Connection through growing in the West End

Robyn Thomas and **Jay Ingram-Seal** tell us what's happening at Stanleys Community Centre in Morecambe.

Stanleys Grassroots Allotment began in 2023, born from the vision and determination of Donna Horwood during one of the most challenging chapters of her life. Following a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, Donna had to step away from her long-standing role as a senior care worker within a 47-roomed dementia and rehabilitation care home. Rather than retreat, she redirected her energy into staying well through nature-based activity, taking on a single-bed plot at West End North Allotments on Osbourne Road with a growing passion for horticulture and wellbeing.

Determined to build something bigger than herself, Donna engaged local volunteers and forged a strong relationship with the allotment committee, eventually joining as a member. When a larger plot became available, her dream took root: to transform the space into a welcoming haven that supports mental and physical health for all.

Donna envisioned a vibrant community hub where anyone could find peace, purpose, and connection through growing. The allotment also supported Stanleys' wider food aid initiative, providing fresh produce to those in need. With funding secured for volunteer support, and match-funding from Stanleys for a new toilet facility, the allotment became more accessible to new users and community groups.

Through Donna's vision, the allotment continues to thrive not only as a growing space but as a beacon of inclusion, regeneration, and wellbeing. Her journey reflects how personal adversity can spark profound community transformation, rooted in hope, care, and resilience.

Before (2023)

After (latest picture, 2025)

The allotment at Stanleys has blossomed into a vibrant, well-tended space thanks to the dedication of a core group of eight committed volunteers. With special thanks to our volunteers Jay, Steve, and Karen for all their hard work. Their love for the land is evident in every corner from the rows of thriving produce to the transformation of a previously derelict lean-to, now a flourishing greenhouse admired by many. They give generously of their time, visiting the site three to four times a week to keep it nurtured and alive.

Stanleys has long supported the community through intercepted food via its weekly food club. In 2024, this work took an exciting step forward thanks to funding that enabled the appointment of a food educator. She prepares nutritious meals for those attending daily lunches and after-school sessions, while also teaching people how to cook with ingredients provided by the food club and fresh produce from the allotment. It's a beautiful cycle of growth, nourishment, and empowerment.

As the allotment yields more produce, preserving it for use in the quieter growing months has become a new goal. Volunteers have already started using a dehydrator to create homemade onion and garlic powder and now hope to acquire a larger dehydrator or freeze dryer to expand this capability.

To ensure year-round growing and build long-term resilience, Stanleys successfully applied for funding from the Pots of Possibility Fund. The result: a brand-new polytunnel, installed in July, opening up fresh opportunities for winter cultivation.

Grassroots was recently visited by Diana McIntyre from Closing Loops to explore ways we can expand our composting capabilities. The conversation focused on how to reduce food waste generated by both the food club and our kitchen through more effective composting systems. Diana shared valuable insights on community composting models and how small-scale efforts can create a big impact when supported by local networks.

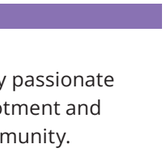
At Grassroots, our volunteers are deeply passionate about sustainability – not just at our allotment and Stanleys, but throughout the wider community. Composting is just one part of our broader goal to reduce waste and promote circular practices. By diverting food scraps from landfill and turning them into rich compost, we can nourish our gardens and help close the loop on food production and consumption.

Looking ahead, we are excited about expanding our composting efforts. This includes introducing more user-friendly composting bins, improving our education around food waste, and working with local partners to scale up our impact. We are also exploring the possibility of hosting composting workshops and involving more residents in the process.

We believe that sustainable practices should be accessible and inclusive. Through collaboration with networks like FoodFutures and continued community involvement, we aim to create a model that others can follow, one compost pile at a time. Our commitment to sustainability is growing, and we welcome everyone to be part of the journey.

Robyn Thomas *is founder and director of Stanleys Community Centre.* **Jay Ingram-Seal** *likes anything to do with nature, and enjoys getting her hands in the soil.*

Get involved



The allotment team always welcomes new faces, regardless of experience. If you'd like to get involved, please contact: **enquiries@stanleyscommunitycentre.co.uk**

To find out more about what goes on at Stanleys: **stanleyscommunitycentre.co.uk** or **@stanleyscommunitycentre** on Facebook and Instagram.

The polytunnel.

Joe, Donna and Jay under the new parasol.