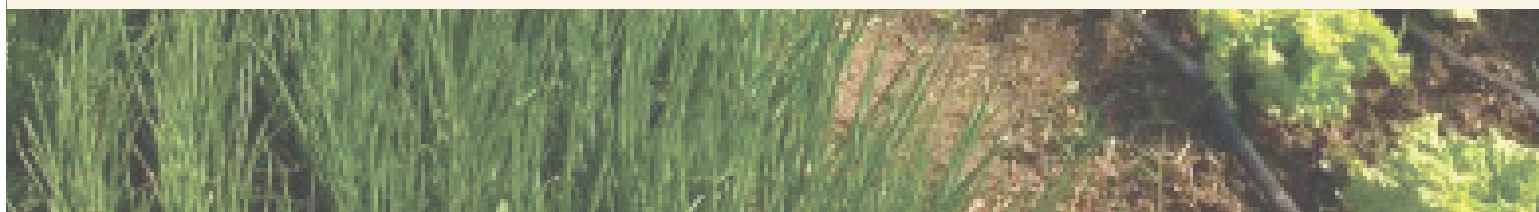




# **HCF GRANT REPORT**

Community Garden Funding 2007-2010





The Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City (HCF) committed approximately \$1 million to support nine community garden projects from 2007 to 2010.<sup>1</sup> These programs provided garden plots, fresh vegetables, and nutrition training to approximately 2,244 people (1,887 children and 357 adults) in HCF's six county service area.<sup>2</sup>

The grantees targeted participants and neighborhoods with limited access to fresh, high quality foods and grocery stores in order to address obesity and healthy lifestyles in these underserved areas. Most projects included training on cooking fresh vegetables and nutrition in addition to hands-on and workshop instruction on gardening. Some grantees also supported farmers' markets.

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The purpose of this report is to evaluate the nine community garden projects as a single HCF funding cluster.

Examples from individual grantees are featured only to illustrate certain points.

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## BACKGROUND

Research has shown that community gardening has health, economic, youth, cultural, and therapeutic benefits<sup>3</sup>

- Health benefits include better access to fresh fruits and vegetables (especially among low-income families) which lead to better diets and nutrition; reduced asthma due to consumption of local foods with tolerable levels of pollen.
- Economic benefits can accrue to individuals or municipalities. Individuals can sell produce grown in community gardens as a source of income. Additionally, community gardens have been shown to increase the value of nearby homes and to be more cost effective to maintain than traditional city parks.
- Youth Benefits. Community gardens provide a hands-on, outdoor, exercise intensive learning environment for youth. Youth involved with community gardens tend to have better knowledge of nutrition and diet and learn important life skills.
- Cultural benefits. Community gardens are an effective way to engage non-English speaking communities as well as an appropriate venue for intergenerational interaction.
- Therapeutic benefits. Horticulture Therapy has been shown to be successful in community gardens and can be used for different populations including military veterans. Reductions in stress levels and health complaints are associated with exposure to green space.

1 The nine projects represent seven organizations. Two organizations received two HCF grants each.

2 All numbers reported are estimates for two reasons: (1) Four of the programs included in this report were still in progress when these results were calculated and (2) Grantees were not consistent in the way they reported number of services and individuals served during the grant period. Estimates presented here are conservative.

3 Source for background information: Multiple Benefits of Community Gardening, by Gardening Matters, Minneapolis, MN [http://www.gardeningmatters.org/resources/multiple\\_benefits.pdf](http://www.gardeningmatters.org/resources/multiple_benefits.pdf).



# TARGET POPULATIONS FOR GRANTS

## TARGET POPULATIONS

Target populations for community garden projects tend to live within very small geographic areas, neighborhoods, or housing projects. This allowed target populations easy and regular access to the gardens.

Five of the grantees targeted school-aged children for programming. Two grantees were able to partner extensively with local schools to develop school-based community gardens, deliver in-class and afterschool garden and healthy eating curriculum as well as cooking classes and taste testing. Psychological well-being was the main focus for one project that included school-aged children who had experienced abuse, neglect, or abandonment. These children were enrolled in residential or day treatment programs, and “horticulture therapy” was added through the community garden program.



Most grantees noted that their target populations had limited access to fresh foods due to lack of neighborhood grocery stores and that the populations were at risk for obesity and overweight.

One grantee specifically included refugee populations as its target. This project emphasized gardening both as a source of fresh produce to supplement family diets and as a potential business opportunity for refugees. Another grantee included women who had experienced domestic violence and their children. This project emphasized both the psychological healing potential of gardening and green space as well as nutrition. And, one project had a particular focus on the elderly and disabled.

The grantees' services appear to be highly concentrated geographically in the Kansas City Metropolitan area, Jackson County (MO) Wyandotte County (KS), and Johnson County (KS). One project targeted Allen County (KS). Cass County (MO) and Lafayette County (MO) are not represented in this funding cluster.



## BUDGET<sup>4</sup>

The nine grantees depended heavily on HCF to pay for staff positions. Approximately \$634,000, or 60 percent of all HCF funds for the community gardens programs, was budgeted to pay for salary and benefits. Although this is a high proportion of the funding allocations, it is actually much lower than some other HCF funding clusters. An evaluation of 11 2008 HCF domestic violence grantees, for example, showed that over 80 percent of HCF funding for domestic violence was budgeted for staffing.

The grantees spent \$212,000 (or 20 percent of all HCF funds) on “Equipment and Supplies.” Grantees made one-time purchases such as a garden tractor, irrigation system, soil and soil amendments, and gardening tools within this category. Many of these items were expensive upfront costs of establishing or expanding gardens, but will not have to be repeated in the near future. This makes low-cost sustainability more likely.

“Other Direct Expenses” accounted for \$146,000 (or 14 percent of all HCF funds) and included items such as consultants.

## COMMUNITY GARDEN BENEFITS

Most grantees focused on the health benefits such as (1) reducing obesity and overweight through better eating and exercise and (2) improving access to fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods in their stated goals. Yet, as a cluster, this group of grantees also demonstrate the economic, youth, cultural, and therapeutic benefits of community gardening.

Two of the grantees worked specifically with individual gardeners (experienced and beginning) to turn their community gardening experience into profit making enterprises in low-income neighborhoods. These grantees helped gardeners get access to small plots of land and provided assistance with marketing, packaging, and small business management. One of these grantees targeted refugees in particular, as a way to help them become economically independent business people. Several grantees started or support farmers markets both as an income generation component of the community garden and a way to further improve access to local and fresh produce.

Many of the grantees focused on youth populations in school-based, summer and residential treatment programs. These programs integrated educational programming (26 week curriculum called Eating from the Garden and six week curriculum called Healthy Habits) with gardening. Youth oriented projects included youth as young as second grade and included multiple components such as taste testing, cooking, and nutrition education.

Finally, the therapeutic properties of the garden space itself and the act of gardening were mentioned by several grantees. Only one grantee specifically stated emotional healing for children as its main purpose, however. This grantee reports that children learned to work as teams and learned socialization skills while working together in the garden. The children forged healthy relationships with adult volunteers, which was also helpful in their treatment. Another grantee that serves women who have experienced domestic violence reports that the peacefulness of the garden has helped participants, even though the project is geared towards healthy eating and nutrition.



<sup>4</sup> These estimates are based on grantees projected budgets.





## OUTCOMES

Grantees were able to achieve and exceed many of their program goals in terms of garden development, participation, education, changed behavior and attitudes. For example, the University of Missouri Extension Council of Jackson County was able to involve 574 fourth and fifth graders at 16 schools and community organizations in gardening and training on nutrition, diet and cooking. Their goal was 550 children and 14 schools. They were also able to train 40 “School Nutrition/ Garden Volunteers” to deliver the nutrition and gardening curriculum (called Eating from the Garden), when their goal was 24. Like University of Missouri Extension, most grantees were able to deliver services to as many or more individuals than their original targets.

**Changes observed among children, parents and teachers.** The University of Missouri Extension evaluation results were some of the most detailed of all the grantees. They completed surveys with students, parents and teachers to evaluate the impact of their Eating from the Garden programs.

Results from surveys showed:

- 53 percent said they were eating more vegetables
- 77 percent said they wanted to continue to work in the garden.
- 4 to 7 percent improvement in their knowledge of plant functioning (role of roots) and gardening principles (compost materials).
- There seemed to be little change in the children’s behavior in terms of eating from all the parts of the food pyramid, but nearly half said they were eating both from the fruits and vegetables group (49 percent) and the whole grains group (40 percent).
- 75 of parents surveyed, only 27 percent reported that their children ate more fruits and vegetables after the program than before. However, one-third of parents said that they tried some of the recipes that were sent home to them through the program. And, 56 percent said they intended to have a garden at home in the summer.

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“Before we had the Eating from the Garden class I did not know that growing plants and harvesting them could be fun. Before this class I ate junk food and only a little healthy food. Now I know you should eat lots of healthy food and not so much fried food.”



- 5th grade student at  
The University of Missouri  
Extension program

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The University of Missouri Extension evaluation indicates that the community garden was effective in changing children’s, teacher’s and parents’ knowledge about and attitudes towards gardening, nutrition, and food safety. And, it was effective in increasing physical activity. Changing eating behaviors, however, appears to be a slower process. Other grantees, including the Friends of Yates program, reported similar results, but through less extensive evaluations.



## OUTCOMES

**Changes among adult urban gardeners and farmers.** The Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture demonstrated changed behavior in urban farmers' willingness to participate in collaborative efforts. These efforts led to lower costs, higher profits, and more financial stability for the farmers. For example, approximately 12 urban farmers purchased potatoes and organic chicken manure together, learning more about appropriate potato varieties and saving money in the process.

Additionally, over 20 urban farmers participated in growing transplants in the Community Greenhouse, again improving their productivity and profit potential, since none could afford to build a greenhouse individually.

Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture is also working to change local landowners' attitudes toward using vacant urban land for gardens through local marketing, one-on-one education, and collaboration. This grantee identified eight local landowners who were willing to participate in land evaluations and willing to learn about converting urban land to garden space. As a result, they were able to start three new neighborhood gardens and farms.

The Kansas City Urban Youth Center community garden was one of 100 youth gardens selected by the National Gardening Association for a gardening grant. There were 1,000 gardens competing nationally. The KC Urban Youth garden was cited for the commitment of its youth gardeners, the convergence of gardening and educational curriculum, and its sustainability practices. This garden also won an award from University of Missouri Extension for the Best Youth Garden in the Kansas City area using the Eating from the Garden curriculum. Three master gardens judged 25 youth gardens for this competition.<sup>6</sup>

## COMMUNITY BENEFITS

There is a nearly universal observation among these grantees that the community gardens have inspired individuals and organizations to volunteer their time and donate resources. Local businesses and even law enforcement have donated labor and supplies for setting fence posts, building a greenhouse and tool shed, improving soil etc. Unexpected donations have been both surprising and crucial.

One grantee obtained Russell Stover Candies recycled syrup containers as a donation and was able to use them to establish 36 raised garden beds. They were able to save the money budgeted for raised beds and use it on other necessary purchases. Another grantee commented that a new community garden on location has become a central showpiece for the organization and a major draw for potential donors. They feel that their cash and in-kind donations have increased since installing the garden.

The range of partnerships that have emerged from the garden projects include nearly 30 schools, several neighborhood groups and housing developments, local restaurants, businesses, and large corporations such as Hallmark. Community gardens and urban farming organizations have been very supportive of one another. Several programs have benefited from the partnership of the Master Gardener program and Kansas City Community Gardens.

The gardens seem to inspire community spirit and engagement, with neighbors involved in food tastings and farmers' markets sponsored by grantees. Neighbors seem generally supportive of the gardens as green, attractive space. One grantee, who established a community garden on a rundown lot at a busy traffic intersection, reported that neighbors came out to comment, cars stopped to watch, and the media came out to report on the change. One neighbor hugged the grantee and thanked her for making "that ugly corner so beautiful." Another grantee noted that the children participating in the project observed local community members donate money, time and garden structures, so they learned the value of giving back to the community. The children were surprised that others were willing to help them in this way.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Gardening Program Reaps Recognition and Results. Retrieved on 1/26/2011 from <http://www.kcurbanyouthcenter.org/>.



# CHALLENGES, BARRIERS AND LESSONS LEARNED

## CHALLENGES, BARRIERS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Grantees identified several challenges, barriers and lessons learned. Most had already identified strategies for addressing the challenges and barriers that were within their control.

### **Weather affects success of community gardens.**

Five grantees noted that wet spring weather delayed planting, garden development and educational programming. For one grantee, this meant changing vegetable choices from those that grow in the spring to summer vegetables. For another, it meant delaying soil amendment preparation, which in turn, delayed planting.

As one grantee put it, “In farming, you make a plan for the year/month/week/day, and then from that point you are engaged in a constant process of re-prioritizing, adapting and refocusing,” as a reaction to the weather or other unanticipated events.

### **Growing season affects programmatic choices.**

Two grantees noted that the growing season did not match school schedules. One grantee addressed this by planting a fall and spring garden so that they could use the 26 week Eating from the Garden curriculum during the academic school year. Another grantee selected a 6 week alternative curriculum (Healthy Habits) to match their summer garden and educational programming.

### **Gardening and teaching experience is paramount to success.**

Grantees with less experience in gardening stumbled through some early steps. Assistance from established organizations like the Kansas City Community Gardens helped them overcome this barrier. One grantee had the challenge of learning to grow vegetables selected by refugees from another culture. These vegetables did not always grow well in the Missouri climate, and the grantee had to learn to integrate them with no previous experience. Another grantee trained volunteers extensively to both develop gardens and teach children the related curriculum. They found that volunteers with teaching experience were

more comfortable in the learning environment with children, so they will bolster teaching training for non-teachers. Garden training made volunteers more successful in establishing gardens.

**Resistance to changing eating habits.** Several grantees noted that it is difficult for participants to change their eating habits to integrate more fresh garden produce, even if the participants supported the garden effort in general. Grantees found taste testing, cooking demonstrations, community celebrations with garden vegetables to be helpful.



# APPENDIX



**In this report, nine community gardens projects funded by the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City from 2007 to 2010 are reviewed as a comprehensive funding cluster.**

- Seven community organizations implemented the nine projects.
- Five of the projects were completed by the time of this study and were reviewed based on their Final Project Reports.
- Four were still in progress and were reviewed based on their most recent Interim Reports.

**The projects included in the report are listed here:**  
**Completed projects**

- University of Missouri Extension Council of Jackson County. Eating from the Garden.
- Friends of Yates, Inc. Eating Smart, Healing Lives.
- Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture. Urban Market Development Project.
- Kansas Urban Youth Center. Healthy Choices.
- Niles Home for Children. Horticulture Therapy.

**Projects still in progress:**

- University of Missouri Extension Council of Jackson County. Eating from the Garden.
- Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture. Farm Business Development Center. (Juniper Gardens Training Farm & Farm Business Development Program)
- SAFE BASE/Unified School District 257. Fun and Fit/ Farm to Fork: Healthy Sprouts
- Elm Creek Community Garden. Growing the Elm Creek Community Garden

