

# Changing Lifestyles

## Inspirational Case Studies of Adapting to Eco-Friendly Behaviours



# Amina Rahman



Amina lives in Edinburgh with her family and works in the NKS nursery. She grows vegetables in her garden, something that she has been doing since her childhood; her parents, grandparents and aunties taught her the skills she now uses to grow vegetables. She loves growing her own vegetables as she believes it is good for the environment and also healthier for herself and her family as they can avoid chemicals. She is very enthusiastic about her garden; two years ago, she grew beautiful cherry tomatoes and excitedly showed many individuals from the community. She also grows mustard greens (which she loves to eat with fish), potatoes, coriander, radish, spinach and other vegetables. Sometimes, her mother-in-law, who is over 90 years old and lives with her, gardens alongside her. In the summer, children in the family also garden.

In the past couple of years, she has been making her own compost. Making her own compost has really benefitted her food as it enriches the soil with organic materials. Before making her own compost, she and her family used to throw food waste

into the bin. When food waste bins were introduced in Edinburgh, she had the idea to begin composting the waste by digging a hole in her garden, filling it with kitchen waste and putting a lid over it. In the last year and a half, Amina has been saving ash from a wood-burning stove her daughter bought. She spreads the ash on plant leaves as a chemical-free pest deterrent and is very happy with the results!

Although she had gained previous knowledge about gardening from her family in Bangladesh, she attended NKS' gardening sessions at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and found them very enjoyable. She learned techniques to plant seeds in Scotland, considering the weather and climate, amongst other things. She and the other ladies taught the facilitator new techniques and ideas as well, creating a mutually-beneficial learning environment.

She believes NKS is doing important work in teaching the community about the environment and how to live sustainably. Aside from new gardening skills, she has learned quite a few things from NKS sessions, including ways to be more energy efficient at home. She is now very conscious about reducing energy-use in small ways, like turning the lights off and not filling the kettle to the top if she is only making one cup of tea. She tries to show her children how to also be conscious about using less energy at home as she believes, "these small things become big things."

**"These small things become big things"**



**Amina making compost in her garden**



# Amita Chandra



Amita has been a member of NKS for the past two years and has participated in the centre's Climate Challenge Fund activities. Previously, she studied environmental science in India, later working for Greenpeace. She was thrilled when NKS began events and sessions addressing climate change as it is something she has always cared about deeply. She has enjoyed learning about the environment and climate change in Scotland, as her studies had previously taught her about the issue in an Indian context.

She tries to do her part to protect the planet however she can. To manage clothing waste, she donates to charity shops in Edinburgh. Her mother, who visits frequently from India, takes back old clothing to give to the country's poor.

To manage food waste, Amita composts leftover scraps of food with material from her backyard with help from a compost-maker; she has been making compost for around one year. She learned about composting through NKS' gardening sessions at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, where participants are shown the garden's compost maker. She says that making compost using old scraps of food is great as it helps her manage waste while also benefitting her vegetable garden. She believes managing waste is

important as she wants to teach her young boys how to protect the environment. She says, "I don't want to waste... I've got my boys and I have to teach them good things."

She uses her home-made, organic compost to help grow vegetables in her plot in her garden. She wanted a garden for a very long time; after moving to Edinburgh, she asked her husband if they could live somewhere with a garden. Since participating in gardening sessions at the Royal Botanic Garden

Edinburgh, her garden has flourished. She has learned how to sow seeds properly and to make supports to grow runner beans. She and her family eat food from her garden, including spinach, beans and radishes. She also credits the sessions for teaching her the importance of buying locally and seasonally to be climate-friendly and to support local economies.



Amita working in a garden

*"It's not easy, but I love to be environmentally-friendly. If you love something, and you try and practice it daily, it becomes easy"*

Although she does not always find it easy to be environmentally-friendly, she is passionate about the environment and continues to try to make small changes. Sometimes, she finds it difficult to cut down on plastic but says she is happy about the 10 pence charge on shopping bags as it makes her think twice about buying a plastic bag. She says, "it's not easy, but I love to be environmentally-friendly. If you love something, and you try to practice it daily, it becomes easy."

She believes that when she is environmentally-friendly, she can convince those around her to make good decisions as well, including her sons. She wants them to grow older wanting to save the environment, as she is aware that climate change is a huge issue.

# Habibah Rahman

Habibah is 17 years old and lives in Edinburgh. She is in her last year of school at the Mary Erkin School and will begin a degree in biomedical sciences this September. In the past few years, she has stopped asking her mother to drive her to school and instead takes the bus. In fact, anywhere she travels alone, including to her tutoring classes and to go out with her friends, she takes the bus instead of asking for a ride.

There are many benefits to taking the bus. She enjoys taking the bus because it is environmentally-friendly. She also thinks it is most convenient for her and her family: if her mother were to drop her to and from school, it would involve 4 trips, instead of 2 direct bus rides. By taking the bus, they avoid 2 unnecessary trips, saving them both time and avoiding carbon emissions from driving.

For her, taking the bus allows her to be independent as she can travel and see the city on her own very easily, she says, "you can take a bus to anywhere." Although many of her friends drive, she says they take the bus together because it is more convenient and enjoyable.

She also enjoys taking the bus because she believes it is more exciting than driving. On the bus, she is able to people-watch and have different experiences each time she travels, which makes her journeys more enjoyable.



**Habibah waiting for the bus**

She has also participated in gardening sessions hosted by NKS at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. At home, she and her family also grow vegetables. She found the sessions at the Botanic Gardens very fun and informative. She also mentioned that from learning how to grow her own vegetables, she has found that eating freshly grown food is much tastier than store-bought produce.

Her mother works at NKS as part of the Climate Challenge Fund team. Habibah says that she has grown up in a household where everyone is very conscious of the

environment and tries to do their best to avoid waste of any kind, including plastics, food and energy. At home, they have invested in metal straws to reduce single-use plastics. Her family also make sure that all of the windows are closed when they heat their home to not waste energy.

**"You can take a bus to anywhere"**

She is an older sister to her two younger siblings. She says that her younger sisters are quite environmentally-conscious, which she credits to videos on youtube and media explaining climate change to children. She praises her younger sisters for helping her on her journey to becoming more sustainable.



# Mukesh Pandey



Mukesh lives with his family in Edinburgh. He works as a systems analyst and also is a priest at the temple. He feels a lot of love and respect for the environment and wants to do what he can to protect the planet. His spiritual background has influenced his love for the earth; he sees the planet as the same as his home and desires to keep both clean.

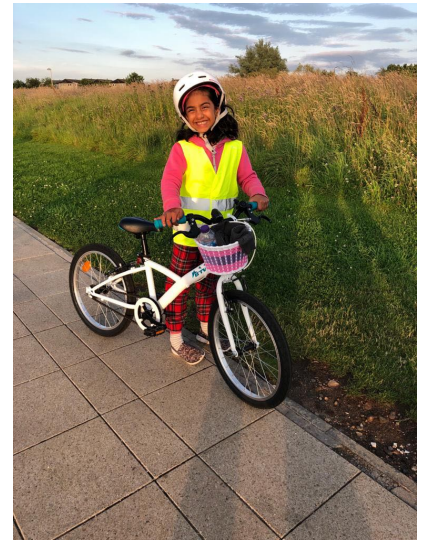
He tries to do his part for the environment through being conscious about food and keeping a sustainable diet. He follows a vegetarian diet and encourages others to do the same. He believes that it is possible for him to be vegetarian because he works an office-based job and does not need to exert much physical energy. He follows a vegetarian diet out of respect

for living things, but also because the food grown to feed animals for consumption can just be used to feed humans which can reduce carbon emissions from agriculture.

**“We have a zero-waste policy [at home]. It is about the love for family members as well, if you waste food, you don’t love or respect the person who has cooked for you. This is very important - love and affection for the environment as well”**

He also says that his family has a “zero-waste policy” in their home that is based on both love for the environment, and for one another. He tells me, “anything, whatever [my kids] want to eat, their plate has that amount of food on it and they have to finish it. My wife is very particular, if I skip a meal I have to eat it the next day. We have a zero-waste policy. It is about the love for family members as well, if you waste food, you don’t love or respect the person who has cooked for you. This is very important - love and affection for the environment as well.”

He is also an avid cyclist. He and his daughters cycle to the community centre for swimming lessons on the weekend. Although he would originally take the bus to work, he now regularly cycles. He stated the many benefits of cycling to work, aside from avoiding carbon emissions from driving and taking the bus. For him, this includes saving time, money (enough for a trip to Europe!) and getting exercise. He mentioned, “when you take your bike to work, you have fresh air, clouds and beautiful skies. You feel fresh in the office. And lastly, it is my only mode of exercise, 5.5 miles to the office. It keeps me fit. To give you a figure, in the last three and a half years I haven’t taken a sick leave. I believe cycling is the one thing that has kept me healthy.”



**Mukesh's daughter, Mishita, on a cycling trip**

# Naz Rathore

Naz has recently joined NKS and is keen to engage in behaviour in her everyday life that will protect the planet. She has become more and more interested in climate change after hearing about it on the news and in her travels. Through NKS and her children, she is beginning to learn more about how to live while caring for the planet.

For her, becoming sustainable is a learning process. Sometimes, finding accurate information about what is good or what is bad for the planet can be complicated. So, she is taking her learning slowly to properly understand the plethora of information about protecting the planet.

She has begun to be more careful about her waste: she puts her food waste in the compost bin and is careful to recycle materials like cardboard. In November, she celebrated her 65th birthday; she and her daughter discussed ways to make her party more sustainable, as they knew having a lot of guests at the party meant the potential for waste was quite significant. Instead of using plastic plates and cutlery, they decided to buy bamboo plates and cutlery that are biodegradable. Naz has also begun buying loose vegetables instead of pre-packaged ones. Although she admits that in the past she was not as knowledgeable about sustainability, she is continually learning, telling me "I have done it in the past, but I won't do it again."



**Bamboo plates used at Naz' party**

While she is conscious of minimising waste, her passion lies in gardening. She has dreamt of growing a vegetable garden in her backyard for awhile and will be making her dream come true in summer 2020. Her neighbours and children have been encouraging her to begin growing vegetables and she is now finally ready and able to do so. For her 65th birthday party, guests gifted her different items to help her to grow a garden. She proclaims, "they all know I don't want anything, I just want something for the garden. I get more pleasure growing a flower than from a big box of chocolates or even a present. I get so happy sitting in my garden."

**"I get more pleasure growing a flower than from a big box of chocolates or even a present. I get so happy sitting in my garden"**

After building raised beds, she hopes to invite women from the NKS community to her home to grow vegetables together and learn more about planting. Her idea to grow vegetables will both benefit the planet and NKS.



# Opu Sultan



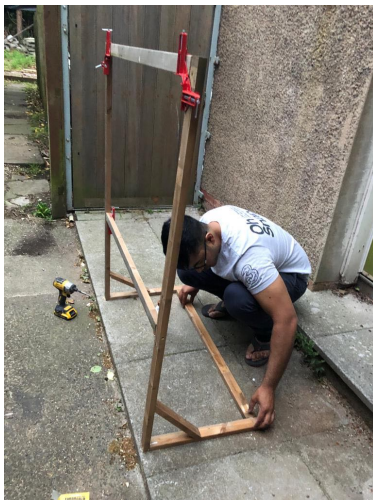
Opu is a photographer from Manchester who has been living in Edinburgh for 14 years. His work involves photographing people and events.

He recently bought and renovated his home. During the process, he tried to minimise waste and ensure his new home would be energy efficient. He minimised waste by building things himself and salvaging materials instead of buying everything new. He has not always made his own things with salvaged materials; before buying his own home, he preferred store-bought items. Now, he advocates for building things from scratch.

After noticing timber in his neighbour's yard that had gone unused for over 6 months, Opu asked his neighbour if he could keep the timber; he has plans to buy land and would like to use it there. Later, he also used leftover wood he had used to build his home to renovate his office, instead of buying new wood.

When he and his family moved in, they found timber in their backyard. Instead of throwing it away, he decided to use the wood to make shoe racks and shelves. He also created a step stool using the same wood. Because he made the step stool himself, it was perfectly built for his height and was exactly what he needed. He told me, "building your own things gives you flexibility to make something that's custom to yourself." In summer 2019, NKS put on a puppet show at the Edinburgh Climate Festival at The Meadows; he used the step stool to create a stage for actors to perform the show, helping NKS avoid wasting materials to create a new stage and providing them with a stage that was perfectly customised to their show.

**"Building your own things gives you flexibility to make something that's custom to yourself"**



**Opu building a stage for the NKS puppet show**

Aside from minimising waste, he also tries to be energy efficient. When renovating his house, he ensured that the building was well insulated and only uses LED lighting. He also is planning on replacing the windows so that heat does not escape.

Although he has been successful in practicing sustainability in renovating his new home, there are areas with which he sometimes struggles: since having children, he finds that it is difficult to avoid food waste as sometimes his children do not, or cannot, eat food that has been prepared. Additionally, although much of his home has good insulation, the living room, where his infant child often rests, catches a draft. Because of this, Opu needs to use more energy. Nevertheless, his efforts to be sustainable are commendable.

# Supta Das



Supta is a member of NKS and has participated in Climate Challenge Fund activities at the centre since spring 2018. Before that, she helped ELREC with their Edible Garden Project. She has also worked at Scottish Water for 11 years.

She has an intimate relationship with the environment, in part due to growing up in the beautiful, mountainous landscape of Northeast India. During our interview, she tells me, “without nature, life is nothing.”

She practices sustainability in many areas of her life. She prefers to shop for groceries weekly instead of monthly, as it reduces food waste. She also composts and rarely eats processed food. Additionally, she is conscious of household energy consumption and the environmental benefits of washing clothes at a reduced heat and monitoring her family’s gas and electricity consumption with a smart metre.

“Without nature, life is nothing”

She also tries to run a plastic-free kitchen. She uses glass containers and a steel milk bottle for her 18 month old son. At a party she threw recently for over 35 guests, she served food on glass plates, washing and reusing them instead of using plastic plates and cutlery that would have been thrown out.

She candidly acknowledges the difficulty in maintaining a zero-plastic lifestyle, citing costs and a lack of control as hindrances to the goal. Yet, she emphasises the importance of making small, doable changes. Outside of her home, she still attempts to live a zero plastic lifestyle: recently, during the Hindu festival of Durga Puja, she made sure to bring her own plate to the temple, instead of using a plastic one provided.

Participating in NKS Climate Challenge Fund activities has improved her gardening and cycling skills, given her a platform and community to share knowledge about climate change and has improved her emotional wellbeing.

The weekly workshops and sessions at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh have taught her about planting seeds and making the best use of a plot. Additionally, sharing recipes among the women who participate in the activity has allowed her to learn different ways to cook the vegetables they grow and avoid food waste. At swap shops, she is able to buy items for her baby son, saving her money and avoiding plastic waste. She emphasises the social aspect of the programme, saying, “it’s helping each other, isn’t it?”

She also speaks highly of the cycling and walking sessions. The cycling sessions have improved her confidence in riding a bike, allowing her to take part in Scottish Water’s Cycle to Work scheme, complete a cycling trip from Glasgow to Edinburgh for Cycle for Scotland and participate in various cycling races.

She credits the walking activities at NKS with helping to improve her physical and emotional wellbeing after giving birth to her son. Her story highlights the benefits Climate Challenge Fund activities have on the wellbeing of communities while also reducing carbon emissions.



Supta using her own plate at the temple



# Sushma Gupta



Sushma is a member of the NKS community and regularly participates in Climate Challenge Fund activities at the centre. She is a dentist by profession and also helps the centre in providing oral health sessions to the community. After moving to Edinburgh from Hyderabad, a city in South India, she began attending cycling, walking and gardening sessions at the centre. These sessions helped her to make friends and begin to lay roots in the city.

She cares about taking care of the environment because she wants to leave the earth beautiful and healthy for future generations. One area where she practices sustainability is through food. In her community in Hyderabad, religious festivals always involve lots of food. At the temples, instead of using plastic plates, worshippers eat in banana leaves. Eating in banana leaves purifies food; the food reacts with the properties of the banana leaf and improves digestion. Therefore, it is healthier for humans and also the environment. It is cultural practices like these that have also had an impact on her sustainable practices.

When cooking, she tries to re-use leftover food. For example, if there is leftover rice, she ferments it with yogurt and eats it to benefit from its abundance of vitamin B12. She also uses leftover chapatis to make wraps.

During the spring and summer months, she regularly attended NKS' sessions at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE). There, she learned the basics of growing vegetables, from pricking seeds to harvesting. She shared with the group and the session facilitator valuable knowledge about soil, including how to use cocopeat to improve soil for gardening. She also shared information about how to make compost at home with wet kitchen waste, that produces nitrogen, and dry waste, like leaves and cardboard, that produces carbon, two elements that are important in helping plants to grow.

From the last harvest at the RBGE, she made radish curry and bean curry, amongst other dishes. The sessions inspired her to grow her own greens. Although she does not have access to a garden, she has learned how to use hydroponics to grow coriander, mint and other herbs without soil.

**"It's in our hands to be conscious about our environment and what is happening around us"**

She finds it relatively easy to live environmentally-friendly. She says, "it's in our hands to be conscious about our environment and what is happening around us." Although, sometimes she finds it difficult to confront aspects that are not in her hands: for example, she believes the government should make more of an effort to take the impacts of plastic seriously and to properly tackle plastic production and consumption.

Despite these difficulties, she continues to be conscious about the environment, in an effort to allow everyone, including future generations, to enjoy its beauty and benefits.



Sushma at the NKS gardening sessions

# Vivek and Nagma Sharma



Vivek and Nagma are members of the NKS community. They are passionate about growing vegetables in their backyard, creating compost and making spaces more green to improve biodiversity in their area.

They inherited their love for gardening and the environment from their parents. During their childhoods in India, they planted vegetables and bought and learned about compost.

They carried their love for gardening with them when they moved to Edinburgh and have transformed their backyard into a green paradise, with many flowers and vegetables. They grow so many vegetables, including kale, Swiss chard and various beans that in the summer they are self-sufficient and do not need to buy

vegetables - in fact, they have plenty to share with neighbours!



Vivek and Nagma's garden in full bloom

Now in their garden, they make their own compost using earthworms, food waste, newspaper and coffee grounds that they get for free from coffeeshops. He believes composting is good because it is natural and it avoids fuel emissions from collecting store-bought compost. Although individuals in the community initially found it strange that the couple were making compost with earthworms, they now recognise how helpful it is to grow a lush, thriving garden.

Vivek and Nagma are passionate about sharing their love for gardening and the environment with younger generations. She believes that teaching children about the environment and climate change is one of the most important things we can do amid the climate crisis. They teach their children about gardening and help them give their plants names like "Spongebob" so that they feel attached to their plants and interested in their growth. Children from the NKS community have also visited their garden to learn more about composting and have grown small potted plants.

**"Try and grab seeds and throw them wherever you see an open space"**

Outside of their garden, Vivek loves planting seeds in wooded or overgrown areas near their home. His efforts are appreciated by his neighbours - with one neighbour regularly walking through the flowering area, stopping to admire the beautiful nature with her friend. Another neighbour has asked him if they can plant a few seeds together in the wooded area behind their home.

Before finishing our conversation, I asked the couple if they had anything else to add, after thinking for a moment, he replied "try and grab seeds and throw them wherever you see an open space." His words are important to remember to make our world healthier and more beautiful.



# Urfol Sunu

Urfol lives in Edinburgh and volunteers at NKS, often giving her time to cooking for the community and teaching members new skills, like basket-weaving and fan-making.

She cares that people are treated well, and is concerned that climate change will harm many individuals and communities. In Bangladesh, where she is from, often, crops cannot be grown due to soil pollution, affecting communities. She is also concerned for the animals that are suffering due to our changing planet, like marine wildlife that are affected by plastic pollution in our oceans.

Joining the NKS community and participating in Climate Challenge Fund activities has helped her to make more sustainable decisions. At home and in her daily life, she tries to make sure her actions and practices do not harm the environment.



**Pillows made by Urfol from re-used cloth**

Firstly, she is conscious about minimising waste. When there is leftover food, instead of chucking it in the bin, she transforms it into another dish. For example, she makes pakoras from old rice or chicken pasta from a chicken curry. She also does not let old garments go to waste; similarly to food, she transforms old garments into new outfits. For example, she has used an old tablecloth to make new pillows for her sofas.

She finds encouragement to minimise waste in her household from her religion. She is Muslim and in Islam, everything, including food, is understood as God's creation, making it disrespectful to waste. In Islam, it is a followers' duty to care for the environment.

Aside from minimising waste from food and clothing, she and her family are also conscious about their energy and water use. Instead of running the water for an extended period of time, they try and minimise water waste by taking bucket baths. Also, she is very careful about turning off lights when rooms are not in use.

She has contributed immensely to the NKS community through her delicious food and sharing of skills. At the Edinburgh Climate Festival at The Meadows in Summer 2019, she taught attendees how to make baskets from recycled materials. She first learned how to weave bamboo baskets from her father while she was a child growing up in Sylhet, Bangladesh. After moving to Edinburgh, she used her creativity and imagination to weave baskets from recycled materials, including old newspapers.



**Urfol teaching basketweaving at NKS**

She hopes that more people can access support to learn more about Global climate change.

*This conversation was translated by Urfol's niece, Tanisha.*

These case studies have been produced and designed by Sonya Peres. Most portraits of participants have been taken by Sonya Peres. Other photographs have been provided by participants.

Thank you to the Climate Challenge Fund and to all the participants for sharing your stories.

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