

Grow Your Park Case Studies

Community Gardens in Parks:

Opportunities for
Health, Community,
and Recreation



National Recreation
and Park Association

Table of Contents

About Grow Your Park 4

ORDERED BY TOPIC

Supporting community health and wellness, and healthy lifestyles

Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department: An Edible Forest Maze 18
 National Trail Parks and Recreation District: From Community-Wide
 Health and Wellness to Children’s Gardening and Back Again 34
 Peoria Park District: Growing Kids’ Enthusiasm for Nature 47
 Reno Parks, Recreation, & Community Services Department: A Cooperative Effort 50
 Rockford Park District: Prepared for the Unexpected 55

Providing access to fresh produce and affordable nutritious food

Friends of Patterson Park: Creating the People’s Garden 15
 Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department: Building a Culture of Gardening 24
 Omaha Recreation & Public Property: From Garden to Market 36
 Oxford Park Commission: Involving the Entire Community 38
 Topeka Oakland Community Center: Helping to Revitalize
 An Urban Neighborhood with Community Gardens 61

Creating and strengthening intergenerational connections

Evanston Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department:
 Growing Food and Building Relationships 12
 Richland County Recreation Commission: Three Gardens Serving Three Populations 53

Revitalizing neighborhood parks

Lansing Department of Parks and Recreation: Growing an Edible Park 21

Strengthening community through public-nonprofit partnerships

Five Rivers MetroParks: Outdoor Connections:
 Supporting Youth Gardening Throughout the City 6

Promoting self-sufficiency

Pensacola Parks and Recreation Department:
 Recreating A Food-Growing Tradition in An Urban Park 44

Growing connections to the natural environment

City of Eugene Recreation Department: Learning Gardening Skills and Environmentalism 9

Supporting children’s physical and emotional development

McAllen Parks and Recreation Department: Diverse Gardens with A Common Purpose 28
 Pekin Park District: Superheroes of Mother Nature 41

Encouraging youth entrepreneurship and “green” career paths

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board: Building Long-Term Infrastructure 31
 Shreveport Public Assembly and Recreation: Feeding A Neighborhood 58

Acknowledgements 64

About National Recreation and Park Association 64

Grow Your Park Case Studies

Community Gardens in Parks: Opportunities for Health, Community, and Recreation

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) received funding from the National Recreation Foundation and J.R. Albert Foundation to support community garden development and programming through the Grow Your Park program. This program provided grants to 20 park and recreation agencies to develop or expand community gardening in their communities, with a special emphasis on increasing children’s knowledge and health through garden programs — ranging from awareness of food origin and proper nutrition to acquiring hands-on skills to increasing intergenerational connections and learning.

The following case studies document the objectives, program elements, challenges, and successful practices implemented by Grow Your Park grantees. The case studies were based on information gathered in telephone interviews with the individuals responsible for each grantee’s youth-oriented garden program, as well as information provided in progress reports. Although each program was unique, a number of common themes emerged in terms of objectives, challenges, and successful practices. All of the

grantees sought to teach children gardening skills and awareness of where food comes from, improve children’s knowledge of nutrition, promote healthy eating habits, and provide opportunities for exercise and a quality outdoor experience. Grantees whose gardens were located in “food deserts” (areas where healthy, affordable food is difficult to obtain) often added to their list of objectives increased access to fresh food for neighborhood residents. Several grantees wanted to provide an opportunity for older youth to develop entrepreneurial skills, to incorporate academic skills into their program, to create intergenerational gardening experiences by involving parents or senior citizens, to recreate a food-growing tradition, or to integrate the program into a broader neighborhood revitalization effort.

Common challenges included having an insufficient number of staff with gardening experience and enthusiasm, initial skepticism from the leadership of the agency in which the program is imbedded, and of course, the weather. A wide range of strategies were

developed to overcome each of these challenges and more.

Practices that most grantees viewed as essential to the success of their program were:

- Recruiting gardening experts right from the start, for example, through partnerships with local gardening organizations
- Obtaining in-kind and financial support from partnerships with businesses
- Keeping the garden simple so that it can be sustained inexpensively
- Winning the support of the lead agency
- Developing gardening-related activities that can be done indoors in case the weather doesn't cooperate or to extend the program beyond the growing season
- Making the planning process inclusive of children, staff, and gardening experts who will be working in the garden
- Making the garden as attractive and visible to passers-by as possible. It's also a great way to attract potential volunteers

A number of positive impacts on participants and/or the community were noted by grantees, including:

- Supporting community health and wellness, and healthy lifestyles
- Creating and strengthening intergenerational connections
- Revitalizing neighborhood parks
- Providing access to fresh produce and affordable nutritious food
- Promoting self-sufficiency
- Strengthening community through public-nonprofit partnerships
- Growing connections to the natural environment

- Supporting children's physical and emotional development
- Encouraging youth entrepreneurship and "green" career paths

There was a wide variety of and creativity in the grantee programs, as well as common themes in the grantees' experiences. It is the intention of this report that the Grow Your Park grantees' experiences will benefit other communities across the country in implementing, sustaining, and improving youth-oriented garden programs.

Note: Climate data for the "At-A-Glance" sections came from www.weatherbase.com. Peoria weather data was used for Pekin, while Chicago data was used for Evanston. Descriptive information about each community came from www.wikipedia.org. Demographic data came from the U.S. Census Bureau. Data from the 2010 decennial census was used for total population and population under age 18. Data from the 2009 American Community Survey was used for race/ethnicity, median household income and poverty status.



Five Rivers MetroParks: Outdoor Connections (Grow With Your Neighbors Community Gardening Program)

DAYTON, OH

Supporting Youth Gardening Throughout the City

Grow With Your Neighbors (GWYN) is a community gardening program that is an outreach project of Five Rivers MetroParks. Five Rivers MetroParks maintains the public parks and trails in Dayton along with the rest of Montgomery County, Ohio. Since 1986, GWYN has been helping urban residents in the county develop and maintain community gardens and green projects, transforming vacant lots into productive spaces.

GWYN staff currently work with about 50 community gardens throughout the county. Most of these are in Dayton and include several youth garden programs. One of these programs, City Beets, is a summer program for youth aged 12 to 15, in which participants grow a garden, learn about nutrition and food systems, and sell produce at the 2nd Street Market in downtown Dayton. The garden is located at Wegerzyn Gardens, a public

GARDEN IMPACT

Strengthening Community Through Public-NonProfit Partnerships

Many of the youth gardening programs conducted at the Five Rivers MetroParks community gardens are run by local nonprofit agencies serving at-risk youth. This partnership allows these agencies to provide a unique experience for their participants that they would otherwise be unable to offer. In turn, Five Rivers can provide educational expertise and supplies, but does not have to staff all these programs.

park in the city. This summer, 19 youths participated in the program.

Other programs include:

- Mountain Top Ministries, a youth employment and mentoring program for low-income teens, has had a youth garden for a number of years
- The Youth Leadership Academy hosted by Our Secret Garden community garden in Dayton is a summer youth employment program for teens aged 12-15. Participants grow a garden, learn about nutrition, and also spend time focusing on math and reading skills
- The Life Enrichment Center, a faith-based nonprofit organization in Dayton, has two raised beds that are tended by about 45 elementary-school children and a dozen older children
- Other youth gardens that GWYN works with are run by the Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA in Trotwood, a neighboring city outside of Dayton. Recently, several probation officers from Montgomery County's Juvenile Justice program, who are also avid gardeners, have been bringing teens from drug court to Wegerzyn Gardens as part of their probation. The NRPA grant is being used to purchase equipment and supplies, such as composters, seeds, plants, irrigation equipment, and garden tools for these youth gardens

Luci Beachdell, GWYN Manager, has developed several partnerships. She has worked with engineers at the University of Dayton to design a water harvesting structure that is relatively inexpensive to build. The City of Dayton has provided some limited funding, and the Ohio State University Extension Service has conducted nutrition education programs for City Beets participants. The county Public Health Department is developing a youth nutrition survey to be used by youth-serving agencies, and Wright State University Medical School will help with the data collection for youth garden participants.

Ms. Beachdell is excited about the progress being made, in particular, by two of the youth gardens that she works with — the Life Enrichment Center and the YMCA. A large number of children participate on a regular basis at both gardens. For example, about 200 students participate at the YMCA at least once a week in their summer day-camp and after-school program. The YMCA is also integrating families into their gardening activities. There have, however, been challenges. One of the youth gardens lacks a staff person or volunteer

AT-A-GLANCE

Dayton, the sixth largest city in Ohio, is situated within the Miami Valley region, just north of the Cincinnati metropolitan area. Dayton is home to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Wright State University, and the University of Dayton. Dayton's economy, which was formerly manufacturing-based, is now dominated by defense, aerospace, and healthcare.

Total Population

141,527

Pop Age 17 and Younger

32,441

Percent Age 17 and Younger

23%

Median Annual HH Income

\$29,630

% Pop Below Poverty

29.8%

Ave High Temp – January

35° F

Ave High Temp – July

85° F

Ave Annual Precip

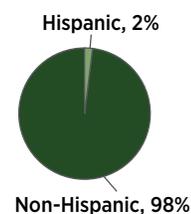
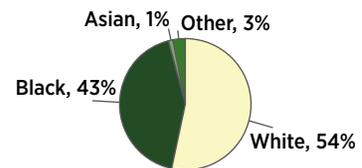
37.4"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

176 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

132 days



with extensive gardening experience. GWYN, with Ms. Beachdell as the only full-time staff and one part-time staff person, does not have the resources to provide that expertise on a regular basis. Ms. Beachdell stated, “I think that finding those volunteers and connecting them to the gardens in a way that works well for everybody concerned is challenging. So I can ask Master Gardeners or internal volunteers who have experience gardening if anyone is interested in doing that. But then I also have to make sure that they match in terms of personality and excitement level and there has to be some interest on the part of those volunteers to do it in the first place.” Even if experienced and enthusiastic volunteers can be matched to programs, their time has to be coordinated with staff time. This is not always an easy task.

Elements of Success

One person’s interest does not make a program.

In order to sustain a youth garden, a number of people, both staff and volunteers, have to be committed to the project and willing and able to put in enough time. One person, no matter how enthusiastic, cannot make it sustainable.

There should be at least one person with regular involvement in the youth garden who has gardening experience.

It is difficult for a youth gardening program to move ahead without access to know-how on a regular basis.

Keep it simple so that lack of money does not have to be an obstacle.

Ms. Beachdell feels strongly that “...if you’ve got some love, some excitement for gardening and working with kids, some land, and some access to resources, and by resources I mean manure or seeds or straw or hay, water, then I think it’s possible. It doesn’t have to be incredibly complicated to be a garden.”

GARDEN IMPACT

Growing Connections to the Natural Environment

Eugene has an outdoors- and environmentally-oriented culture, and the community gardening programs of the City's Recreation Department help to engage youth in this culture by teaching gardening skills, health, nutrition, environmental awareness, and principles of sustainability. In addition to working in the gardens, the children have cooked meals using food they harvested and have made soap from lavender and flower pots and stepping stones from recycled materials.



City of Eugene Recreation Department

EUGENE, OR

Learning Gardening Skills and Environmentalism

Eugene's community garden program has child- and youth-oriented gardens in each of three community centers: Sheldon, River House, and Peterson Barn Park. Sheldon and River House are located in predominantly middle to upper middle class neighborhoods. Peterson Barn Park, however, is in Bethel, a low-income, ethnically diverse neighborhood with a large Latino population. There are about 200 children involved in gardening among the three sites. Community center staff and volunteers from the surrounding neighborhoods work with children in each garden. The food the children grow is used for snacks and to take home to their families. There are also plans to provide food to the local food bank in the future.

The goals of Eugene's project are twofold. First, to engage children and youth in growing fresh produce for consumption and second, to teach them gardening skills, health, nutrition, environmental awareness, and principles of sustainability. This project fits well into the outdoors- and environmentally-oriented culture of Eugene. As Molly Elliott, recently retired Adaptive Recreation Services Program Supervisor in Eugene's Recreation Department, stated: "The City of Eugene has a strong sustainability initiative

AT-A-GLANCE

Eugene, Oregon, located in the Willamette Valley and home to the University of Oregon, is the second largest city in the state.

Total Population

156,185

Pop Age 17 and Younger

28,479

Percent Age 17 and Younger

18%

Median Annual HH Income

\$42,398

% Pop Below Poverty

19.7%

Ave High Temp – January

46° F

Ave High Temp – July

82° F

Ave Annual Precip

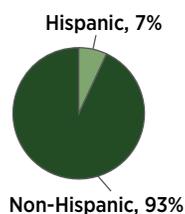
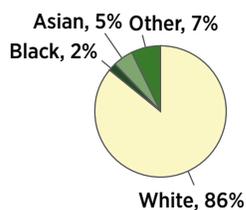
47.8"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

157 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

137 days



that influences our youth development strategies. We envision connecting youth to natural environments with the opportunity to develop, plan, and provide healthy food choices for themselves and also providing fresh produce for the local food bank.”

Each community garden has its own distinctive characteristics. The gardens at Sheldon and Peterson Barn Park community centers were designed specifically for children and youth. The garden at River House, however, is larger and is part of the Recreation Department’s Community Garden program, which is open to the public. In addition to working in the gardens, the children have cooked meals using food they harvested, made soap from lavender and flower pots, and created stepping stones from recycled materials.

The Sheldon Community Center garden operates year-round as part of an after-school program and a summer day-camp. Approximately 125 children between the ages of 6 and 16 work in the garden. The children work in the garden on a weekly basis, and a curriculum-based program is used to teach them gardening skills, nutrition, and recycling. The children were involved from the earliest stages in designing the garden. They decided what to plant, used pre-cut lumber for the beds, made walkways to connect the beds, mixed the soil, filled the beds, spread compost and mulch, and planted the garden. Before the garden program began, there was only bare earth where there are now raised beds.

The staff included a pretest and posttest to measure how much the children learn over the summer. Topics included knowing the difference between beneficial and harmful insects, what pollinates garden plants, and what lives in the ground that is good for plants.

River House Community Center already had an established adult community garden when the staff decided to initiate a summer program targeting children ages 10 to 16 who have a special interest in gardening. About 11 children have been involved with this project on a weekly basis. In addition to gardening at the community center, children also visit other gardens around the city. As Ms. Elliott described, “We targeted kids [who] were really interested in gardening. [They] really wanted to learn about gardening and they bonded as a group and with their instructor ...” There are also month-long summer day-camps with a gardening focus at the community center.

The garden at Peterson Barn Park is part of a free summer playground program in a low-income neighborhood. This program is oriented toward younger children between the ages 6 to 10. Staff at the community center attempted to involve the children from the neighboring school in gardening as part of the after-school program. However, the children showed little interest during the school year. Fortunately, the children’s enthusiasm grew during the summer playground camp.

NRPA grant funding, community partnerships, and volunteers have all been instrumental in creating and sustaining Eugene's children's garden program. Grant funds were used at Sheldon to create a garden where there was none by purchasing materials and tools to construct beds. River House used funds to develop the intensive gardening program for a targeted group of children as well as the summer gardening camps in the existing community garden. Peterson Barn Park used the funds to develop the children's gardening program. Partnerships have been developed with Walmart, which donated seeds, and with local greenhouse owners. The greenhouse owners cleared space so that the children could plant seedlings. In addition, one greenhouse owner had a composter that was no longer needed, so the community garden program bought it for the cost of materials. The program has also developed a resource notebook of local gardening organizations that will foster partnership development. Finally, staff time with the children has been extended by an active group of adult volunteers, from college students to retirees, at all three gardens.

Having become an important part of Eugene's gardening culture, the Recreation Department's garden program is being sustained through the department's general operating funds because of grant funding, partnerships, and volunteers.

Elements of Success

Involve the children from the very beginning.

Ms. Elliott stated, “[What is now the garden] was just wasted space. It was next to the swimming pool, so broken equipment would land out there. [Now] it's a whole different scene — it's beautiful, it's vibrant, it's alive! And the kids had a huge part in that. They envisioned what they wanted to see changed. They drew pictures of it. They put the work in.” The children's involvement from the earliest planning stages increased their sense of ownership and pride in the garden. It also provided a great opportunity to learn lifelong lessons about the connection between effort and positive outcomes.

Involve staff that are committed to gardening, sustainability, and healthy eating and make it fun for the kids.

A lot of gardening is just plain hard work on hot summer days, but the right kind of staff can make even weeding fun for the children. Two of the three gardens have that kind of staff. The third does not, and that garden has not developed as much.

Use community volunteers.

Having volunteers who are enthusiastic about working with the children in the gardens has been essential to the project's success. Their involvement has helped to leverage scarce staff resources.



Evanston Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department

EVANSTON, IL

Growing Food and Building Relationships

Evanston's Community Garden program began in 1976. Currently, there are four community garden sites in the city. The city's first youth-oriented garden started a few years ago when youth, who were enrolled in a recreation center after-school program, planted and managed a garden plot at one of these sites. In addition to doing hands-on work, youth learned about health and nutrition, and educational skills were integrated into their gardening work. The gardening program complements the recreation center's Get Healthy Initiative, which teaches the children about healthy eating habits and also has an exercise and fitness component. As part of the after-school program, the children grow herbs and other plants indoors during the winter and start planning their summer garden.

The NRPA grant enabled the department to move the youth garden to the nearby Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center and substantially increase its size. Sixteen children aged 5 to 12 work in the garden, along with eight seniors and a few other residents from the surrounding neighborhood. Bob Dorneker, Recreation Superintendent, described the now-flourishing garden

GARDEN IMPACT

Intergenerational Connections

"I think the fact that we have young children and older adults together and they are working and teaching and the kids are paying attention. That is a success for me. ... I mean I'm seeing relationships being built. [The seniors] are coming to the point where they see these kids, or these kids see them — they know their names. They exchange a hug maybe. ...They are glad to see each other."

— *Becky Jenkins, Building Manager of Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center and Director of Evanston Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department's Ecology Center*

as, “ [previously] a large patch of weeds. ... We used part of that [NRPA] fund and a majority of city funds actually, and we’ve actually brought in fresh soil to the area. We built raised beds. We did a little pathway in there so it is really an area now that is very nice in the community.”

The youth garden is located in a dense and diverse neighborhood that has a fairly wide income range, from poor to middle class. It is about 75% African-American, 20% Latino, and 5% white. The neighborhood also has a large population of seniors, many of whom have lived there for a long time and feel a strong connection to the community. The children, seniors, and other volunteers who work in the garden all live in this neighborhood.

Becky Jenkins, Building Manager of Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center and Director of Parks and Recreation’s Ecology Center, described the program’s goals as: “With the children, we are trying to teach them better eating habits. Teaching that they can rely on the earth to grow their food. Teaching them how... they can build relationships with some of the seniors or other people they come in contact with.”

The program also addresses a broader neighborhood issue — the absence of local grocery stores in which to buy fresh food. Although the garden is located in an area that the city is trying to develop economically, it is currently a “food desert”. The program gives the children greater access to fresh food by equipping them with the skills to grow it in their own yards.

The program can be sustained at its current size within the Parks and Recreation Department’s operating budget due to the fact that expenditures for the garden’s infrastructure have already been made. Mr. Dorneker and Ms. Jenkins, however, are seeking sponsorships from local businesses and other partnerships in order to grow the program. They would like to increase the number of children involved and eventually expand the size of the garden area to enable adults in the neighborhood to use it. They hope that it will truly become a community garden.

When asked about the successes to date, Ms. Jenkins replied, “I think the fact that we did get the garden started and everything is growing and people are being involved. And I think the fact that we have young children and older adults together and they are working and teaching and the kids are paying attention. That is a success for me. ... I mean I’m seeing relationships being built. [The seniors] are coming to the point where they see these kids, or these kids see them — they know their names. They exchange a hug maybe. ... They are glad to see each other.”

When this year’s produce is harvested, there will be an event for everyone involved in the garden — children, their parents, seniors and other volunteers who worked in the garden, and staff. They will share a meal using food from the garden and the entire experience will be celebrated.

AT-A-GLANCE

Evanston is located 10 miles north of downtown Chicago and is bordered by Lake Michigan. Northwestern University is also located in Evanston.

Total Population

74,486

Pop Age 17 and Younger

14,360

Percent Age 17 and Younger

19%

Median Annual HH Income

\$72,447

% Pop Below Poverty

9.4%

Ave High Temp – January

29° F

Ave High Temp – July

84° F

Ave Annual Precip

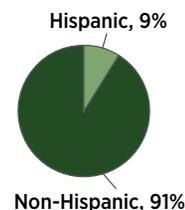
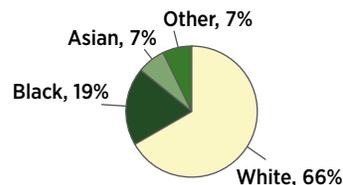
35.3"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

189 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

126 days



Elements of Success

Start organizing the garden early.

Delays are common in gardening, but when the excitement begins to build among the children, it is important that the garden be ready for them when they are ready for it.

Include everyone in the planning.

While the children have been involved in planning the garden, efforts should also be made to elicit input from the senior volunteers, who are typically experienced gardeners.



GARDEN IMPACT

Promoting Access to Nutrition

The People's Garden, developed by the Friends of Patterson Park, is located near many convenience stores, but it is a long walk to the nearest grocery stores. The youth gardening component of the People's Garden teaches children gardening skills, gives them an appreciation of where food comes from, and encourages healthy eating habits while providing exercise opportunities.



Friends of Patterson Park

BALTIMORE, MD

Creating the People's Garden

Patterson Park is a 155-acre park in southeast Baltimore.¹ It is surrounded by diverse neighborhoods, some of which are gentrifying. The area is characterized by a broad income range from lower income to middle class with a multi-ethnic mix. The Friends of Patterson Park (FPP) was incorporated in 1998 as a nonprofit organization to promote and protect the park, serve as a liaison between the community and the Baltimore City Recreation and Parks Department, increase financial and human resources available for park projects and programs, and foster park stewardship in the community.²

Community gardening in Patterson Park has a long history. City records show land designated for this use as far back as 1904.³ The Baltimore City Recreation and Parks Department Horticulture Division now offer garden plots in Patterson Park for rental as part of the City Farms program. FPP is developing a new garden program that will be called the People's Garden. The People's Garden is based on a plan by a local Master Gardeners group. Unlike the community gardens, which are in a fenced area and for which a \$20 rental fee is charged, the People's Garden is intended to be open and accessible to the community. Currently

1 "Live in Baltimore – Patterson Park," accessed on 8/22/11, <http://www.livebaltimore.com/neighborhoods/list/pattersonpark/>.

2 "Friends of Patterson Park," accessed on 8/22/11, <http://pattersonpark.com/general-info/about-the-friends/>.

3 "Community Gardens, Friends of Patterson Park," accessed on 8/23/11, <http://www.pattersonpark.com/Activities/communitygardening.html>.

AT-A-GLANCE

Baltimore, located along the Patapsco River, an arm of the Chesapeake Bay, is the largest city in Maryland. A dozen public and private colleges and universities are located there.

Total Population

620,961

Pop Age 17 and Younger

133,560

Percent Age 17 and Younger

22%

Median Annual HH Income

\$39,083

% Pop Below Poverty

19.6%

Ave High Temp – January

41° F

Ave High Temp – July

88° F

Ave Annual Precip

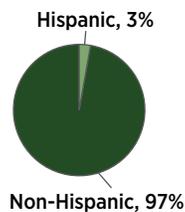
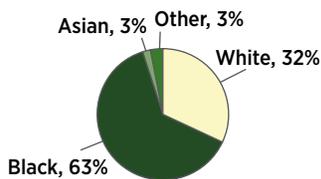
40.9"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

214 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

113 days



with four raised beds and 18 fruit and nut trees, FPP envisions a garden that community residents of all ages will tend and harvest on their own. In addition, the FPP plans to add six more beds.

The objectives of the youth gardening component of the People's Garden are:

- To teach children gardening skills
- Give children an appreciation of where food comes from
- Teach children healthy eating habits
- Provide exercise opportunities
- Increase their sense of ownership of the park

Callie Schwartz, Friends of Patterson Park staff member, mentioned that while there are many convenience stores in the area, it is a long walk to the nearest grocery stores. For this reason, children tend to have greater access to junk food. Consequently, the garden program actively promotes nutrition. Kathy Harget, the Executive Director of the Friends of Patterson Park summed it all up by saying, “[through the garden project] they will learn to appreciate what this park has to offer, and then in return, what they can offer the park.”

The People's Garden is being developed through a combined effort. NRPA funding has been used for building raised beds, paying staff, as well as buying tomato seeds and plants, soil, and other garden supplies. An AmeriCorps worker built the beds, and FPP staff helped to fill them with soil. The fruit and nut trees were provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the city supplies the water. Staff from Johns Hopkins Medical Center and Sheppard Pratt Health System, a private, non-profit behavioral health organization, provided nutrition classes for families. A lot of the actual garden work this past summer was done by groups of volunteers who live in the surrounding neighborhoods. For example, an informal group of Spanish-speaking families came to help out, as did another volunteer group, called the Detail Detail Team, which undertakes various projects in the park. In addition, an FPP staff member reached out to participants in FPP soccer and walking groups — resulting in an additional 29 children and 17 adults working in the garden.

Ms. Harget and Ms. Schwartz see many opportunities for the garden's expansion. They would like to have more garden space and more children and families involved through the schools and the surrounding neighborhoods. They envision possibilities for strengthening the garden's educational component, using it as an outdoor classroom for teaching urban farming and nutrition. Ms. Schwartz has worked with four public schools within walking distance of the park. She noted that, “They all have garden clubs [and] I would like to see if they would be interested in using this as another outdoor space — an outdoor classroom.”

The program's biggest challenge has been staff turnover, and FPP is currently in the process of rebuilding the staff. Along with the challenges of staff turnover that FPP has faced, there have also been successes — harvesting from the new raised beds and involving children and families from the community over the summer. A ground breaking event in November 2010, when the fruit and nut trees were planted, attracted local officials and the press and provided great publicity for the garden program.

FPP is working toward financial sustainability of the People's Garden. Because urban farming has become active and popular in Baltimore, Ms. Harget believes that local foundations will be interested in funding the garden. She is also working on attracting corporate sponsorships to help support the garden as well as FPP's general operations.

Elements of Success

Making the garden visible and visibly interesting attracts notice and a desire to participate.

People using the park have noticed the garden and how well it is doing. Ms. Harget and Ms. Schwartz would like to add attractive signage to identify the plants in the garden and make it even more enticing.

Have a strong summer maintenance plan in place.

Once the school program is up and running, it will be important to have a plan to care for the garden during the growing season.





Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department

IOWA CITY, IA

An Edible Forest Maze

Iowa City's community garden program is located in Wetherby Park, a city park that serves neighborhoods in the southeastern end of the city. These neighborhoods are predominantly low-income and multi-ethnic. The park is in the center of this area and is within walking distance for most residents. There are a large number of garden plots in the park for which neighborhood residents pay \$20 in rental a year.

The NRPA grant enabled the Parks and Recreation department to establish the children's gardening program this past summer. The gardening program is part of two county-operated day-camps, one of which is at a community center near the park while the other is at an elementary school in another area of the city. The goals are to educate the children about nutrition, increase their sense of connection to nature, and to improve their self-esteem by working hard and reaping the rewards. The children worked in both an annual and a perennial garden. About 60 children between the ages of 6 and 10 worked in the garden this summer. The program was launched with the help of partnerships with two local nonprofits that focus on environmental sustainability. One partner is Backyard Abundance, which offers environmental education and landscaping by their volunteers. Backyard

GARDEN IMPACT

Positive Behavior Change

Approximately 20% of the children who work in the garden have behavior problems and nearly 5% are on the autism spectrum. The garden staff has observed that working in the garden seems to help some of those children, giving them a focus and a goal. Some even want to go back to the garden in the afternoon after working in it all morning.

Abundance helped to build a perennial garden in the park with the summer campers that came to be known as the Edible Forest Maze. Using permaculture techniques, it is planted with strawberries, chokeberries, and apple and nut trees. Another partner, Summer of Solutions, is a national organization of high school and college students with a branch in Iowa City. Student volunteers take on projects during the summer that work toward environmental sustainability.⁴

The garden staff is planning an end-of-summer event in August to showcase the garden. The children will act as “Garden Ambassadors,” talking about what they’ve grown and showing off some of the harvest to parents and others.

In addition to the children’s garden, Wetherby Park also has three raised beds for adults with physical disabilities. The garden is part of the park’s adaptive recreation program and was built this summer with funds from the NRPA grant. Food grown in this and the children’s garden will be used for a dinner at the end of the summer.

The garden staff has thought through how to sustain their program in the future. The perennial garden, once it is established, will require little maintenance because of the permaculture methods that Backyard Abundance used to plant it. Seeds and plants will be purchased through the playground budget. Volunteers from Summer of Solutions and Americorps will help the children plant and maintain the garden. As Gabi MacKay, one of the two Grow Your Park Environmental Education Coordinators, commented, “... we may not even need to have a permanent staff member out there. We may get it done through all volunteers”, with oversight provided by the playground coordinator.

As in all gardens, the Wetherby Park children’s garden has faced a few challenges. The raised beds used in the adaptive gardening program, which are next to the parking lot, have been vandalized several times. The Parks and Recreation department posted signs in response. Another challenge was access to water for the perennial garden. The annual garden is located in the community garden area, so there is an available water line. However, the perennial garden is at least 400 yards away and water had to be transported in buckets until the city extended water lines.

Along with challenges, the garden has also had significant successes. For Ms. MacKay, one of the big successes is, “... just the fact that we built a perennial garden. That was a huge amount of work and the fact that we got all the plants in, for the most part, is pretty amazing. In terms of the kids, every time I go out to the park, someone is asking me, ‘Are we planting today? Can I help water?’ So just that kids even are aware of it and they are sharing with me more of their eating habits, what they like about food, what they don’t like about food. I think they feel confident

AT-A-GLANCE

Iowa City is a university town in the eastern part of the state, home to the University of Iowa.

Total Population

67,862

Pop Age 17 and Younger

10,110

Percent Age 17 and Younger

15%

Median Annual HH Income

\$43,335

% Pop Below Poverty

24.8%

Ave High Temp – January

32° F

Ave High Temp – July

87° F

Ave Annual Precip

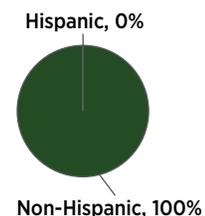
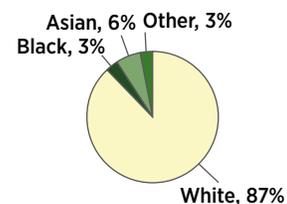
35.2"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

N/A

Ave Annual Rainy Days

64.8 days



⁴ “Iowa City Summer of Solutions,” accessed on 8/16/11, <http://sustainability.uiowa.edu/blog/?p=715>.

that they can do gardening on their own. ... I just think they are feeling much more confident in the garden and they are very helpful.” Approximately 20% of the children who work in the garden have behavior problems and nearly 5% are on the autism spectrum. The garden staff has observed that working in the garden seems to help some of those children, giving them a focus and a goal. Some even want to go back to the garden in the afternoon after working in it all morning. The garden seems to have a more beneficial effect on younger children with behavioral problems than with the older children.

Elements of Success

Lead garden staff should be in on the planning stages.

Staff of summer programs should be hired and in place to begin planning the garden well in advance of the start of the program, so that they can educate the children on planting schedules, plant location, and other aspects of garden planning.

Plan to have three separate plantings.

In summer day-camp programs, plan to put plants in the garden in mid-May, June, and July. Even though the kids might not be able to help plant in May because their program doesn't start until school is out, they can get to see plants at early, middle, and by the end of summer, full-grown stages.

Garden staff and staff of after-school or summer day-camp programs should coordinate with one another.

Regular program staff can reinforce and complement what is learned in the garden. Staff of both programs can help with transitions between regular programming and gardening activities.

Give kids specific tasks and assigned duties.

Ms. MacKay stated, “Even if it is just that every kid has a watering can, [it makes] them feel valuable and important.” It also helps them to maintain their focus on the garden.

Grow seedlings that will excite the children's curiosity.

Growing seedlings that resemble the full-grown vegetables combined with “surprise” seedlings that don't look anything like mature vegetables helps to maintain children's interest and curiosity as the plants grow.

GARDEN IMPACT

Neighborhood Park Revitalization

The Allen Neighborhood Center (ANC), a nonprofit organization, administers the programming in city-owned Hunter Park, where the child and youth gardening program is located. Until a few years ago, the park was a meeting place for gangs and prostitutes and was rarely used by residents. A partnership between ANC, Lansing Department of Parks and Recreation, and a large number of community residents was successful in revitalizing the park, and Hunter Park is now the hub of the community. The children's and youth gardening program has been an important component of the park's revitalization because it has helped to increase park usage. As ANC Director Joan Nelson stated, "Where kids go, parents follow".



Lansing Department of Parks and Recreation

LANSING, MI

Growing an Edible Park

Hunter Park, a 13-acre park on the east side of Lansing, is located in an economically and racially diverse neighborhood. About two-thirds of the population is white, 15% African-American, and about 12% Latino. One in 10 residents are foreign-born, with many from Cuba, Afghanistan, Somalia, and elsewhere in Africa. The neighborhood has about two dozen neighborhood associations. The park is under the jurisdiction of the City of Lansing Parks and Recreation Department. The Allen Neighborhood Center (ANC), a nonprofit organization, administers the programming that takes place there.

Joan Nelson, ANC Director, described Hunter Park a number of years ago when it was rarely used by residents and was a meeting place for gangs and prostitutes. In the summer of 2004, ANC in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department began work on a master plan for the park. Neighborhood residents identified a number of desired park improvements, including construction of a large greenhouse. From the beginning, a portion of the greenhouse was designated for youth to plant an urban fruit and vegetable garden. The partnership between ANC, the Parks and Recreation department, and the large number of community residents, who were involved in the planning and

AT-A-GLANCE

Lansing is the capital of Michigan. The Lansing Metropolitan Area, located in south-central Michigan, is a center for higher education, culture, government, business, and high-tech manufacturing.

Total Population

48,579

Pop Age 17 and Younger

3,666

Percent Age 17 and Younger

8%

Median Annual HH Income

\$30,802

% Pop Below Poverty

38.6%

Ave High Temp – January

29° F

Ave High Temp – July

83° F

Ave Annual Precip

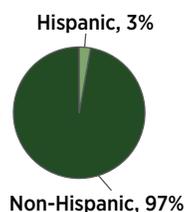
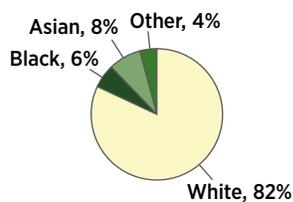
30.8"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

175 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

140 days



implementation process, was successful in revitalizing the park. Hunter Park is now the hub of the community. The revitalization of the park was accompanied by improvements in the surrounding neighborhoods, including reduced crime. Ms. Nelson stated, “We see park improvement as a neighborhood stabilization strategy. ... The connection between improving a park and improving the neighborhood surrounding it is pretty important to us.”

The revitalization of Hunter Park set the stage for the development of the youth gardening program which began in the greenhouse and spread to a large area of the park. ANC hosts the Youth Service Corps, in which middle- and high-school youth undertake service projects in the community. The NRPA grant is being used to support the Youth Service Corps’ gardening projects. When the greenhouse opened in May 2008, the Youth Service Corps built raised beds. There are currently 24 raised beds that are used year-round. The teens also established a large bed outdoors. They sell their produce at ANC’s weekly farmers’ market, which is close to the park, and also bring some home for their families. About two years ago, the teens began a project called Garden in a Box, in which they build 2’ by 2’ cedar boxes and deliver them to people in the neighborhood with limited mobility, income, or gardening skills, to enable them to grow their own vegetables. This year, they are creating what they have called an Edible Hunter Park. Given the high level of food insecurity in the neighborhood, the youth decided to fill the park with produce that will be available to anyone for the picking. As Ms. Nelson described, their goal was that, “Anybody could eat their way through the park.” Working with two landscape design students from nearby Michigan State University, they planted an apple orchard, “living fences” of grape vines and berry bushes, and an edible ornamental garden along one wall of the greenhouse. A MSU student is making signage for the Edible Park. Although the number of teens involved in the youth corps has declined recently, ANC is considering strategies to increase participation.

A weekday program for children in the 5-to-11 age group, Kids Time, uses another garden that was built for that program. Forty-six children are enrolled, and on any given day, there are at least 15 in attendance. Their garden work enables them to provide their own snacks, and there is also a nutrition education component. In addition, they participate in ANC’s Market Walk program. Every time they accumulate 10 miles of walking, they get a \$5 coin to spend at the farmers’ market.

ANC children’s and youth gardening programs involve a number of partners that help to leverage resources, and in doing so, help to provide financial sustainability. The Department of Parks and Recreation is an ongoing partner. United Way (ANC is a United Way agency) recruited MSU students to help prepare the bed for the edible ornamental garden. ANC also has interns from MSU and the local community college, and they are applying for an AmeriCorps grant to provide a full-time staff

person for their children's programs. They will continue to rely on volunteers and currently have about 200 who contribute over 9,000 hours a year.

ANC recently became part of a collaborative of nonprofit community development organizations in Lansing that have park-based gardening projects. Called Let's Garden Lansing, the collaborative organizes gardening-related workshops, classes, and events. A focus of the collaborative is youth gardening, and monthly workshops for teachers are planned for this year to promote school-based gardening.

Elements of Success

Programming for children and youth requires intensive adult support.

ANC has a youth programming coordinator who is responsible for Kids Time and the Youth Service Corps. There are at least three adults working every day in Kids Time and one adult in the youth corps.

Children benefit from by being involved in the process of planting, nurturing, harvesting, and preparing food.

Ms. Nelson believes that gardening builds patience. "The kids are learning to nurture plants. They are developing an appreciation for the whole wondrous ways ... you put a seed in the ground and, oh my, you have food!"

Children's and youth gardening needs to be participatory.

Children and youth need to be involved in the entire process, from planning the garden to harvesting and preparing the food to eat, in order to feel a sense of ownership of the project.

The children's and youth gardening program has been an important component of the park's revitalization.

ANC schedules as many events as possible in Hunter Park so that the park is used and valued by the community. The garden program has helped to increase park usage, because as Ms. Nelson stated, "where kids go, parents follow".



Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department

LINCOLN, NE

Building a Culture of Gardening

Lincoln's Parks and Recreation Department's community gardening program has grown rapidly from one location seven years ago to eight locations, including two new sites this year. One garden is designated for adults with traumatic brain injury, other disabilities, or mental illness and is used not only for recreation and exercise but also as a form of therapy. The other seven gardens are youth-designated. Most of the youth gardens serve both elementary- and middle-school children. However, one garden serves children from elementary through high school, and several gardens are specific to either elementary or middle school. The gardens are located at recreation centers, schools, and on land provided by local businesses and churches. Eighty to 90% of participating children are ethnic minorities, from low income houses, or are new Americans. Many of whom are from Sudan, Russia, and other countries in Asia. Since the program received its NPRA grant, it has served 472 children and 25 adults with disabilities, for a total of nearly 500 people.

One of the main goals of the youth gardening program is to help children understand the garden-to-table cycle. Sandy Myers, Recreation Manager and Kathryn Burklund, Program Monitor, both believe that it is important for children to understand not

GARDEN IMPACT

Helping Families Grow Their Own Affordable Fresh Produce

Children in the Lincoln's Parks and Recreation Department's community gardening program learn how they and their families can grow their own food, even in small containers on their balcony for those who live in apartments. Children and their families are learning that fresh produce can be affordable, even on a limited budget and with little time, to eat if they grow it themselves.

only what they are doing but why they are doing it every step of the way. This intentionality in teaching gardening skills, they feel, will ultimately lead to children feeling a greater sense of responsibility for the garden and getting more gratification from their efforts. Nutrition education is also an important component of the youth program. In addition, children learn how they and their families can grow their own food, even in small containers on their balcony. Finally, children and their families learn that fresh produce can be affordable, even on a limited budget.

In addition to maintaining the vegetable garden, the children also planted apple trees. Garden-related field trips are included in the program as well. As Ms. Myers noted, "... the kids really get a full experience. They get to go into the vegetable garden and fruit areas, the tree areas, and [there are] a lot of experiences for the kids there."

The produce is used for the children's snacks or is sold at the program's weekly youth farmers' market. Produce from the youth gardens is taken to the market site and prepared for selling. The kids also take turns working at the market. Anything that is not eaten or sold is sent home with the children along with recipes.

The youth garden is a year-round activity, from planning the garden and planting seedlings indoors in the winter months through the fall harvest. Environmental education goes on all year. During the school year, the program is part of after-school programs, and in the summer, it is integrated into day-camps located at city recreation centers.

The program has developed a large number of partnerships. They receive food donations from several farmers' market in Lincoln that are used at the recreation centers, for children's snacks, and to send home to supplement the food that the children grow. The Nebraska State Arboretum helped to install a butterfly flower garden at one of the recreation centers. Lincoln's AmeriCorps program has provided young adults to work with the children. Community CROPS (Combining Resources, Opportunities, and People for Sustainability), a local nonprofit organization that actively promotes community gardening in Lincoln, has community garden sites, a training farm, and a Community Supported Agriculture program.⁵ Youth gardeners have toured their sites and facilities. In addition, Community CROPS offers gardening classes, which the youth garden staff has benefited from. Churches have provided land for garden plots and areas to set up the youth farmers' market, and businesses and apartment building owners have also provided land for plots and sometimes access to water. Local nurseries have donated seeds. For the last four years, the University of Nebraska has provided student volunteers on Big Red Day, an annual event in which students volunteer on community projects.

⁵ "Community CROPS – About Us," accessed on 8/18/11, <http://www.communitycrops.org/about>.

AT-A-GLANCE

Lincoln is the second largest city in Nebraska, the state capital, and home to the main campus of the University of Nebraska

Total Population
258,379

Pop Age 17 and Younger
58,702

Percent Age 17 and Younger
23%

Median Annual HH Income
\$50,290

% Pop Below Poverty
12.3%

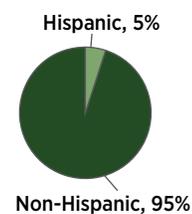
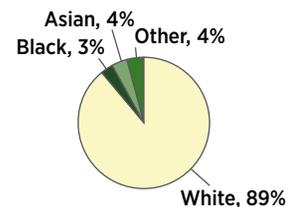
Ave High Temp – January
34.3° F

Ave High Temp – July
91.1° F

Ave Annual Precip
27.5"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine
216 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days
93 days



The NRPA grant has been used to refurbish older beds and build two new garden areas, supply water where needed, as well as buy garden tools, new growing stands for seedlings, seeds, garden signage, and curriculum and educational games from the National Youth Gardening Association.

The program has experienced several challenges that lead staff have worked hard to overcome. The Parks Division was initially skeptical about having park land dug up for produce gardens. However, Ms. Myers noted that, “They [the Parks Division] have seen how [we] maintained the parks and the gardens that we have. They have actually become some of our strongest supporters. So winning over the Parks side was kind of one of those pieces we had to bring together.” Another challenge was the negative attitude of the schools at the outset. Ms. Myers explained, “At first the schools’ attitude was just no. That is not what school property can be used for. I don’t know what it was. They just didn’t think they wanted people wandering in after hours on their property. Or they didn’t want the expense or the responsibility of it. Or maybe they were worried it would become a mess. We’ve been able to make sure that we have trained, skilled and dedicated people. They value the garden and they will make sure it gets maintained. And now the schools have been pretty much won over and we haven’t had difficulty with the last one, where we asked if we could take the whole back garden area plot. And they said, Sure! So, some of it is convincing them [the skeptics] that we are not a fly by night. We are here to stay.” Evidence of that is the fact that Parks and Recreation’s new comprehensive plan will include a process to take park land from general usage to use for community gardens.

Ms. Myers and Ms. Burklund have seen increased enthusiasm among recreation center staff who work in the youth gardens for using “green” gardening methods. They have also seen excitement for gardening grow amongst the kids.

Ms. Myers and Ms. Burklund believe that program sustainability has developed from a number of sources. The NRPA grant has been used to build new beds, refurbish old ones, and buy tools. The program’s many partnerships have helped to stretch their budget. The improved relationship with Parks and Recreation has resulted in receiving valuable assistance, and earnings from the youth farmers’ market are put into the program.

Elements of Success

Start small and be as successful as you can early on so that your reputation builds over time.

Eventually, you will win over the skeptics, but you have to be patient during the process.

Well-organized and consistent staff training makes a difference.

Because of yearly turnover in AmeriCorps members, who work with the children in the garden and maintain the beds, lead staff have had to develop strong, consistent training for both AmeriCorps and recreation center staff.

Be intentional in working with children in the garden.

Children will get much more out of gardening if they understand not only what to do but why. For this reason it is essential that staff think through what they want the children to learn from each gardening experience.

Partners are a necessity.

The program has developed a large number of partnerships to leverage scarce resources — money, knowledge, equipment, and land.

Perhaps the most important lesson - building a culture of gardening.

When community gardening first began at the Parks and Recreation Department, it was viewed as a somewhat marginal activity. Increasingly, it has become accepted as integral to the department's ongoing activities and very much a part of its long-term planning.



McAllen Parks and Recreation Department

MCALLEN, TX

Diverse Gardens with A Common Purpose

The community garden program is operated by McAllen's Parks and Recreation Department. It is located at the IDEA Quest Academy, which is a K-12 charter school for low-income children. The school is adjacent to one of the city's community centers. The school garden program is a pilot that will be taken to three other community centers in McAllen.

All four gardens will have the same overall objectives — to teach children how to grow healthy food, to provide children with opportunities to eat healthy food by growing it themselves, and to promote backyard gardening with families. But each youth garden will also have its own unique features. One will continue to be based at IDEA Quest. Another will be intergenerational, integrating the large senior population in the surrounding neighborhood into a teen-senior partnership to work in the garden in pairs. Another garden is in a predominantly Latino neighborhood and will feature vegetables used in Latino dishes. The fourth garden is in a diverse neighborhood and will grow a wide range of produce.

The program at IDEA Quest is an after-school club for students between the ages of 10 and 17. Junior Master Gardener curricula were purchased and are used to complement the hands-on

GARDEN IMPACT

Helping Kids Achieve Academic Success

The community garden program run by McAllen's Parks and Recreation Department is located near the IDEA Quest Academy, a K-12 charter school for low-income children. The community garden program at IDEA Quest is woven into the academic curriculum in a variety of ways. For example, the students record and graph harvest data so that progress can be monitored. The community garden program also teaches students responsibility and other life skills.

activities. The club is registered with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service as a Junior Master Gardener Club. The students prepared and planted four 8' by 3' theme gardens — pizza, salsa, tacos, and salad — and the students are divided into teams of five or six, one for each theme garden. In addition, the students also have access to four 40' by 3' farm rows. The program is woven into the academic curriculum in a variety of ways. For example, the students planned to record and graph harvest data so that progress toward their goal of growing 100 pounds of produce by the end of May 2011 could be monitored.

The program has developed a number of important partnerships. According to Sally Gavlik, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department, “We’ve worked with the Food Bank. We are working with Master Gardeners. We are working with the local chapter of the race walkers.” The same children who are involved in the gardening program will also participate in the race walk group. The intent is early prevention and reduction of childhood obesity and diabetes, both of which are substantial health problems in McAllen, through gardening and race walking.

Elements of Success

In working with school-based programs, the support of the school administration is essential.

When the garden at IDEA Quest was first developed, the school administration at that time was very supportive of the program. They provided the resources to build an outdoor classroom for the garden coordinator and brought in some fruit trees so that the children could grow their own fruit. However, when a new administration came in, support was not as strong and the program floundered to some extent. Fortunately, new leadership at the school is supportive of the program. As Ms. Gavlik stated, “So it is really getting a buy-in ... to understand that this type of program teaches the children responsibility. It teaches them education about their future. This is a lifelong project because it teaches them healthy food habits. And it can actually help them combat obesity and it can show them how, almost anywhere, you can have a garden.”

The support of the Parks and Recreation Department is also key to the program’s success.

“If you have support from your Parks and Recreation Director that says community gardening is a Parks and Recreation function, then you are going to be able to develop these types of programs.” Under Ms. Gavlik’s leadership, Parks and Recreation

AT-A-GLANCE

McAllen is located at the southern tip of Texas in the Rio Grande Valley. Its southern boundary is five miles from the U.S.-Mexico border. The main campus of South Texas College is located in McAllen.

Total Population

129,877

Pop Age 17 and Younger

39,031

Percent Age 17 and Younger

30%

Median Annual HH Income

\$38,253

% Pop Below Poverty

28.2%

Ave High Temp – January

72° F

Ave High Temp – July

96° F

Ave Annual Precip

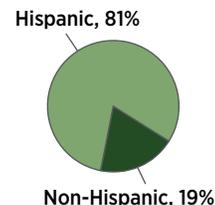
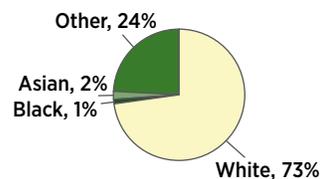
23"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

N/A

Ave Annual Rainy Days

41.4



will be providing funding to help build the program now and sustain it in the future, including the purchase of seeds, seedlings, and tools. A staff person at each community center garden will coordinate the garden as part of his/her regular duties.



GARDEN IMPACT

Promoting “Green” Career Paths to Youth

One of the gardening programs at the JD Rivers’ Children’s Garden operated by Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board provides employment to area youth. In addition to providing invaluable real world work experience, garden staff also provides education on “green careers.” Special guests come and talk with the youth about once a week, including naturalists and foresters. The youth participants get to ask how these guests got their job, the training they needed, and what they like or dislike most about their jobs.



Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board:

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Building Long-Term Infrastructure

The JD Rivers’ Children’s Garden is located in Theodore Wirth Park in north Minneapolis. Since it was built in 1982, the garden has provided programs for children and teens, horticulture therapy for people with disabilities, and intergenerational programming with recent immigrants.⁶ Use of the garden is available to groups of children from the summer day-camps, after-school programs, and the daycare program operated by the Park and Recreation Board, school groups, and groups from other organizations. The Children’s Garden provides these groups with staff, programming, water, seeds, plants, and gardening supplies. Most children who use the garden are elementary-school age, although summer youth employment programs send teens to work in the garden. Although a wide range of children’s groups use the garden, its main target group is children from low-income neighborhoods, especially from the Near North and Phillips neighborhoods. Most of the children are African-American, East African immigrants, or Latino.

The main objectives of the garden program are to teach children gardening skills and healthy eating habits and to provide a hands-

⁶ “JD Rivers’ Children’s Garden, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board,” accessed on 8/24/11, <http://www.minneapolisparks.org/default.asp?PageID=4&parkid=459>.

AT-A-GLANCE

Minneapolis, the largest city in Minnesota, lies on both banks of the Mississippi River, just north of the river's confluence with the Minnesota River, and adjoins Saint Paul, the state capital. It is home to the University of Minnesota and a number of other universities and colleges.

Total Population

382,578

Pop Age 17 and Younger

77,204

Percent Age 17 and Younger

20%

Median Annual HH Income

\$47,097

% Pop Below Poverty

21.4%

Ave High Temp – January

21° F

Ave High Temp – July

83° F

Ave Annual Precip

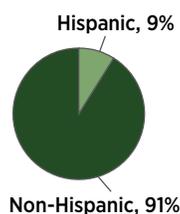
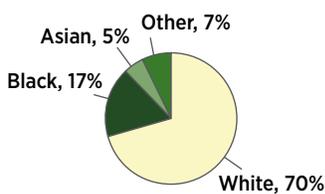
27.3"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

197 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

115 days



on nature experience. The children eat the food they grow and if there is excess, they take it home to their families or it is donated to local food shelves. The staff also provides education on “green careers”, especially for teens who work in the garden.

MaryLynn Pulscher, Parks and Recreation Environmental Education Coordinator, who operates the Children’s Garden, explained that funds from the NRPA grant were used to enhance the garden’s long-term sustainability by buying perennial plants, improve the garden’s physical infrastructure, and develop new, intergenerational programming. Most of the garden space is allocated to annual vegetables. However, the children indicated a desire for more fruit crops, so fruit plants and fruit bushes were added to the garden. New physical infrastructure will include building compost bins, cold frames, and raised beds and extending existing water lines. These improvements will enable the garden to be planted earlier in the season and the crops to grow faster. A soil improvement project was undertaken so that more of the garden space could be productively cultivated. Garden staff will also be piloting an intergenerational program in which children from Parks and Recreation camps will bring their parents or grandparents for “canning and jamming” classes. Ms. Pulscher also has an interest in developing programs around the food of the many ethnic groups in Minneapolis.

Ms. Pulscher has developed a number of partnerships to maintain and improve the garden. Local nurseries donate plants, and local businesses have sold the program supplies, such as canning jars, at bulk prices. Master Gardener volunteers help lead programs. Working with Audubon Minnesota and the Bryn Mawr Neighborhood Association, they added a chimney swift tower to the garden during the 2010 growing season. Residents of nearby Bryn Mawr also volunteer in the garden. In addition, Best Buy and the Target Corporation provide volunteers. The Nordic Ski Foundation runs summer day-camps, and the Children’s Garden provides the gardening and nutrition education programming. In the winter, the Nordic Ski Foundation runs Parks and Rec’s cross-country skiing program.

One of the main challenges the garden program has faced, according to Ms. Pulscher, is transportation. The garden is located in a 700-acre park on the edge of the city and is not an easy walk from the surrounding neighborhoods. As a result, people need transportation to get there. Ms. Pulscher also pointed out that produce gardening is very time-intensive, and her staff are all part-time.

A measure of the garden’s success is that several of the groups that have used the garden in the past now have their own on-site gardens.

Ms. Pulscher believes that financial sustainability results from Parks and Recreation’s long-term commitment to the garden, partnerships, and volunteers. In addition, the NRPA grant was used to make permanent

improvements in the garden's physical and plant infrastructure. Cooperative arrangements like the one Parks and Recreation has with the Nordic Ski Foundation also contribute to sustainability.

Elements of Success

Make sure that organizations that you partner with have the capacity and experience to deliver what is promised. Ask the right questions in advance.

For example, if you are counting on an organization that has promised to provide a certain number of adult volunteers to prep the beds for planting, try to ascertain that they really have that number to send and find out how much supervision they will need and how long they plan to spend.

Always have a back-up plan.

Partners that you've had in past years may not have the money to provide help every year. Have an alternate plan to accomplish your goals.

Have a network of experts to call when problems in the garden come up.

Unexpected problems may come up that you don't know how to handle, such as Japanese Beetles, an infestation of Comfrey or wondering whether a problem is blight. Having technical experts in the community to help you is immensely valuable, and may save your garden.





National Trail Parks and Recreation District

SPRINGFIELD, OH

From Community-Wide Health and Wellness to Children's Gardening and Back Again

The National Trail Parks and Recreation District (NTPRD) maintains parks, trails, and outdoor recreational facilities in Clark County, Ohio, which includes Springfield. NTPRD seeks to promote health and wellness among the residents of Clark County by offering a variety of physical fitness and healthy living programs. The children's gardening program was a natural outgrowth of NTPRD's mission.

For several years, NTPRD had an herb garden located next to the District's administration building in Springfield that was used for educational programs in the summer day-camp. That garden expanded into a vegetable garden when four raised beds were built. The gardens are used in after-school programs and summer day-camps, the latter operated by NTPRD. The after-school programs are located in schools in Clark County and have a physical activity and nutrition focus. Groups of third through fifth graders are bussed to the garden where they are taught gardening skills and nutrition. This year's summer day-camps brought about 40 children aged 7 to 14 into the garden, who participated in gardening activities run jointly by camp and NTPRD staff. In contrast to the more racially and

GARDEN IMPACT

Supporting Community Health and Wellness

The National Trail Parks and Recreation District seeks to promote health and wellness among the residents of Clark County by offering a variety of physical fitness and healthy living programs. The children's gardening program was a natural outgrowth of this mission. The program increases the children's knowledge of gardening and nutrition and awareness of where food comes from. The youth participants have been excited to eat the vegetables they've grown, and want to bring their families. Involving more adults and families from nearby neighborhoods in gardening is a longer term goal, because some of the neighborhoods have a dearth of food stores, with limited access to fresh foods.

socio-economically diverse after-school children, the day-campers are predominantly lower income and African-American from Springfield's inner city. Between the day-camps and after-school programs, the garden is in use from spring through fall.

The main goals of the program, according to Penny Dunbar, NTPRD Recreation Specialist, are to increase the children's knowledge of gardening and nutrition and awareness of where food comes from. Ms. Dunbar noted that, "you would be surprised at how kids don't know where their food comes from!" She has also observed that children who work in the garden often feel a sense of accomplishment that can lead to increased self-esteem and fewer behavior problems. Ms. Dunbar stated, "I think [the children] show ... a sense of ownership and responsibility for the plants that they have helped to plant and taken care of ..."

Involving more adults and families from nearby neighborhoods in gardening is a longer term goal, not only for improved nutrition and health, but because some of those neighborhoods have a dearth of food stores, limiting access to fresh foods.

The NRPA grant was used to build the raised beds and for gardening supplies. The program's primary partnership is with county and city schools. In addition, Ohio State University Extension Service provides nutrition education for the after-school program in which both children and their parents participate. Ms. Dunbar believes that long-term sustainability will come from maintaining the program's current partnerships, building new partnerships, and receiving additional grants.

Elements of Success

The garden should be a community-wide activity, used by diverse groups from the surrounding neighborhoods, including children, adults, and families.

In addition to having children participate, it is good to involve their families and families from the surrounding neighborhoods, to broaden the impact and improve the neighborhood's nutritional status.

Don't be defeated if the weather isn't cooperating.

You can still have a successful garden even if it is planted late.

AT-A-GLANCE

Springfield, the county seat of Clark County, is located in southwestern Ohio. Wittenberg University, a liberal arts college, is located there.

Total Population
60,608

Pop Age 17 and Younger
14,775

Percent Age 17 and Younger
24%

Median Annual HH Income
\$34,043

% Pop Below Poverty
23.2%

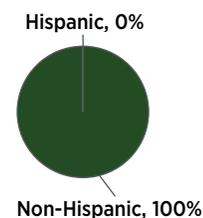
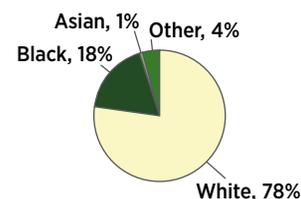
Ave High Temp – January
33° F

Ave High Temp – July
84° F

Ave Annual Precip
39"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine
N/A

Ave Annual Rainy Days
N/A





Omaha Recreation & Public Property:

OMAHA, NE

From Garden to Market

Omaha's youth garden is at Sherman Community Center, which is adjacent to Sherman Elementary School and in a very low-income neighborhood. The program was initiated as a partnership between the city Recreation Department, the school, and City Sprouts, a local nonprofit organization that builds community gardens and conducts educational gardening programs for youth. The 60 to 80 children in the program are in grades kindergarten through six and attend either the school's summer school program or the recreation center's summer day-camp. Three adult staff run the program. Two are provided by City Sprouts and one by the city. The program currently has a total of 24 beds — 18 beds for the youth to work in and six raised beds for individuals with physical handicaps.

The program was faced with a significant challenge almost immediately. The garden is located in a flood retention area for the Missouri River. The river started flooding in May when planting should have taken place. However, with city staff focused on sandbagging the city in preparation for a major flood, which fortunately did not occur, the garden did not get planted until July. Despite this setback no time was wasted. The children were busily engaged in alternative gardening activities, such as making worm beds and container planting. They also had a

GARDEN IMPACT

Providing Access to Fresh Produce and Program Sustainability

Omaha Recreation & Public Property's youth garden is at the Sherman Community Center adjacent to Sherman Elementary School, in a very low-income neighborhood. In addition to teaching the children gardening skills, nutrition, and how to cook their produce, program staff will make use of farmers' markets in two ways. They will set up a free market in the neighborhood to share the produce, since there are no local grocery stores and to help residents stretch their budgets by giving them fresh food. They will also sell their produce at other farmers' markets in Omaha to generate income to help sustain the program.

Name the Garden contest. When the garden is officially dedicated, the winning name will be printed on a sign.

In addition to teaching the children gardening skills, nutrition, and how to cook their produce, program staff plan to make use of farmers' markets in two ways. First, they plan to set up a free market in the neighborhood to share the produce. There are no local grocery stores in the neighborhood and this will help residents stretch their budgets by giving them fresh food. Second, they hope to sell their produce at other farmers' markets in Omaha to generate income that would help sustain the program.

Staff hope to build an intergenerational component into the program. Some seniors who regularly meet at the Sherman Community Center have seen the garden and have expressed an interest in being involved. Staff hope to be able to expand the program so that children and seniors work together. The NRPA grant has been used to buy materials to build the beds and for the contract with City Sprouts to provide the educational programming component. The program is also planning to raise additional funds with the help of City Sprouts. Since city departments are not allowed to solicit private funding, City Sprouts may be able to obtain donations from local businesses.

Elements of Success

Always have a Plan B.

Because of the threat of flooding in Omaha, the garden got a late start. However, the children were involved in alternate gardening activities from the very beginning of the summer and no time was wasted.

Partnerships, especially those with gardening experts, are essential.

This project began as a partnership between the city, the adjacent public school, and City Sprouts. In particular, the community gardening expertise brought by City Sprouts has been an essential component in launching and sustaining the project. As City Recreation Manager Kim Harmon stated, "There are lots of people who, like me, call themselves city girls, and I don't know the first thing about gardening. City Sprouts knew everything that was going on. How to plant, where to plant, what to do, and that was huge for city girls like me."

AT-A-GLANCE

Omaha is the largest city in Nebraska. Located on the Missouri River, it is the anchor of the Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area.

Total Population

408,958

Pop Age 17 and Younger

102,671

Percent Age 17 and Younger

25%

Median Annual HH Income

\$45,979

% Pop Below Poverty

14.7%

Ave High Temp – January

31° F

Ave High Temp – July

88° F

Ave Annual Precip

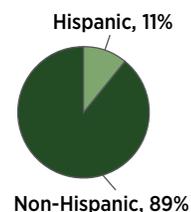
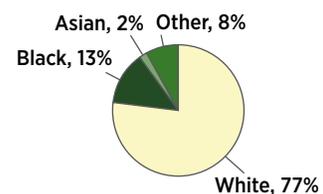
30.3"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

216 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

99 days





Oxford Park Commission

OXFORD, MI

Involving the Entire Community

The Oxford Park Commission's community garden program began several years ago when the Oxford Community Garden Association approached the Commission about starting a community garden on unused public land next to the city's skate park. Located in a non-residential area, the garden now has 33 plots, totaling 14,000 square feet, including nine plots designated for youth.

The goal of the garden is to provide opportunities for community members to grow food for themselves or others in need. Involvement in the garden is open to anyone in the community for a \$10 fee, and it has a diverse group of participants, from children to retirees. Several of the plots are used by the Oxford Community Garden Association to grow food for donation to the food pantry and directly to people in need. The program has become so popular that there is often a wait list for plots. The Park Commission furnishes soil, mulch, and other supplies while the city supplies water and maintains the water lines. Although some start-up costs were paid by the NRPA grant, Bubba Robinson, Deputy Director of the Park Commission, is confident that the costs of sustaining the program will be handled by the Commission's operating funds, at least for the foreseeable future.

A group of children became interested in gardening well before the community garden existed in the city park. Several years ago,

GARDEN IMPACT

Providing Food to Those in Need

The goal of the Oxford Park Commission's community garden program is to provide opportunities for community members to grow food for themselves or others in need. Involvement in the garden is open to anyone in the community for a \$10 fee, and it has a diverse group of participants, from children to retirees. Several of the plots are used by the Oxford Community Garden Association to grow food for donation to the food pantry and directly to people in need.

a college student working in the Park Commission's summer internship program conducted a youth gardening workshop as her required project. She taught the children basic gardening skills and showed them how to plant containers using plants, soil, and pots donated by Home Depot and garden centers. Mr. Robinson commented, "Of course, all of us said you're probably not going to get any kids. I think she ended up with 28!"

The youth gardening program operates in two ways. One is the youth-designated plots in the city park, in which families pay the rental fee and work in the garden. The second is a large plot in the park which has been used by a second-grade class in a nearby school. Mr. Robinson observed, "You can involve a lot of kids through the schools. And ... we had that one class, there were 20-some students in this teacher's class who came down at least once a week to the garden, so there [were] 20-some kids that may have not ever been able to work a garden and see how it operates, or see how to grow anything, if it hadn't been for the community garden." However, because the children had to walk, they didn't get to work in the garden often enough. The Park Commission, along with the school, is exploring the feasibility of building a garden on the school grounds. With the involvement of a volunteer who works with school groups to help them start gardens and the classroom teachers, Mr. Robinson is optimistic that it will be an easy transition for the second graders to start a new garden at their school. He also hopes that with the Park Commission's help, other local schools will start gardens. In addition, he plans to link up with local youth organizations, such as 4H, and help them to start gardens.

The garden's most active partnership so far has been with the Oxford Community Garden Association, which provides expertise and speakers so that anyone who is interested in learning more about growing food can find out how to do it. According to Mr. Robinson, "The [Oxford Community Garden] Association has been outstanding to work with. ... Anyone who looks to do a community garden or has already got one and is having trouble maintaining it themselves, a good organization like that is outstanding."

Starting a farmers' market is a hoped-for outgrowth of the garden program. There is already a farmers' market in Oxford, but it is not open to everyone who has produce to sell. Mr. Robinson envisions starting a market where people who have garden plots in the city's program or anywhere else around town could sell their produce. An advisory committee will soon be formed to explore the feasibility of this project.

Mr. Robinson views the garden program's major success as "...just keeping all the plots full. Because when we first started, I didn't think it would be that big. But now we can't keep enough plots!"

AT-A-GLANCE

Oxford, home of the University of Mississippi, is a university town located in the northern part of the state.

Total Population

18,916

Pop Age 17 and Younger

2,805

Percent Age 17 and Younger

15%

Median Annual HH Income

N/A

% Pop Below Poverty

N/A

Ave High Temp - January

54° F

Ave High Temp - July

91° F

Ave Annual Precip

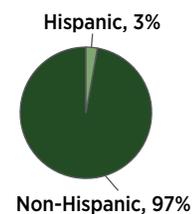
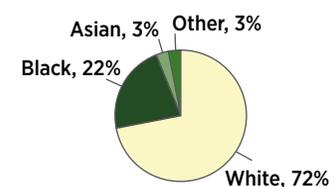
52"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

N/A

Ave Annual Rainy Days

84 days



Elements of Success

Offering one- or two-hour gardening workshops with hands-on activities at the beginning of the planting season can build children's enthusiasm for the "real thing".

Showing children that if you go through the right steps, you can wind up with a garden full of vegetables gets children on board and ready to go.

Partnering with schools and other youth-serving organizations is a great way to reach a lot of children at one time.

Linking up with youth-serving organizations, whether it is the schools, 4H or others is an easy way to get a lot of kids involved as a group — they are already organized as a group, and the community garden can provide them with a new experience.

A local community gardening association is a valuable partner that can provide expertise, educational programming, and help in the garden.

Ideally, those organizations should be involved from the beginning.



GARDEN IMPACT

Promoting Children's Physical and Emotional Development

The basic premise of the Pekin Park District's children's nature programming is that "direct exposure to nature is essential to a child's healthy physical and emotional development." Children are given the chance both to learn about the natural environment and to grow food that might otherwise be absent from the family table. In addition to learning about healthy lifestyles, they also are having an opportunity to express their creativity. The children have been directly involved in the design of the gardens.



Pekin Park District:

PEKIN, IL

Superheroes of Mother Nature

The basic premise of the Park District's children's nature programming is that "direct exposure to nature is essential to a child's healthy physical and emotional development." The goals of the children's gardening program are to give kids within a 30-mile radius of Pekin, located in the center of Illinois, a chance both to learn about the natural environment and to grow food that might otherwise be absent from the family table. Over 700 youth between the ages of 3 and 16 not only are learning how to design, plant, tend, harvest, and prepare food crops, they are also learning about healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, for most children, the experience will be free.

The children at Soldwedel Program Center want visitors to marvel at the mound of dirt in the shape of a big head rising out of the ground. That will be their Mother Earth garden, one of many that the children who get to attend the gardening programs here have designed and planted. Mother Earth is going to have mosaic eyes and, maybe, Rapunzel "hair" made of squash vines speckled by red and orange nasturtiums and pepper blossoms.

NRPA's funding has been instrumental to the rapid implementation of the Park District's children's gardening program. Thanks to the NRPA grant, the nature-based programming reached into gardening, which was not the focus before. "Before the grant, we only had \$200 for supplies," said

AT-A-GLANCE

Located on the Illinois River, Pekin is the county seat of Tazewell County, and a key part of the Peoria metropolitan area.

Total Population

34,094

Pop Age 17 and Younger

7,459

Percent Age 17 and Younger

22%

Median Annual HH Income

\$40,152

% Pop Below Poverty

13.1%

Ave High Temp – January

32° F

Ave High Temp – July

86° F

Ave Annual Precip

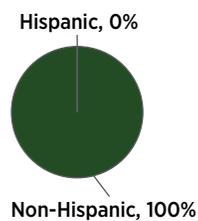
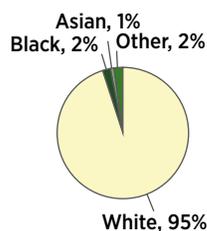
35.4"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

193 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

114 days



Terri Gambetti, the Pekin Park District's Superintendent of Recreation. With the grant, the Park District could buy shovels, hoses, wood for raised beds, seeds, and deer deterrent fencing — all 200 yards of 7-foot tall netting. Youth can now be bussed in at no cost to the agency bringing them, and programs aimed at low-income youth are offered for free.

Volunteers have sprouted from every corner including parents of children who attend the gardening workshops, Friends of McNaughton Park (a nonprofit organization to support the adjacent 800-acre woodland), YWCA, Boys and Girls Club, Salvation Army, Illinois Central College, and neighbors from surrounding towns. Then there's Beth Wegner, a seasoned gardener and author, whose modest salary makes her nearly a volunteer. She's the one who wants to make all the kids "Super heroes of Mother Nature" and "to fall in love with nature and learn how to take care of it."

Based on designs coming directly from the youth gardeners, Ms. Wegner has guided the plans for the gardens: Brambles, where five different kinds of berries are planted; Fairy, the flower beds; four vegetable gardens; Sunflower House; The Bean Tepee; Melon Patch; Corn Maze and Native American Garden with corn, bean and squash beds. Plus there are the compost station, rain collector and the interactive interpretive trail. There are plans for a fall harvest. Three dates are set in September for all the volunteers and kids who have participated, as well as neighbors, to come by to glean, sample foods, and get recipes.

Fleets of volunteers, Master Gardeners and eager learners can make for a successful gardening season. But even with the richest soil, no program is rich enough to stay in the black over time. Using targeted letters, mass press releases, and word of mouth, Soldwedel Program Center staff plan to reach out to garden shops, green houses, the Pekin School District, and the public to seek donations for future needs.

Elements of Success

Broad-based community support is essential

The program has been fortunate to have an abundance of volunteers. The Soldwedel Programs operate primarily on the basis of fees along with the good will of supporters. Being able to mobilize a wide range of individuals and organizations who donate their time is what made the Pekin program possible.

Cultivating partnerships

The "Friends" group was assigned the jobs of tilling and prepping the garden areas and making a place that would be accessible to people with disabilities.

Including a master gardener

The discovery and enlistment of a master gardener, like Beth Wegner, made the program shine and raised the level of the experience for both volunteers and participants.

Having support from the lead organization

Support from the lead organization made progress much smoother. Getting the parks department to donate staff time and trucks made it possible to hit short deadlines.

Reaching out to surrounding communities

Outreach to surrounding communities broadened the pool of potential volunteers and beneficiaries.





Pensacola Parks and Recreation Department

PENSACOLA, FL

Recreating A Food-Growing Tradition in An Urban Park

Pensacola's community garden program is part of the city's plan to improve the Hollice T. Williams Park as an urban greenway within Pensacola's revitalization area. A three-acre area in the park was designated for a community garden in the recently completed park redesign plan. The park is central to several low- to moderate-income neighborhoods with ethnically diverse populations.

One of the program's main goals is to recreate the food-growing tradition — the store of knowledge, skills, and experience — that was once common in the South and all but disappeared in the last couple of generations. By focusing on children, the program hopes to encourage families to become involved in gardening, engage in healthy eating habits at an early age, provide opportunities for exercise, and reduce childhood obesity. With limited access to food stores in the surrounding neighborhoods and the high price of fresh produce, another program goal is increasing the availability of fresh food to local residents. Teaching gardening skills and providing a nearby place to garden helps to stretch limited food dollars. The program also hopes to build community by creating an opportunity for interaction

GARDEN IMPACT

Promoting Self-Sufficiency

Helen Gibson, City of Pensacola Chief of Neighborhoods, noticed that many of the teens attending her Saturday workshop about community gardening didn't seem very enthusiastic about being there. She approached one of the youngsters at the request of his grandmother and, "... I told him about the benefits. How wonderful it is to be able to grow your own food. And once you have this knowledge of how to do this, you will never be hungry. No one can ever take it from you. ... And his whole visage changed, his whole attitude." The boy apparently began promoting the idea to his friends, because at the end of the day, Ms. Gibson said, "I asked how many know what the benefit is of doing this? And hands went up."

among people working together in the garden. Finally, the project is intended to add beauty to the park using a combination of organic fruit and vegetable gardens coupled with flower and butterfly gardens to assist with pollination. A proposed theme for the program is, “Eat Your Park”.

Efforts by the city, local non-profit organizations, and neighborhood associations to promote growing and selling fresh produce gained momentum following Hurricanes Katrina and Ivan. In the earliest stages of envisioning the community garden at Hollice T. Williams Park, the City Parks and Recreation Department conducted several community workshops in the surrounding neighborhoods. As Helen Gibson, City of Pensacola Chief of Neighborhoods, stated, “The idea for the community garden actually came from the residents [who] participated in that process. ... They specifically were the ones [who] proposed that we do this. ... I would call it a grass-roots type of response.” Ms. Gibson also mentioned that when she was addressing one of the neighborhood groups, she “asked for a show of hands — how many in the room had parents or grandparents who had a garden in the yard. And dozens of hands went up. And then I asked the same question. How many have a garden now? And very few, I don’t think any hands went up. So then I began to talk about our vision for establishing this community garden. And there was a lot of interest and people were excited about the idea, and particularly for the kids.” Children’s involvement and hard work have been a key component in creating the gardens.

With a total of 22 beds, the gardening program has had broad-based community support from both public and private sectors. About 25 children between the ages of 8 and 17, mostly teens and nearly all African-American, from three neighborhood youth groups work in six garden beds designated for youth. Adults work in the other 16 beds. Three neighborhood associations have been actively involved, one of which is buying trees and benches for the garden. Neighborhood youth, Navy cadets, and Eagle Scouts helped to prepare the site and build and transport raised beds. Seeds, seedlings, soil, lumber, compost, and tools were all purchased with funds from the NRPA grant. Escambia County Equestrian Center donated truckloads of horse manure. The county Agricultural Extension has been offering gardening workshops. One of the biggest challenges was access to water. The Community Redevelopment Agency funded the irrigation system, and the city provides the water. A landscaping class at a local junior college adopted the garden as a class project, developing several proposals for landscaping around the garden. Manna Food Bank, which has been active in promoting gardening in Pensacola, donated seeds and tools. Home Depot also donated seeds.

AT-A-GLANCE

Pensacola, a seaport on the Pensacola Bay, is the westernmost city in the Florida Panhandle and home to the University of West Florida’s main campus. Nearby is a large United States Naval Air Station, the first in the United States.

Total Population

51,923

Pop Age 17 and Younger

10,166

Percent Age 17 and Younger

20%

Median Annual HH Income

\$45,380

% Pop Below Poverty

14.5%

Ave High Temp – January

61° F

Ave High Temp – July

90° F

Ave Annual Precip

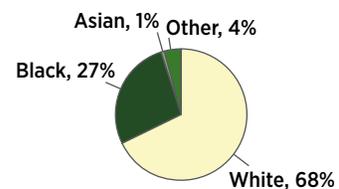
62.6"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

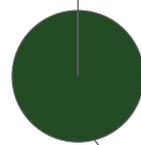
229 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

109 days



Hispanic, 0%



Non-Hispanic, 100%

Elements of Success

Promote the involvement of a diversity of community residents and organizations.

People and groups with different interests helping to create the garden and working in it will help to sustain the program. The Navy cadets, Eagle Scouts, Agricultural Extension, youth groups, neighborhood groups, and many others have all been essential in creating and maintaining the garden.

Visible success attracts interest.

Because of its central location, people can walk or drive by the park and see the garden's lushness. As Ms. Gibson stated, "We have had lots of people make comments driving by that they are interested in finding out how they can participate." There is also a garden page on the city's website so that people can see what is going on in the garden and sign up for a bed. Also, a basket-full of this year's bumper crop of cucumbers and peppers was delivered to the mayor's office. Evidence of the garden's success is the fact that there are several people on a wait list for beds.

Start constructing your garden early in the season and anticipate delays.

Start as soon as you possibly can, because there will always be some delay in the construction.

Enlist the help of experts.

From the beginning, the program worked with the Agricultural Extension on irrigation, soil, pests, and the like. Their knowledge of gardening has been essential in making the project a success. In addition, an active and knowledgeable volunteer coordinated the procurement of plants and materials, laid out the rows, and recruited people to participate.

GARDEN IMPACT

Small Steps Towards Healthy Eating

Bob Streitmatter, Peoria Park District Garden Manager and Luthy Botanical Garden Director, related a story about a little girl at one of the garden sites who was unfamiliar with cabbage. When she found out that coleslaw is made from cabbage, “[she said] she likes coleslaw. She told me she likes to dip her French fries in her coleslaw. So we are sort of making a difference one French fry at a time!”



Peoria Park District

PEORIA, IL

Growing Kids' Enthusiasm for Nature

Peoria's youth gardening program is part of the city's Park District. The youth gardens are located at two sites — the Proctor Recreation Center and the Logan Recreation Center. The latter is next to a private Lutheran K-8 school where the Park District also has a youth garden that operates in tandem with the Logan garden. The program is geared to children ages 6 to 13. The children at both the Proctor and the Logan/Lutheran program are predominantly African-American or Latino and from low-income households. The Logan/Lutheran program has a more diverse population from slightly more affluent households.

Youth gardening at the Proctor Center has been going on for at least five years. Bob Streitmatter, Park District Garden Manager and Luthy Botanical Garden Director, explained that the NRPA grant enabled the program to enrich the soil at the Logan garden, purchase better tools and other supplies, and plant grapes and other fruit crops. The grant was also used to start a raised-bed garden at the Lutheran school site that includes vegetables, herbs, some theme beds, an old-fashioned flower garden, a native habitat garden with prairie grasses, and eventually an orchard and other fruit crops. Gardening has become well-integrated into the summer day-camp and after-school programs that operate at both the Logan and Proctor recreation centers and at the Lutheran school when it is in session. The garden serves 70 to

AT-A-GLANCE

Peoria, located in north-central Illinois, is the third largest city in the state outside the Chicago Metropolitan Area.

Total Population

115,007

Pop Age 17 and Younger

28,370

Percent Age 17 and Younger

25%

Median Annual HH Income

\$44,164

% Pop Below Poverty

18.9%

Ave High Temp – January

32° F

Ave High Temp – July

86° F

Ave Annual Precip

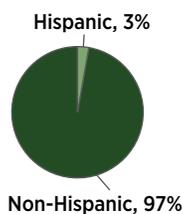
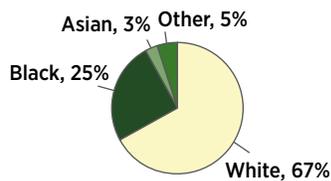
35.4"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

193 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

114 days



80 children in the Proctor Recreation Center's summer day-camps and about 30 to 40 at the Logan/Lutheran gardens. When school is back in session, the number increases to 100 to 150 children from the after-school program and the Lutheran school.

The program's objectives are for the children to become more in touch with nature and the outdoors, learn basic gardening skills so that they can plant their own gardens at home, and improve their nutrition. Both sites are in low-income neighborhoods. Because the nearest grocery stores are miles away, the children have limited access to fresh produce. Although the gardening program cannot change that fact, Mr. Streitmatter stated that, "... what we can do here is to change the individuals, how they react to it [living in a food desert]."

At the Proctor garden, Mr. Streitmatter, the Botanical Garden staff, and the recreation center staff operate the program activities. At Logan/Lutheran, a local nonprofit called Gifts in the Moment and recreation center staff run the program with some teacher involvement. Both sites have a nutrition education component. The summer camp at the Proctor Recreation Center includes an academic component to minimize the loss in learning over the summer months. Gardening and nutrition have been integrated into the camp curriculum.

Mr. Streitmatter indicated that sustainability of the gardens will come primarily from the internal and external partnerships he has developed. The Park District will continue to support the garden at the Proctor Recreation Center, especially since it is a large, active community center that is heavily used by the surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, both sites receive plants from the Park District's Botanical Garden. Parents and teachers at the Lutheran school have been enthusiastic about and supportive of the program and have been actively involved in gardening with the children. A partnership between the gardening program and Gifts in the Moment promotes nature education at local public and private schools. The goal of the training is to integrate nature studies into the full academic curriculum. Dietetic interns from Bradley University and the Order of St. Francis Hospital, both of which are in Peoria, have provided the nutrition education component at both sites.

Mr. Streitmatter and other Park District staff have noticed fear and apprehension on the part of some of the children about being outside and working in the dirt. They have observed what has come to be called Nature Deficit Disorder in about 5% to 10% of the kids. Mr. Streitmatter and the recreation center staff have observed that children seem to feel less fearful and more comfortable outside as their time in the garden increases. The children have also been enthusiastic about trying new vegetables and fruits that they've never before eaten. Mr. Streitmatter related a story about a little girl at one of the sites who was unfamiliar with cabbage. When she found out that coleslaw is made from cabbage,

“[she said] she likes coleslaw. She told me she likes to dip her French fries in her coleslaw. So we are sort of making a difference one French fry at a time!”

Elements of Success

Have a back-up plan for alternate gardening activities in case the weather doesn't cooperate and the children can't go outside.

It is easy to overlook the possibility of not being able to follow your program as planned. But on days with lightning and thunder, a back-up plan will be valuable.

Get the kids in the garden and planting as early in the season as possible.

That way, they will have more of an opportunity to experience the full gardening cycle, from planting to harvest.

Forging partnerships is key for sustainability.

The old adage that “many hands make light work” is true. The more people that are involved, the more likely the program will have an impact and will be sustained.

Involving parents increases the potential impact of gardening in the home.

If parents are involved in the program, they are more likely to see the benefits of eating more fruits and vegetables and may be more interested in trying a home garden.

Be sure staff are well-trained.

If a program can't have the entire staff trained, at least having the lead staff trained will be beneficial.



Reno Parks, Recreation, & Community Services Department

RENO, NV

A Cooperative Effort

Reno's youth garden is located at the Evelyn Mount Northeast Community Center. This center, which is located in a low-income neighborhood, hosts a Parks and Recreation program called Vacation Station. Many of Reno's elementary schools are on a year-round schedule, in which the children go to school for 10 weeks followed by four weeks off throughout the year. Every few weeks a group of children cycles from school to off-time. Vacation Station provides recreational activities for those children, aged 6 to 12, during their off-time. These activities serve from 20 to 50 children at one time. They are from a wide range of income and race-ethnic groups. The activities are led by young adults in the 16-to-25 age range. Most are college students or, in the summer, high school students. The children's gardening project was a recent addition to Vacation Station's programming.

Reno Parks and Recreation has been involved in children's gardening for a number of years. The Junior Ranger Garden, a summer program run by city park rangers, was active until 2010, when park rangers were laid off due to budget reductions. At about the same time, the city received its NRPA grant, at

GARDEN IMPACT

Small Steps Towards Healthy Eating

"I think one of the biggest successes I've felt is a 22-year old [a children's activity leader] who had never had salad before. ... And now he [asks] when are we going to have salad again? I mean to me, that was the biggest success ever."

— Peggy Nelson-Aguilar,
Recreation Supervisor in
the Parks Division of the
Reno Parks, Recreation,
and Community Services
Department

which point the children's garden was integrated into Vacation Station's programming and became a year-round project. The garden is located in what was a large, unused, fenced space that had once been a playground at the recreation center.

Two of the main goals of the program are to introduce the children to fresh food and to growing their your own food. Peggy Nelson-Aguilar, Recreation Supervisor in the Parks Division of the Parks and Recreation Department, mentioned that a lot of the children "didn't even know that food grew in the ground. ... The neat thing was they were willing and are willing to try anything." Because the children attend Vacation Station in cycles, one child will take home a vegetable or a plant that another child planted six weeks before. That way, the kids get to see plants in various stages of growth, and they get to see immediate success. Even though their seeds may not be ready to sprout, someone else's seeds that were planted weeks before are sprouting and maybe are even ready to harvest. A month or two from now, their seeds will have sprouted and another child will take that plant home, and the cycle continues.

NRPA funding enabled the children's garden to develop in several important ways. Ms. Nelson-Aguilar was able to hire a three-quarter time staff person to run the gardening program. An enthusiastic gardener, Larrie has expanded the program by cooking with the children and sending the children home with produce and recipes that feature what they grow in the garden. She also provides an educational component on plants as well as art activities. The grant also enabled Ms. Nelson-Aguilar to buy a greenhouse for the program. The children had been going to the large greenhouse five miles away to do gardening-related activities, like planting or cleaning pots, when it was too cold to work outside. Because of the distance, the children had to be transported there, taking this time away from the activities. The new, smaller greenhouse is located on-site at the recreation center.

Ms. Nelson-Aguilar has thought of some innovative ideas and has established a number of internal and external partnerships that have helped to develop the program and will help to sustain it into the future. The private company that the city contracts with for trash removal and recycling has met with the children several times to talk about recycling and composting. Ms. Nelson-Aguilar found a number of seed companies on the Internet and wrote to all of them. Before long, she received \$2,000 to \$3,000 worth of seeds in the mail at no cost, and now boxes of free seeds arrive every year! The kids also harvest seeds at the end of the summer for planting next year. In addition, every spring, they plant more than they will need. When the plants get big enough, the staff organizes a plant sale with about 1,000 to 1,500 plants. They sell out every year, and at a dollar a plant, the sale earns enough to buy any new gardening supplies that are needed. The cooperation of city departments has also been essential. The Youth Division of Parks and Recreation runs Vacation Station, and the children's garden has been integrated into that program,

AT-A-GLANCE

Reno is the second largest Nevada city after Las Vegas and is home to the University of Nevada-Reno. It sits in a high desert valley at the foot of the Sierra Nevada.

Total Population

225,221

Pop Age 17 and Younger

51,353

Percent Age 17 and Younger

23%

Median Annual HH Income

\$49,957

% Pop Below Poverty

14.9%

Ave High Temp - January

45° F

Ave High Temp - July

91° F

Ave Annual Precip

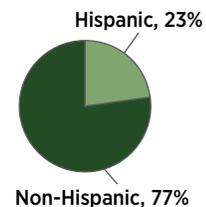
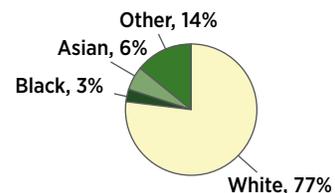
7.3"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

252 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

50 days



which in turns partners with the public school system. Ms. Nelson-Aguilar also worked with the city's Public Works Department to create a ramp for the children's garden to make it wheelchair-accessible and with Park Maintenance to build the greenhouse and provide irrigation. The operating budget combined with the plant sale, seed donations, and the help received from other city departments provide enough resources to sustain the program. As Ms. Nelson-Aguilar stated, "...whenever I ask for help, whether it be from Park Maintenance for our irrigation issues, or to help construct the greenhouse or ... trying to get the ADA ramp ..., every [city] department that I've asked for help has just been willing and jumped right in. ... Everybody just likes the idea of what we are doing, so they want to make sure it happens."

Ms. Nelson-Aguilar feels the greatest success is "... that the kids are actually eating things that they never thought they would. And the fact that they like it. I think one of the biggest successes I've felt is a 22-year old who had never had salad before. ... And now he [asks] when are we going to have salad again? I mean to me, that was the biggest success ever."

Elements of Success

Don't be afraid to ask for help

Ms. Nelson-Aguilar enlisted the support of a number of city departments to develop the garden, and she wrote to seed companies around the country. As she said, "I figured I [had] nothing to lose but a stamp."

Dream big but keep it simple.

Everyone thought an on-site greenhouse was unrealistic in a down economy, but with the advice of the city horticulturalist on what was needed, the NRPA grant, and Parks and Recreation's help in constructing it, it happened! However, Ms. Nelson-Aguilar advises keeping the garden as simple and low-cost as possible so that it is possible to keep it going in both good economic times and bad.

Make it fun and experiential for the kids.

Kids seem to enjoy working in the garden and getting their hands dirty, even weeding, especially if they know they will get to eat what they produce.

GARDEN IMPACT

Intergenerational Connections

One of the unintended consequences of the Richland County Recreation Commission's youth gardening program was to see older adults and children working together and building relationships. The advisory council came and saw the program, and then got active in participating in the program. Retired seniors came and shared their knowledge and expertise about gardening with the children.



Richland County Recreation Commission

COLUMBIA, SC

Three Gardens Serving Three Populations

The Richland County project started with eight raised beds at the Crane Creek Community Center. The Crane Creek community is comprised of five low-income, predominantly African-American neighborhoods. The garden is part of the center's after-school program, and children in second through fifth grade, 55 in all, work in the garden during the school year. When the school year ends, approximately 50 children from the center's summer day-camp work in the garden.

The objectives are to educate the children about nutrition, improve their nutrition, and increase their opportunities for outdoor exercise. Zenethia Brown, the Recreation Commission's Director of Community Relations, stated that the goals were to, "expose [the children] to better foods, better nutrition, better food choices. And just kind of get them out there and take them off the video games. Just get them outside." Although it wasn't an objective at the outset, the program became intergenerational, when a group of retired seniors with gardening expertise began working with the children on a regular basis.

The program has been extended to two other locations. The neighborhood association in Ridgewood Park has been working with the Recreation Commission to develop a garden that

AT-A-GLANCE

Richland County, located in the center of South Carolina, is the second most populous county in the state and is the location of the state capital, Columbia.

Total Population

129,272

Pop Age 17 and Younger

21,914

Percent Age 17 and Younger

17%

Median Annual HH Income

\$37,596

% Pop Below Poverty

21.3%

Ave High Temp – January

56° F

Ave High Temp – July

92° F

Ave Annual Precip

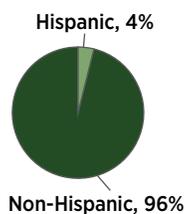
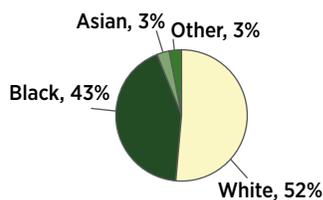
48.7"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

219 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

109 days



will be open to all residents of that community. One of the goals is for participants to take the skills they learn at the garden and use them to create their own home gardens. A local school has also been using the garden in its science curriculum. The third garden is at the Denny Terrace Community Center as part of its adaptive recreation program for adults and children with special needs. So far, the Crane Creek and Denny Terrace gardens have had a harvest. The gardeners were able to take home the fruits and vegetables of their labor, and a school near the Crane Creek center also received some of the bounty.

Clemson University Extension has been the program's main partner to date, providing technical expertise to get the gardens up and running. This includes testing the soil and making recommendations for amending it. In the fall, the Extension Service will conduct composting workshops.

The Richland County Recreation Foundation raised private funding to support the programs offered by the Recreation Commission. In addition to the NRPA grant, funding for the garden program has come from Palmetto Pride, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to end littering in South Carolina and beautify the state. These grants have been used to get the three gardens up and running. That funding combined with other grants will be used to sustain the program in the future.

Elements of Success

Never underestimate the importance of volunteers.

When the Crane Creek garden began, it was difficult to keep the large number of children in the after-school program who worked in the garden organized and focused. When neighborhood seniors became involved, the counselors could divide the children into smaller, more manageable groups.

Find an expert — from the very beginning!

Ms. Brown felt that a gardening expert, like the individual her project has been working with from the Clemson Extension, is essential to helping gardeners get the most from their efforts. Experts should be involved from the earliest planning stages.

GARDEN IMPACT

Garden Impact: Promoting Healthy Lifestyles

The City of Rockford's Park District youth-oriented gardens are established near two community centers. Both community centers operate summer day-camps that focus on nature and outdoor activities. Gardening is integrated into camp programming at both sites. Many of the same children from one of the summer programs continue to work in the garden after school starts. Many of the participants live in homes without a yard, without green space. The gardening program provides them an opportunity to participate in an outdoor activity.



Rockford Park District

ROCKFORD, IL

Prepared for the Unexpected

The City of Rockford's Park District has had a focus on gardening since at least 1999, when the City of Gardens program was initiated. The City of Gardens focuses on urban beautification, reforestation, and gardening. In addition, Ruth Miller, City of Gardens Program Director and Facility Manager for the Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens, explained that the Park District's Board of Commissioners has identified healthy lifestyles as a programming priority for the district. Establishing a youth community gardening program was a natural outgrowth.

The Park District's first youth-oriented garden was established about two years ago at Washington Park Community Center (WPCC), which is located in a low-income, predominantly African-American neighborhood. Youth in the summer day-camp program work in the garden with two Park District horticulture staff and volunteers. One of the beds is raised to provide accessibility for adults and children with disabilities. The NRPA grant helped to establish a second youth garden, at the Linda K. White Center in the Reuben Aldeen Park, a 103-acre park in the center of Rockford. The park is in a middle-class, ethnically mixed neighborhood. The Linda K. White Center is the location of the Park District's therapeutic recreation programming for youth with disabilities. In addition to building

AT-A-GLANCE

Rockford is located in northern Illinois and is the state's largest city outside the Chicago Metropolitan Area.

Total Population

152,871

Pop Age 17 and Younger

39,539

Percent Age 17 and Younger

26%

Median Annual HH Income

\$38,204

% Pop Below Poverty

21.7%

Ave High Temp – January

31° F

Ave High Temp – July

87° F

Ave Annual Precip

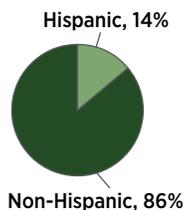
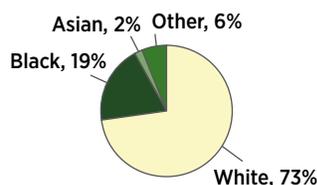
34.8"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

191 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

118 days



a new garden, the NRPA grant allowed the Park District to expand the garden at WPCC and add a nutritional component.

Both community centers operate summer day-camps that focus on nature and outdoor activities. Gardening was integrated into camp programming at both sites. At the Linda K. White Center, at least 200 children aged 5 to 10 participate in gardening during the summer, and at WPCC, about 25 fourth- and fifth-grade children. Many of the same children from the summer programs continue to work in the garden after school starts as part of after-school programs at the community center. In addition to vegetables, the children also plant a perennial garden designed to attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

WPCC's location in an impoverished neighborhood has presented both opportunities and challenges. Clayton Guler, Operations Coordinator/Office Manager for the Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens, stated, "... the majority of these kids are from an area where they don't have a yard. They don't have green space. They've never been exposed to gardening, to healthy eating." About a week after this summer's garden was planted, it was destroyed by vandals. The children were devastated. Fortunately, Mr. Guler had the resources to buy new plants with which to replant the garden. Now, some of the kids check the garden twice a day to make sure nothing else has happened to it.

Now that the initial start-up expenditures have been made the gardens should be sustainable through the City of Gardens budget.. However, significant program expansion would require grant funding.

Local partnerships have included cable provider Comcast, which every year, helps prepare the garden beds and clean up WPCC with the neighborhood kids, as part of its Comcast Cares program. This summer, a nutritionist from the University of Illinois Extension Service came to work with kids at both sites. Representatives from one of the local farmers' markets spoke to the children about growing vegetables. Representatives from Learn Great Foods, an organization that provides farm tours and culinary retreats at farms in the Midwest, came to one of the sites and conducted a program on nutrition. The youth gardening program also partners with some of the public schools and has worked with the Rockford Environmental Science Academy, a public middle school, on its school garden.

The program has faced weather-related challenges as well as acts of vandalism. But as Mr. Guler stated, "Challenges as far as working with the kids, there [are] none. I mean the kids are wonderful. They are excited to be involved with it. It is not an activity where you really have to pull teeth to get them involved and excited."

For Ruth and Clayton the key to the gardening program's success is giving the children an opportunity to learn lifelong skills in growing food and the children's pride and sense of accomplishment.

Elements of Success

Plan ahead and be prepared for the unexpected.

Plan to have extra plants on hand in case you have to re-plant due to bad weather, vandalism, insects, or hungry rabbits taking their toll on the garden.

Develop creative ways to expand gardening into a year-round activity.

Kids can plant seeds, paint flower pots, or make decorative stepping stones for the garden indoors in the cold months. A nutrition component or other educational component can also be used in the off-season.

Keep the garden small and simple.

A smaller garden helps to prevent the project from becoming overwhelming for center staff to manage and also enables the children to see the benefits of their work more quickly than in a larger garden. That way, everyone feels successful.



Shreveport Public Assembly and Recreation

SHREVEPORT, LA

Feeding A Neighborhood

Shreveport's children's and youth gardening program is located at the Valencia Park Community Center, one of 15 community centers that are part of the city's Public Assembly and Recreation Department (SPAR). Valencia Park is located in a predominantly African-American neighborhood called Stoner Hill. Stoner Hill, like all of the neighborhoods where the city's community centers are located, is a low income neighborhood. SPAR originally envisioned the children's garden as a beautification project in which the kids would also learn about vegetable gardening. However, when SPAR staff realized that Valencia Park is in an area with no nearby grocery stores, only fast-food restaurants and convenience stores, they changed the focus from beautification to increasing residents' access to fresh food. That goal was soon coupled with additional goals. First, teaching children and youth gardening skills to produce their own food. Second, providing food for the neighborhood and providing an opportunity for neighborhood youth to develop entrepreneurial skills through marketing, packaging, and selling their produce to residents of their own neighborhood. The garden program began in 2009 and there are now about 25 plots in the garden and an orchard.

GARDEN IMPACT

Budding Entrepreneurship

The teens from the Shreveport grantee's Urban Youth Farm program were invited to give a presentation about the program to the Shreveport City Council. A local restaurant owner, who had been buying his produce from the Urban Youth Farm, went with them to the City Council meeting, telling the elected officials, "Look, you know, I'd be stupid not to buy this from these kids. These are the best greens that I've ever tasted!"

The three gardening programs at Valencia Park take advantage of Shreveport's year-round growing season. The after-school program meets once a week in the garden and includes 25 children aged 4 to 17. Twenty-five older kids aged 11 and up are in the summer program, called Fit for Kids, and also meet weekly in the garden. The Urban Youth Farm is the third and newest component. During summer, high school students receive stipends to work in the garden, teach younger children gardening skills, and market and sell their produce. One of the requirements for the program was having participated in the gardening program when they were younger.

Staff of the community center and youth from the Urban Youth Farm organize a weekly farmers' market at the center. The youth sell their produce to neighborhood residents for less than half of retail price in an effort to increase access to fresh food. Earnings from the market are invested in the program.

The garden program partnered with the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center's (LSU AgCenter) extension service from the very beginning. Dr. Grace Peterson, LSU Agricultural Center extension agent, has been a driving force in creating community gardens in Shreveport's low-income neighborhoods for a number of years. Dr. Peterson met with the Valencia Park staff to plan the garden project, and soon after, homeowner associations from Stoner Hill became involved. As Catherine Kennedy, SPAR Communications Division Manager, stated, "Dr. Grace Peterson, she has the knowledge, the training, to go with the community center manager and staff, along with the homeowner association groups, because those are also key partners. ... It is not just one organization or even just any two that can run it. It really takes three to four. So we have [the] LSU AgCenter, the City of Shreveport staff, the homeowner association groups." The AgCenter provides gardening expertise and the nutrition education component. Other partnerships have developed as well, including the Northwest Louisiana Master Gardeners and the Red River Coalition of Community Gardeners, both of which lend their expertise to the project. Students from the Caddo Magnet High School, located next to the park, volunteer in the garden to help meet the number of volunteer hours required to graduate. Several local businesses have also contributed to the garden program. For example, the Shreveport Federal Credit Union made a presentation to the teens about business loans. Also, a local restaurant has been buying its produce from the Urban Youth Farm. Furthermore, Lowe's Home Store donated plumbing supplies for the water lines, the owner of a local garden store dug the trenches for the lines at no charge, and city workers installed the lines.

The NRPA grant was used to buy orchard trees, plants, gardening supplies, and sign posts in addition to youth stipends.

Ms. Kennedy explained that long-term financial sustainability comes from several sources. Partnerships and volunteers are essential. Also, the

AT-A-GLANCE

Shreveport, located in northwest Louisiana, is the third largest city in the state. It is the commercial and cultural center of the region where Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas meet.

Total Population

199,311

Pop Age 17 and Younger

49,848

Percent Age 17 and Younger

25%

Median Annual HH Income

\$34,079

% Pop Below Poverty

23.6%

Ave High Temp - January

56° F

Ave High Temp - July

93° F

Ave Annual Precip

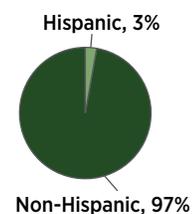
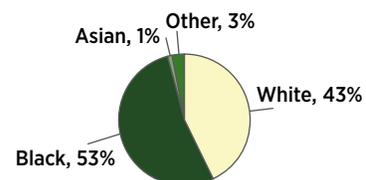
46.9"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

214 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

98 days



program is seeking funding from SPAR for a full-time staff person dedicated to coordinating urban farming at all 15 community centers. The Master Gardeners have included community gardening to their budget that will benefit the city's program. In addition, money from the farmers' market sales also helps to sustain the program.

A major challenge for this program is that Ms. Kennedy would like to make the summer youth stipends year-round but does not have sufficient funding. In addition, she attracting local residents to adopt plots in the park has proven more difficult than anticipate. As an alternative, the garden program will have a Free Green Saturday, in which residents can come to the garden and pick produce in an attempt to encourage people to utilize the free plots.

With the challenges have also come successes. The garden itself has become known and accepted in the community. It is a productive use of what had been an empty space. And Ms. Kennedy believes that it has changed young people's attitudes about gardening. Gardening for many African-Americans has had negative connections with poverty and slavery. More positive feelings seem to be developing for the children and youth involved in Valencia Park's gardening program.

Elements of Success

Community gardening projects must be developed on a collaborative basis from the very start.

Meeting with neighborhood associations and youth is one of the key components of success. Ideas, no matter how good, can't be imposed. They need to develop out of a collaborative process.

Community center staff need to be supportive of the program so that they can approach the activities with enthusiasm and creativity.

The energy of the staff helps them make connections with the youth, and encourage their learning and growth.

Partner with the local Agricultural Extension from the beginning so that you are not "flying blind".

They have the expertise that is needed to start and maintain the program.

GARDEN IMPACT

Introduction to Healthy Foods

Topeka Parks and Recreation Department's Oakland Community Center youth gardening program is located in an area that in recent years has experienced urban blight, including high crime and gangs. One of the programs impact is the introduction of new, healthy foods to the young participants. The children have been able to harvest and eat food they grew. As the director, Lance Wilson notes, "A lot of kids said they had never had a salad." And they've learned that you don't need a lot of money to grow your own food.



Topeka Oakland Community Center

TOPEKA, KS

Helping to Revitalize An Urban Neighborhood with Community Gardens

Topeka's youth gardening program is located at the Oakland Community Center. Oakland is a low-income, predominantly Latino neighborhood that in recent years has experienced urban blight, including high crime and gangs. The objectives of the garden program are both child- and community-oriented and include:

- Beautification of the community center area
- Increasing pride in the community center
- Engaging neighborhood children in productive activities
- Teaching children food-growing skills
- Improving nutrition
- Decreasing child obesity
- Involving parents and other neighborhood adults in the garden in order to grow food and to promote positive intergenerational interaction.

The garden currently consists of eight raised beds. Most of these are used by the approximately 40 children in the center's after-

AT-A-GLANCE

Topeka, located in northeastern Kansas, is the state capital.

Total Population

127,473

Pop Age 17 and Younger

31,093

Percent Age 17 and Younger

24%

Median Annual HH Income

\$40,120

% Pop Below Poverty

16.4%

Ave High Temp - January

37° F

Ave High Temp - July

89° F

Ave Annual Precip

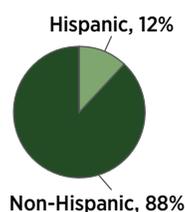
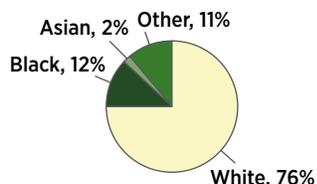
34.6"

Ave Annual Days of Sunshine

211 days

Ave Annual Rainy Days

97 days



school program and 36 children in the summer day-camp. This day-camp, called Cool Summer, is designed for low-income children from the Oakland neighborhood. The majority of children involved in the gardening program are 8 to 9 years old.

Mr. Wilson has forged several partnerships to help develop the garden program. Topeka Common Ground is a non-profit volunteer organization whose mission is to promote and support community gardens. Its volunteers have brought their expertise to the Oakland garden about once a month in the school year and twice a week in the summer. Volunteers demonstrate how to grow food without spending a lot of money. A Girl Scout troop gardens in one of the beds. A neighborhood improvement association will also be adopting a bed in the fall. The College Prep Academy of Topeka, an organization that helps low-income children prepare for college, came last winter to assemble some of the raised beds. The Shawnee County Department of Corrections has sent work crews to the center for outside cleanup.

The NRPA grant has been used to establish the garden and buy gardening supplies. Long-term sustainability will come from the Oakland Center's fund at the Topeka Parks and Recreation Foundation, and a \$1,000 grant the Oakland Center receives every year from Walmart.

City budget cutbacks have been the biggest challenge to date. When the Oakland Center lost a staff person who was actively involved in the garden, remaining staff and temporary workers had to pitch in.

For Mr. Wilson, key successes include the fact that the children are able to harvest the food that they grow and are introduced to new, healthy foods. He mentioned that "... a lot of kids said they had never had a salad." Now they have learned that you don't need a lot of money to grow your own food.

Elements of Success

Be flexible.

Don't get set on one specific plan because things can and do change.

Bring in knowledgeable people with a passion for gardening from the very beginning.

Mr. Wilson said, "I tell people, I am so far from knowing anything about gardening, it's ridiculous. [It's] getting good people in to help you get started. Surround yourself with good people ... even if it's only 2 or 3."

Keep the garden simple and low cost.

It's important for the children to see that gardening and gardening-related activities, like making decorative stepping stones, don't have to be expensive.

Dream big and don't underestimate the power of kids and their interests.

Mr. Wilson envisions many new possibilities for the youth garden. For example, he hopes that in the next year or two, the community center will have its own farmers' market supplied in part by the garden.



Acknowledgements

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About the National Recreation and Park Association

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people. Through its network of 20,000 recreation and park professionals, citizens and partners, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy lifestyles, recreation initiatives, and conservation of natural and cultural resources.

The National Recreation and Park Association represents all park and recreation agencies in America, touching the lives of more than 300 million people in virtually every community, whether rural communities, suburban neighborhoods, or urban centers. NRPA, through its vast network of 105,000 parks, is committed to enhancing the quality of life for all people, focusing on health and livability, environmental conservation, and youth development and play:

Health and Livability – Parks are recognized as major contributors to the health of the nation. Addressing diverse wellness factors from obesity and chronic disease prevention to nutritional education to inclusive recreation to spiritual rejuvenation, NRPA promotes the essential resources parks provide people to lead healthier, happier, and longer lives.

Environmental Conservation – NRPA enables and encourages park and recreation agencies to take action to protect and enhance the environment for current and future generations. This multi-faceted support includes empowering communities to protect natural environments and natural habitats, developing sustainable

conservation solutions that emphasize the integration of economic and environmental goals, advocating for environmental issues, and promoting environmental stewardship ethics for communities.

Youth Development and Play – In partnership with sporting organizations and non-profit partners, NRPA supports initiatives that engage our nation's youth in regular physical activity, intellectual and social development, connecting with nature, and accessing safe community gathering places.

NRPA is also dedicated to educating professionals and the public on the essential nature of parks and recreation. Through learning opportunities, research, and communications initiatives, NRPA strives to generate public support in order to advance the development of best practices and resources that demonstrate park lands and recreation services as indispensable elements of American communities.

In 1965, Laurance Rockefeller united the spirit and energy of five distinct citizen and professional organizations to form the National Recreation and Park Association. The synergy created by the union of these groups resulted in an increased understanding of and better appreciation for the benefits of outdoor recreation and a stronger voice in addressing the issues that help sustain parks and recreational facilities across the country. Today, NRPA is the leading authority in the United States on the role of parks and recreation and its impact on individuals and communities.



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