

# Dr. Arthur F. Sullivan Memorial School Garden



A Final Report: Boston Fellow, Albert Schweitzer Fellowship  
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Total project hours: 200    Direct Service hours: 119    Administrative hours: 81

The Dr. Arthur F. Sullivan Memorial School Garden, is a project created by Caitlin Fritz, a graduate student at Clark University studying community development and planning, as well as the community organizer for the Sullivan Middle School Health Center. The project is collaboration between Sullivan Middle School and the school health center, run by Family Health Center of Worcester, Inc. The three main objects of this project were to foster plant to food connections, to use the garden to build relationships between the school, the health center, and the greater community, and to develop student ownership of the garden where students engage in peer education. Both the school and the health center wish to continue the garden at the school. The community has actively expressed support the garden as the students have taken on gardening at home, and a newfound excitement for eating fresh fruits and vegetables and leading a healthy lifestyle.

## **Final Report Narrative**

The Sullivan school garden spanned the 2007 – 2008 and 2008 – 2009 school years, and consisted of 18 total students from Sullivan Middle School in Worcester, Massachusetts. The students created a group called the Beetle Juice Club, to manage the garden and engage the school and community in education about eating healthy and staying active.

The original primary goals of this project were to improve the nutrition of the students in the group, specifically by increasing the fruit and vegetable intake, and increasing connections to the outdoors for physical activity usage; however, as the project evolved it became clear that the garden project better served the following three goals: to foster plant to food connections, to use the garden to build relationships between the school, the health center, and the greater community, and to develop student ownership of the garden and create a space for the students to engage in peer education.

## **Project Activities**

The following activities took place to support the three overarching goals of the project.

### *Goal one: To foster plant to food connections*

- Gardening – This was the main component of the project where the students grew a variety of vegetables and herbs including: tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cabbage, mint, basil, cilantro, lettuce, and sunflowers.

- **Healthy Snacks** – During each group meeting of the Beetle Juice Club, a healthy snack was offered, always including some type of fresh fruit or vegetable. When there were fresh vegetables to harvest from the garden in the fall, the students were able to enjoy snacks made from the plants they had grown, including salsa, bruschetta, and cole slaw. When vegetables from the garden were not available organic produce from the local grocery store was purchased, usually coinciding with the fruit of the month promoted by the nurse practitioner in the health center. The students were able to assist in some of the preparation including mixing and assembling the snacks. After each snack the students took home a recipe to try at home (see attached recopies) along with taking home some of the fresh produce picked from the garden that afternoon.
- **Main South Community Farmer's Market** – The group sold some of its produce at a pilot farmer's market coordinated by the Regional Environmental Council of Worcester. The goal of this market was to increase healthy food options at an affordable price to the low-income neighborhood of Main South. Participating in this market not only allowed for the students to fundraise for their garden, but the group also engaged in discussions about food security as a justice issue and the purpose farmer's markets can serve as a vital link for communities to fresh local produce.
- **Food Miles Activity** – During the winter the students learned about the impact of food miles, both on the environment with the added greenhouse gases in transportation but also in the chemicals used to preserve foods for long distances. Looking at the packaging on their snacks the students mapped out where their food came from and calculated the miles that food traveled to their plate. The students also learned

where many typical fruits and vegetables come from when they are not in season here in the Eastern United States. Lastly the students brainstormed ideas of how to minimize their own food miles and the importance of eating locally grown and in-season produce.

*Goal two: To use the garden to build relationships between the school, the health center, and the greater community*

- Outreach to school – The teachers and staff of the school were regularly updated on the garden and its activities through the parent teacher newsletter, emails, flyers, posters, and a bulletin board updated regularly by the students in the Beetle Juice Club.
- Outreach to the community – During the summer a community gardening day was held and 150 households throughout the surrounding neighborhood received a flyer with information about the garden. On the garden day one community member attended and many others stopped by to check in on the garden throughout the summer.
- Main South Community Farmer's Market – For the farmer's market, the students created posters and flyers which were put up for display, exposing the garden to an even broader audience throughout the city.

*Goal three: To develop student ownership of the garden and create a space for the students to engage in peer education*

- School wide naming contest – During the fall 2008, students throughout the entire school were open to submit nominations for the name of the new school garden.

Nominations were collected during the lunch periods as well as from homeroom teachers. Over 200 suggestions were collected, from which the students of the Beetle Juice Club chose the name Dr. Arthur F. Sullivan Memorial School Garden.

- Creating a mission statement – The students in the Beetle Juice Club learned how to create a vision for their group and the garden, and how to express this in a succinct mission statement to guide the group throughout the year. The students created the following mission statement: “The Beetle Juice Club is a group of student gardeners from Sullivan Middle School whose mission is to teach kids that gardening is fun and exciting, beautify the school grounds, and unify the school around eating healthy and caring for the environment.”
- Creating a Youtube video – The students created an online video for the Farm to Cafeteria video contest. The video was created in a news broadcast format, entitled the Beetle Juice News, where the traffic, sports, weather, and special investigative reports all tied to what real food meant to them, and why their school should have healthier school lunches. The video can be found online at <http://www.youtube.com/BeetleJuiceClub>
- Cafeteria bulletin board – Along with updates on the garden, the students seasonally updated the bulletin board with tips on staying healthy. In the winter the students wrote ways to stay active on scarves, hats and gloves and highlighted in-season vegetables such as winter squashes, pumpkins, kale and other dark leafy greens. In the spring the students created a garden scene, writing on the flowers ideas to be active outdoors.

## **Success Stories**

- Eating healthier snacks – The students have actively expressed an increase in excitement about eating healthier foods. One example came in the fall when the students were trying a cole slaw recipe prepared from cabbage grown the garden. When asked if any students had tried cole slaw before, only one replied “Ewww that’s gross!” That same student, however, later in the afternoon while playing an icebreaker activity wrote down as a fact about herself that “she really liked the cole slaw.” Another example recently came when planning for our end of the year celebration. I had suggested we can have whatever snacks we want, even pizza, but one student exclaimed “Hey! I actually like healthy snacks!”
- The Spring Garden Forum – In March of 2009, the Regional Environmental Council, a community based organization which supports gardens throughout Worcester, held a Spring Festival to kickoff the new growing season. Four students from the group attended with their families. At the forum the garden was recognized with the ‘Fresh Roots’ award for being so actively engaged in its first growing season. Along with this recognition the garden received \$150 donated from Tower Hill Botanical Gardens.

## **Challenges**

- Transportation – Sullivan Middle School is not centrally located within the district, which it serves, making it difficult for those students who do not live close enough to walk, or have parents who can pick them up, to stay after-school and participate in the garden group. Specifically this was a challenge during the summer months, as no students were able to participate. In the future better coordination with the

existing after-school program at the school, which runs an after-school bus, can help ameliorate some of this problem.

- Time – Working sometimes up to ten hours a week in the garden during its peak-growing season was not enough time to accomplish all the potential, which the garden can serve for the school, the health center, and the community. The manual work in the garden during the summer is quite time consuming, and along with the coordination of the program, a more full-time position would ideally be best. In the future it will also be important to build a garden team to specialize in volunteer recruitment, fundraising, and to support the growth of a successful school gardening program.

### **Impacts**

- The students – The students in the group, along with being excited about eating healthy snacks, have also actively expressed how they are gardening now at home. Many of the students who participated in the Spring Garden Forum took plants home and have been quite successful growing them in their own backyards.
- The school – The school has express support for continuing the garden beyond the Schweitzer project. Specifically the life-skill classes have taken an active interest in using the garden as part of their classroom instruction.
- The health center – The health center has also expressed interest in continuing the garden beyond this project. The students in the group have also become more actively engaged in the health center, and in educating their peers that the health center is more than just a place for when you get sick, but a place for wellness and being proactive about a healthy lifestyle.

- The community – During the summer outreach to the community, many neighbors expressed excitement and interest about the garden and that finally a group was doing something to beautify the schools grounds. The principal noted that it has connected many communities members to the school, as during the summer he saw many residents of the neighborhood visit the garden and keep an eye on it to make sure it was watered.

### **Future and Value of the Fellowship**

The most valuable aspect of the Schweitzer Fellows was participating in an interdisciplinary program, because it allowed me to meet, interact with, and develop relationships with those who are outside my program of Community Development and Planning at Clark University. It was especially valuable to learn from other fellows who come from the medical field, and those who come from other schools or work in other communities.

In the future I plan on using my experience with this project and as a Schweitzer Fellow to embark in a career which explores and engages in the intersections between health, poverty, and environmental issues and how they affect food security and the development of healthy youth and works to build healthy and environmentally just communities that are empowered and can participate in shaping their own futures. I am looking to pursue a career that develops healthy and sustainable communities using community building and community organizing.



## Acknowledgements

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