



OPRA Foundation 2019 Program Development Grant Report

Project Description

Five Rivers MetroParks was awarded \$2500 to develop and implement the Grounded and Growing program for teens, ages 12-16. The overall goal of the program was to empower youth to engage in community hunger initiatives while taking control of their own health and wellness through growing, cooking and sharing fresh food. The program took place at Possum Creek MetroPark in Dayton, OH during June and July of 2019. The teens met three times a week for eight weeks and participated in activities that immersed them in a full-spectrum farm-to-table/farm-to-community experience.

Program Outcomes

The program outcomes below were identified as the program was being planned.

1. Participants increase their understanding of hunger and food equity challenges in our city
2. Participants feel like they have a voice and the power to play a role in solutions to hunger and food equity challenges
3. Participants improve their self-efficacy related to preparing healthy food for themselves and/or others
4. Participants gain knowledge and skills related to growing food
5. Participants make more healthy food choices at home.
6. Participants feel more connected to nature and the environment

Program Timeline

February 1, 2019-March 15, 2019	Participant recruitment and application period	
April 1-15, 2019	Potential participants were interviewed by Grounded and Growing program staff in order to meet the applicants, gauge interest, and to talk about expectations.	
May 7, 2019	Informational meeting for youth and parents.	
April/May 2019	Volunteer recruitment and trainings	
June 4-July 27, 2019	Grounded and Growing program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tuesdays 9am-12:30pm · Wednesdays 9am-3:00pm · Friday 9am-12:30pm

Funding

The total cost for the program was \$13,539. Five Rivers MetroParks direct costs for the program were primarily instructors and support personnel, t-shirts for the participants, and garden development materials. \$2500 in funding from the OPRA Foundation Program Development Grant paid for kitchen items and tools, compost for the garden and some food and other program supplies. Additional support from the program came from volunteers, Whole Foods, partner organizations and other in-kind donors. A specific breakdown on costs can be found below.

	Five Rivers MetroParks budget	OPRA Program Development Grant	Additional Sponsor or In-Kind	Source of In-Kind
Staffing	\$3,777		\$4,992	Volunteers (312 hours valued at \$16/hr)
Program Supplies (T-Shirts and Notebooks)	\$327		\$100	notebooks for journals donated
Food and Other Supplies	\$79	\$271	\$250	Whole Foods
Kitchen Items and Garden Tools		\$1442	\$250	Whole Foods
Outreach Supplies		\$127		
Garden Materials	\$584	\$657	\$300	Miami Valley School, Tractor Supply (seeds and plants)
Guest Speakers	\$175		\$208	Field Trip hosts (13 hours valued at \$16/hr)
Total	\$4942	\$2497	\$6,100	\$13,539

Implementation Details

In the garden participants learned the basics of growing food. They were taught about soil health, proper plant/seed spacing, the nutrient needs of the various plants, the importance of pollinators, and identifying garden weeds. Staff and volunteers familiarized the teens with the different garden tools and how to use them. Participants worked daily in the garden, planting, weeding, mounding potatoes, watering, and harvesting. The teens also worked on a legacy garden art project. They painted three garden totems, all brightly colored and painted with positive messages to inspire future visitors and Grounded and Growing participants.

Each day, vegetables were harvested for the group’s lunches. As the teens prepared the food and ate lunch together with staff and volunteers, topics like eating with the seasons, making recipes healthier, and different uses for produce were discussed. Produce was also harvested bi-weekly to take to the Food Bank of Dayton and for the participants to take home to their families in order to independently prepare the meals they made together at the farm. Near the end of the program, the participants’ newly acquired cooking skills were put to the test as they prepared an extensive culinary meal for the Grounded and Growing Family and Community Appreciation Dinner for 46 attendees.

Outside of the garden, teens learned from and worked with community partners involved in hunger and food equity issues in Dayton. Experiences included:

Community Partner	Activity
Hall Hunger Initiative	Representatives came out to the farm to talk with the teens about hunger issues around the world and within our own locality
Dayton Mediation Center	Teens participated in discussions about healthy ways of managing conflict amongst peers and fun team building activities.
Dayton Children’s Hospital	Participants visited the new Family Resource Center Kitchen where staff shared the direct link between various diseases and food insecurity. A dietician worked with the group to prepare a delicious four course lunch with produce brought from the program garden.
Whole Foods	Staff conducted a tour of their Centerville store and the head chef gave the teens a cooking demonstration. Participants had previously made a shopping list and were given a budget to shop at Whole Foods for pantry supplies to aid them in preparing the healthy lunches we enjoy at the farm.
Food Bank of Dayton	Staff provided an informational session and tour. Participants then spent the day working in the Food Bank garden, helping to plant garden beds and clean aquaponics tubes.
Mission of Mary CSA Farm	Hosted the group for a work day. Mission of Mary talked with the group about their mission and investment in making fresh produce accessible to those in the community. Afterward, the teens spent the day working in their greenhouses weeding and harvesting the vegetables.

The program culminated with a final presentation at the Small Farm and Food Fest at Carriage Hill MetroPark. The teens delivered a short presentation giving their account of the program and what they learned over the course of the 8 weeks. They also answered questions and gave out samples of their signature strawberry-rhubarb lemonade to festival visitors at the Grounded and Growing information table. As they left the program, youth were encouraged to continue advocating for food equity and health and nutrition projects at the conclusion of the program.

Program Evaluation:

The success of this program was measured through a series of pre-post reflection surveys (youth participant, parent, community partners, and volunteers) to quantify perceptions and observations of those involved in the program. This method was chosen as the preferred survey method because reflection allows participants to look back and think about whether there was a change during their program experience. In addition, since this was a pilot year, we wanted to measure outcomes without disrupting the flow of the program. The pre-post reflection surveys took very little time away from program activities.

Results

Outcome 1: Participants increase their understanding of hunger and food equity challenges in our city.

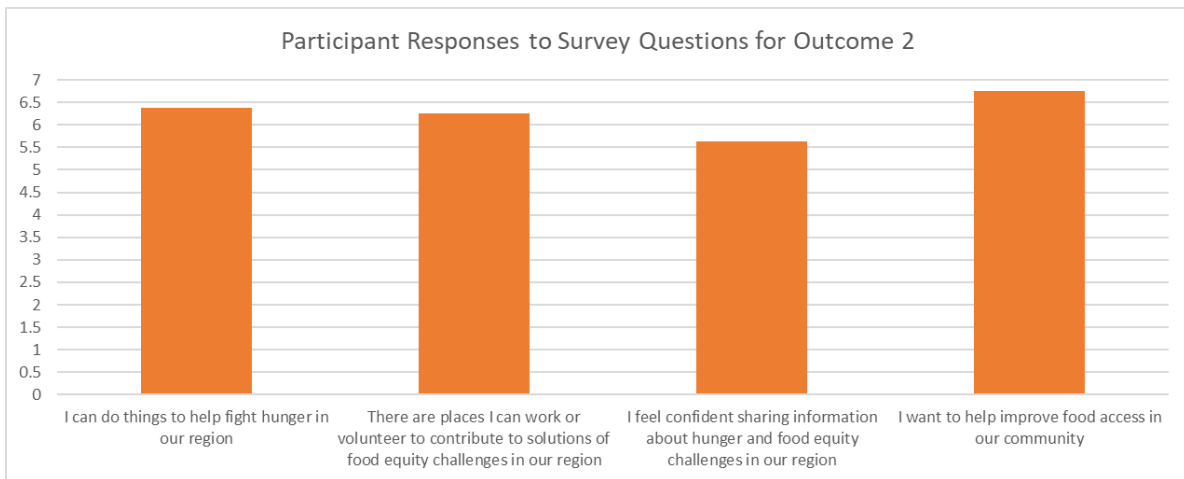
Outcome Achieved:

- In answers to an open-ended question, teens mentioned specific issues and observations including the impact of the tornado, surprise about people not knowing where next meal comes from and new awareness of food bank/food pantry.
- Participant Quote: "I learned to realize that food is such a privilege and to be grateful for the food I get even when it is not my favorite"

Outcome 2: Participants feel like they have a voice and the power to play a role in solutions to hunger and food equity challenges.

Outcome Achieved: Participants were asked four questions about how much they agreed with statements about knowledge, confidence and desire to continue to have an impact on food security after the program. On average, participants mostly agreed that there are things they can do and that they have the desire to continue to help. (Average score= 6.25 on a scale of 1-7 where 1=Entirely Disagree and 7=Entirely Agree).

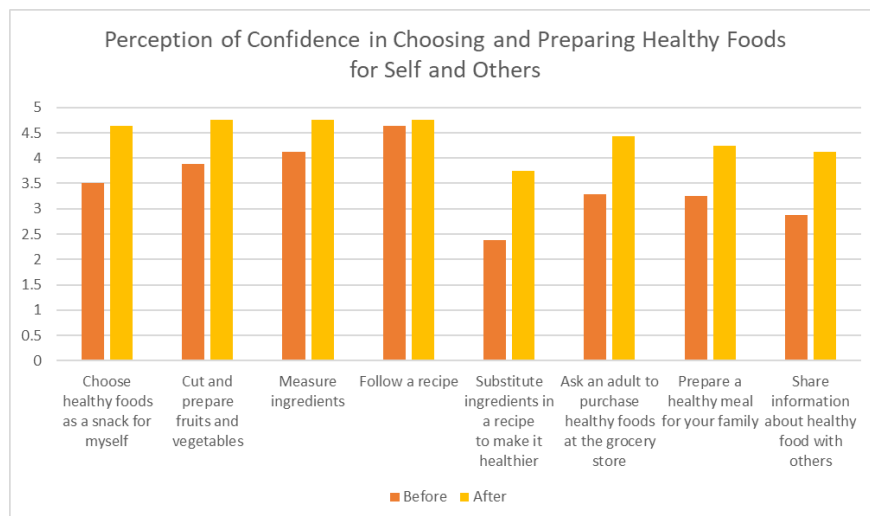
- In the open-ended questions, participants stated that donating food either directly to neighbors or to the foodbank, growing a garden or working with one of the organizations they were exposed to during the program were things they wanted to continue to do after the program.
- Teens were least confident in their ability to share information about hunger and food equity challenges. This is likely an area where we will look to improve and update the curriculum in future years.



Outcome 3: Participants improve their self-efficacy related to preparing healthy food for themselves and/or others.

Outcome Achieved: Participants were asked eight questions about their level of confidence choosing and preparing food before the program and after. On average, participants indicated that their confidence had increased in all measured areas. (Scale of 1-5 where 1=Not Confident at All and 5=Very Confident).

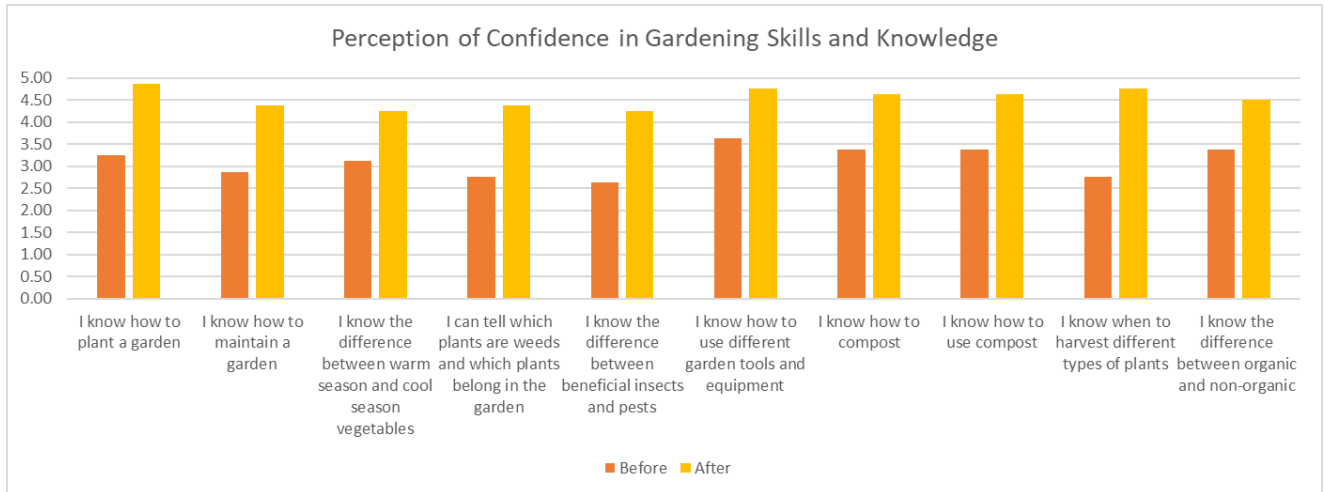
- Areas with the most change included substituting ingredients in a recipe to make it healthier and sharing information about healthy food with others. Positive changes in confidence were also indicated in choosing and asking for healthy foods and preparing a healthy meal for your family.
- 6 of the 8 participants listed cooking as the most valuable thing they gained in the program.
- In the open-ended questions, some teens shared that cooking was easier than they thought, they were excited to cook the produce they brought home, and that they could cook more for themselves using what they learned from the program.
- Participants cooked a multi-course meal for the Community Dinner at the end of the program.



Outcome 4: Participants gain knowledge and skills related to growing food

Outcome Achieved: Participants were asked ten questions about their level of confidence choosing and preparing food before the program and after. On average, participants indicated that their confidence had increased in all measured areas. (Scale of 1-5 where 1=Not Confident at All and 5=Very Confident).

- Teens left the program feeling most confident in their ability to plant a garden, use various tools, and know when to harvest produce.



Outcome 5: While participating in the program, participants make more healthy food choices at home.

- Outcome not measured in pilot year. We intend to update the program design in future years to be more intentional about achieving these outcomes.

Outcome 6: Participants feel more connected to nature and the environment

- Outcome not measured in pilot year, questions accidentally omitted from the participant survey.

Program Satisfaction

Participants, parents and volunteers were also asked questions related to program satisfaction. When asked how much they agreed with statements about enjoyment, safety, comfort and value the responses were overwhelmingly positive.

- Some participants mentioned the peaceful atmosphere, time spent with others and time away from phones as things they enjoyed.
- Other participant comments included:
 - “This program is such an amazing program and I would love to come back each summer to learn and grow my skills to help my community.”
 - “I liked how we had volunteers to share their knowledge and to get to know.”
 - “This was lit.”

- Parents indicated that responsibility, tolerance, patience, friendships, social skills, leadership, love for work, and teamwork were valuable things their teen gained from the program in addition to gardening and cooking skills and knowledge of food accessibility issues in the region.
 - Parent Comment: “That in a society where technology is the teacher of youth, these kids experienced live interaction and hands-on learning. They built physical and relational-not virtual- skills, which was enriching for them and what their world desperately needs them to know how to contribute.”
- Volunteers enjoyed new friendships with each other, learning and working with the teens. They also enjoyed seeing the teens working together and being successful

Outputs

# of Participants	8
Produce Raised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 250 pounds donated to the Foodbank <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An additional 1500 pounds were donated after the program ○ 50 pounds used during the program for cooking and meals ○ Each teen took home 25 pounds of produce for their families
Partnerships Developed	6
Hours of Service to the Community	48

Conclusions

- After participating in the Grounded and Growing program teens were more aware of local hunger and food equity challenges. They connected with community organizations and learned ways they could contribute to solutions. Knowledge, skills and confidence in gardening and cooking increased as well.
- Parents thought the program was valuable for their teens and enjoyed the produce their children took home as well as learning about other community programs.
- Volunteers found their experience satisfying and valuable. They enjoyed new friendships with each other, learning and working with the kids, and seeing the kids working together and being successful.

Commitment to the Future

Based on evaluation results and satisfaction expressed by participants, parents and volunteers we would like to continue the program in the future. We intend to ask Whole Foods to continue their support for the program and are seeking out new grants and sponsorships to offset the ongoing costs of the program.

Recommendations for Future Years

Though we considered the Grounded and Growing program to be a success in its inaugural year, we have identified a few areas that we would like to improve. These include:

1. Improving the volunteer training program so that volunteers feel more empowered to take the lead on different activities during the program. Our volunteers felt like they contributed to the program's success, but also felt that they could do more.
2. Increasing engagement with community partners, especially in the area of advocacy. Learning about and engaging with various community organizations was considered important to all participants involved in the program. Many teens, parents and volunteers were not aware of some of the organizations we worked with and their impact on the community. All enjoyed learning about and being exposed to the different community resources.
3. Improve the balance of inquiry-based/independent experiences in the program structure. Allowing time for participants to explore their own interests is important, but activities that offered too much downtime were detrimental to the flow of the program.
4. Streamlining our evaluation process by incorporating some aspects into the program design. We would like to do more program observation, journaling activities, and skill contests to make information gathering more natural and fun for the participants. We had intended to try some of these things this year, but were unable to do so due to time constraints.



Participants from the 2019 Grounded and Growing program with leader Sarah Gold.



Participants preparing a meal at Dayton Children's Hospital Family Resource Center Kitchen.





Farm tour and workday at Mission of Mary Farm in east Dayton



Cooking demonstration at Whole Foods

Cabbage harvest in the garden at Possum Creek MetroPark.

