit and vegetables, so started growing with Incredible Edible Wakefield. It was up to Amy whether she tended the plants when she knew the group met, or whether she went along when she knew she’d be alone. It didn’t take long for Amy to build new relationships with people she might otherwise not have met, and share learning and recipes, connecting through the power of food. A year later, Amy reflects, “I’m out of the house more, I feel more relaxed, grounded, much calmer, far better at problem solving, reconnected with nature and I seem to have a whole new attitude and outlook on life. I actually like who I am now, I know what I want from life and feel I have a lot to offer.”

We also support groups of incredible people to connect across their local area, through a range of events offering opportunities to share, learn and explore together, while connecting communities across a wider geographical area. We held regional Connecting Communities events in the North West, South West and Wales and in the Wakefield area we’ve support exchange visits between groups, building connections between group members to help local change as well as the feeling of being part of something bigger, a national movement of people making changes at a local level to address global issues.

* name has been changed

CASE STUDY

GROWING AND THRIVING – A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Our groups connect people; everyone engages for their own unique reasons, travelling their own personal incredible journey, creating positive change for them and those around them. For Amy*, a series of challenging life events had kicked off a bout of depression and she didn’t want to leave the house or be around people. As part of her recovery, Amy wanted to ensure she was eating chemical free fruit and vegetables, so started growing with Incredible Edible Wakefield. It was up to Amy whether she tended the plants when she knew the group met, or whether she went along when she knew she’d be alone. It didn’t take long for Amy to build new relationships with people she might otherwise not have met, and share learning and recipes, connecting through the power of food. A year later, Amy reflects, “I’m out of the house more, I feel more relaxed, grounded, much calmer, far better at...
When we began this incredible, audacious journey, we never thought that each town and village would be able to grow enough food to sustain itself. Instead, one thing we did want to do was to create a conversation about the future of food, our food system and our land use. Our groups grow in remarkable places. We call these spaces Propaganda Gardens, in the hope that even if they may not produce enough yield to feed the entire local population, they will produce a conversation that helps ordinary people feel that they have the power to change the future of food.

Incredible Edible Oldhill worked in partnership with Autism Bedfordshire to change one bed outside a local shopping parade in Dunstable. With support from Incredible Edible Dunstable, a group of people with autism designed, dug and planted the bed with a range of edible plants, with Jason who attended the course taking time out of his Saturday job in the nearby Autism Anglia shop to do the watering. The work was supported by a range of businesses, including the local pub, plant nursery and car repair shop, who all happily supported the activities. Being Incredible doesn’t mean cultivating huge swathes of land, as this story shows. Creating change in one raised bed can have an impact both on the people directly involved, anyone passing and local businesses, which demonstrates the power of small actions.

Incredible Edible Ulverston worked through Incredible Edible groups change that space and the way people interact with it. Incredible Edible Ulverston and Ulverston in Bloom were approached by a local housing association to work with local residents to change a small space previously used to dump unwanted toys into somewhere productive, educational and attractive. The group and local residents made the most of their local connections, as well as support from the housing association, to create some raised beds filled with edible plants transforming the space and the experience of the local residents. The project was commended by the regional and national In Bloom judges and won the Mayor’s Award in a local competition, plus the Greening Grey Britain Award in the Cumbria in Bloom awards. This recognition changes people’s perceptions of the street they live in, building confidence and for one person involved in the group it allowed them to gain new skills which led to them getting paid employment.

By growing in public places, Incredible Edible groups change that space and the way people interact with it. And what better way to change the way children think about food than to change their walking route to school? After seeing the local council build some planters along the safer school route, Incredible Edible Conwy worked with staff and pupils of the Speech and Language Resource, Dosbarth Gold y Gors at Ysgol Awel y Mynydd primary school to plant produce which the local community can harvest. This budding partnership will mean the children get weekly hands on opportunities to learn about growing and engage with their walk to school in a completely different way.
A famous person once said ‘do not hide your light under a bushel’, in other words, being a movement for change means being brave enough to want to raise your voice in the public sphere. The voice of Incredible Edible is not empty words, policy positions or global goals, it is just ordinary citizens doing extraordinary things. We believe that the network has a pivotal role to play in amplifying those small actions, so that we can encourage each other on the journey and help other people to think differently and imagining an alternative future.

Our grass roots action is complemented by a range of on-line tools which serve the same purpose of creating kind and connected communities throughout the UK.

CASE STUDY

INCREDIBLE RESOURCES

We share our learning and experience through our website and social media, connecting incredible people across towns, counties, regions, countries and the world. The materials on the website are there to provide guidance, inspiration and some practical resources for new and established groups as they continue their incredible journey. For Duana at newly established Incredible Edible St Austell, accessing the resources and gaining support from our Regional Facilitator made a real difference as the group established itself. “The resources are excellent. I’ve spent a lot of time until now doing all of this side of it by myself, and I was ridiculously excited when I finally got to explore the website properly. There is so much there that I can use to help us. Sara (Regional Facilitator) has been a great help, we managed to meet up at the point where I really didn’t think it was worth continuing, and she gave me a much-needed vitality injection.”

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REFLECTIONS ON 2018

We asked our groups about their achievements in 2018 and they told us about how they’d spun all three plates, increasing the amount of space they grow, supporting people to learn about food, and working closely with local business to promote Incredible activities and local food. Our groups talked about their connected communities, about the people and organisations they’d worked with to achieve Incredible things like gaining awards, increasing their reputation and securing funding.

Of course, not everything is plain sailing and groups also told us about their challenges, with the dry weather as a particular challenge in 2018, plus getting enough people with a range of skills involved with their group. Sometimes groups faced challenges working with local councils and businesses, as well securing funding for Incredible activities in their community. Our Regional Facilitators will continue to support groups to make the most of these achievements and to overcome their challenges in 2019.

PLANS FOR 2019

Incredible Edible groups have plans to grow in 2019, not just plants but the people they engage with, the sites in public places where they grow, their promotion, funding and learning activities. Our Regional Facilitators want to support this growing of people and activities as well, seeing 2019 and beyond with more people gaining health benefits from being involved in community activities and developing new relationships with food, as well as with each other. Their priorities involve connecting communities across their area, with their own Incredible Edible groups developing in robust and sustainable ways.

Incredible Edible has always been about asking the question – how do we make it easier for all people to live well and prosper? This is expressed in grass roots action to change things, through the power of small actions. This year we see many people in many countries sharing a growing sense that the situation which inspired the birth of Incredible Edible is not getting better. There is a climate crisis. The voices of old and young across the world have called for us to accept the urgent need for change in the fundamental frameworks of our lives so that our planet and people can thrive. We believe that over the last decade we have learned a thing or two. This year we are affirming that we, the grass roots activists, can help the policy makers to do things differently. We are asking for three things:

MORE LAND TO FEED OURSELVES FROM

So the public realm needs to change, we need to create more community owned land and we need to make edible towns and cities the new normal.

MORE PEOPLE LIVING WELL AND LONG

Edible Hospitals and health centres should be the norm with community kitchens at the heart of the NHS and more use of local food.

MORE SKILLS AND JOBS IN RESOURCEFUL COMMUNITIES

We need to invest in urban farmers and growing techniques and also create the bridges between school yard and kitchen table. We need to invest in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths for tomorrow’s food needs and build capacity in our infrastructure that focuses on local food enterprise.

We call this our new Social Contract and it looks like this...

WE THE PEOPLE

1. Grow and share food in our local communities.
2. Create more propaganda gardens.
3. Share the lost arts.
4. Support local businesses.

WE THE POLICY MAKERS

1. Rethink public realm.
2. Make edible landscapes mainstream.
3. Invest in community kitchens & skills.
4. Support local food supply chains.

This is not a new phase of the development of Incredible Edible, we have been working for this since day one. Today we feel it is more urgent than ever that the power of our small actions is matched by committed actions in all quarters to help us change the frameworks that support us to live healthy, happy and prosperous lives. Now is the time for us to be the change and see the change.
Join a growing movement and do something Incredible

We work in groups and with partners, with all who are willing. We would love you to join us on the journey. There are lots of people who have walked this journey before you. Get in touch and we will pick up the phone and encourage you. The website is full of our learning and our local networks meet together to inspire and build each other up.

Get in touch and find your own way to be Incredible.

info@incredibleedible.org.uk
www.incredibleedible.org.uk

Notes on data collection: Our data is based on the answers from a sample of 34 of the 82 (41%) Incredible Edible groups in the UK in 2018

Cover image: Aleksandra Warchol

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