



## **Job Training Program Impact Report From Wasatch Community Gardens (WCG) March 2020**

### **Use of Grant Funds**

Funds supported WCG's Job Training Program – Green Team and Seeds of Success – through which we assist women experiencing homelessness and low-income single mothers in moving themselves from poverty to self-sufficiency.

In 2019, 17 women participated in the Green Team Program for at least 30 days. Ten participants completed the program and successfully secured housing and employment. In addition, nine single mothers received training as Certified Nurse Assistants through the Seeds of Success Program. Seven participants completed the program, and five have secured employment. The aggregate annual wages for the families who completed the program have increased from \$8,448 to \$116,856!

### **Program Overview**

A partnership between WCG and Advantage Services, the Green Team Program provides employment and mentoring to women experiencing homelessness at our 1.4-acre Green Phoenix Farm (formerly called the Green Team Farm), located at 622 W 100 S in Salt Lake City. The 10-month, rolling admission program can serve up to 12 participants at a time. Participants work at the farm four days per week, earning \$8-9 per hour (\$10 for the two Team Leaders). They receive one-on-one assistance to secure housing and permanent employment and to achieve other personal goals.

Started in 2019 through a partnership between WCG and Climb Wyoming, Seeds of Success is a job training and placement program for single mothers living in poverty, which uses a cohort-based model that relies on the power of women working in groups. Each cohort, lasting 10 weeks, can accommodate up to 10 women. Participants receive free job training through an outside trainer, along with placement assistance in high-demand career fields. Participants spend time at the Green Phoenix Farm during orientation and have regular skills development days at the farm throughout the program.

### **2019 Program Goals and Activities**

1) Provide job training to program participants.

Green Team – During their four days at the farm each week, participants worked closely with WCG's Farm Director and Farm Assistant to learn organic agriculture techniques. During the winter months, they grew approximately 20,000 vegetable starts in the onsite greenhouse, which WCG then sold to the public at our Annual Plant Sale in May. Participants also grew/harvested produce for use in WCG programs and to donate to other nonprofits serving low-income clients, as well as saved/dried seeds to sell to a commercial seed company to earn revenue for the program. In addition to learning gardening skills, much of the women's experience at the farm was centered around building their confidence, finding their personal power, and learning to work together as a team.

Seeds of Success – Participants in the first Seeds of Success cohort, which ran from May through August 2019, were trained as Certified Nurse Assistants (CNAs). The Seeds of Success Program

Director provided participants with daily support to complete training course requirements, schedule and pass the state certification tests, and access additional tutoring and training support from the industry trainer. WCG tracks participants' progress for two years following program completion. A graduation ceremony was held for the participants and their families at the Green Phoenix Farm in August 2019. See <https://wasatchgardens.org/component/easyblog/inaugural-seeds-of-success-graduation?Itemid=241>

2) Provide additional life, job, and financial skills training for program participants.

Green Team – Our partner at Advantage Services worked with participants to facilitate two hours of additional life skills trainings each week, including financial classes through AAA Credit and Wells Fargo. Participants received training on effective workplace skills and participated in aptitude testing. They also earned CPR/First Aid certification and Food Handlers Permit certification. Additionally, our partner provided weekly one-on-one mentoring and connected participants to community resources to help them identify and address barriers to success.

Seeds of Success – Throughout the program, the Program Director worked with the group to help strengthen key social, emotional, and thinking skills. Additionally, the Program Director provided weekly life and job skills workshops at the farm on topics such as conflict management, giving and receiving feedback, communication strategies, and mindfulness. The Program Director also worked closely with each woman to help her access existing community resources available for childcare, housing, food, transportation, medical support, and mental health needs.

3) Assist Green Team participants in securing housing.

Our program partner at Advantage Services met with Green Team participants weekly to educate them about, and connect them to, resources to help them secure and maintain housing, including housing vouchers and other opportunities.

4) Assist participants in securing permanent employment.

Our program partner at Advantage Services met with Green Team participants weekly to help them find appropriate employment opportunities. Additionally, beginning in 2019, the Seeds of Success Program Director met with participants in both programs on a weekly basis to provide job coaching and placement assistance. This included assisting participants with job searching skills on the computer, creating resumés and cover letters, managing professional communications, securing interview attire, and participating in mock interviews.

5) Encourage healthy eating habits by providing access to fresh produce and hands-on food preparation experience.

Green Team – We completed construction of an onsite kitchen at the farm during summer 2019. Previously, the crew used a makeshift camping-style kitchen for meal preparation. The new kitchen allowed the women to prepare and cook healthy breakfasts and lunches during their four farm work days each week. There was also a handful of dedicated volunteers who brought lunch and ate it with the crew on a regular basis. This activity has been a wonderful way to create authentic interactions and friendships between Green Team participants and community members. The Farm Director also incorporated regular yoga, meditation, and mindfulness activities into the women's daily routine at the farm to teach participants about taking care of their bodies and minds.

Seeds of Success – During their regular skills development days at the farm, participants had hands-on opportunities to grow and harvest fresh, organic produce. They got to take home produce from the farm each week and learned ways to prepare it that would appeal to their children.

6) Provide fresh, organic produce to low-income individuals and families in Salt Lake City at no cost.

In 2019, we estimate that \$4,438 worth of produce grown at the farm was consumed by program participants and their families. Produce valued at \$4,331 helped feed children and adults in WCG's other programs serving primarily low-income households. Additionally, produce valued at \$4,020 was donated to other nonprofits serving low-income clients, including Neighborhood House, Sorenson Unity Center, and Valley Behavioral Health. Finally, \$2,716 worth of produce was served to attendees at WCG events such as the Tomato Sandwich Party and gifted to WCG's supporters.

7) Create vibrant community spaces and community involvement through ongoing volunteer opportunities and occasional garden tours.

The Green Phoenix Farm continues to be a model of regenerative agriculture in an urban setting, revitalizing an otherwise underutilized area of the city. Over 200 people volunteered their time at the farm in 2019. They helped us complete several major infrastructure projects, including the kitchen as well as an aquaponics system in the farm's greenhouse. They also participated in ongoing hands-on learning opportunities through our weekly Compost and Aquaponics Clubs.

In June 2019, we hosted the 2nd Annual "Bee Fest: A Celebration of Pollination" event at the farm. Organized by Catalyst Magazine and Slow Food Utah, this free public event was attended by 1,400 community members – more than twice as many attendees as the previous year. Attendees were able to connect with bee keeping educators, gardening experts, and other pollinator friendly vendors and enthusiasts, as well as attend free workshops throughout the day. WCG staff provided tours of the Green Phoenix Farm throughout the day, including information about the programs that WCG hosts on the site and their impact on the community.

In November 2019, we hosted a Partner Lunch at the farm to draw new and existing partners to learn more about the Green Team and Seeds of Success Programs. The event was a success, with 18 attendees from 13 different agencies/organizations in Salt Lake City. We plan to host similar events/farm tours in the coming year for prospective referral and employer partners.

### **2019 Program Accomplishments**

- 17 women participated in the 10-month Green Team Program for 30 days or more.
  - Two are team leads who participated in the program in 2018 and were hired to stay on at the farm with increased responsibilities. Both have housing and employment.
  - Eight additional women completed the program and obtained housing and employment.
  - Two participants who joined the program mid-year in 2019 will be returning in 2020 to complete the program.
  - Five participants dropped out of the program for various reasons.
- Nine single moms (with a total of 18 children between them) received training as CNAs through Seeds of Success.
  - At program completion, seven participants graduated from the program and one is in the process of finishing the training.
  - Five women are employed, making an average monthly wage of \$1,947; four of the five are employed full-time.
  - The aggregate annual wages for the families who have completed the program have increased from \$8,448 to \$116,856!
- The farm provided over \$15,500 worth of fresh, organic produce to program participants and other low-income individuals and families in Salt Lake City.
- WCG facilitated over 1,600 community members in visiting the farm through volunteer opportunities and community events.
- WCG and the Green Team/Seeds of Success Programs were selected as a finalist for the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation Stewardship Award.

For the 2019 farm season, we developed and administered our first Health and Wellness Survey to Green Team participants. The purpose of the survey was to measure the program's impact on participants in the areas of access to fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy eating habits, and physical and mental health. The survey was administered to participants at point of hire and again at the end of the season. Both surveys were identical, with the exception of the first and last questions. The initial survey asked participants to state their goals for physical and mental health during their time at the farm. The end of season survey asked participants what change, if any, they experienced in their physical and mental health during the program.

Participants were asked to self-report on a number of questions, on a scale of 1-5. For diet, participants were asked to state the frequency with which they ate leafy greens, fresh fruit, and vegetables, as well as how often they ate fast food, junk food, sweet junk food, and drank soda. Participants were asked to self-rate, on a scale of 1-5, their strength, flexibility, aerobic fitness, mental health, and energy levels in the morning, mid-day, and afternoon.

The survey was administered to 10 women at the start of the season, and to seven at the end. Overall, we saw a consistent increase in the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables consumed, as well as a decrease in the amount of fast food, junk food, and soda consumed by participants. We also saw improvement from all participants regarding their physical health. Of particular note was the dramatic improvement in aerobic fitness reported by participants. At the start of the program, all participants reported their aerobic fitness as "terrible" to "below average." On the exit survey, all participants reported their aerobic fitness as "average" to "above average."

We also saw meaningful improvements in mental health, with all participants initially rating their mental health as "terrible" or "below average." On the exit survey, most participants reported their mental health as "average" to "above average."

For the final question of the exit survey, "How has your time on the farm affected your mental health," we saw the longest and most detailed responses. Responses included:

"I am mentally and physically capable now. I am no longer depressed."

"It has challenged me to see myself in so many different roles in so many different ways and to be someone I never thought I could/would be. It strengthened my character and taught me how to be thoughtful and non-judgmental, especially with mental illness. It taught me to ask for forgiveness and have compassion for others and for my own personal challenges."

"Being able to plant seeds, pull weeds, and harvest gives me a chance to clear my head and move forward with good intentions throughout the rest of my life."

## Firsthand Stories from Program Participants



In February 2019, Shannon was married and living in Las Vegas, a victim of an abusive marriage that had lasted 30 years. One evening, several friends and co-workers did an intervention. After work, they picked her up and drove her straight to the airport, where they wished her well and sent her on a 10pm flight to Salt Lake City. Not knowing anyone, or having anywhere to go, she went to the YWCA. It was there she learned about the Green Team Program, and in April of 2019, she joined the team.

*“The farm finally allowed me to breathe. It gave me the space to clear my head, find stability, and look into the future for what I needed to do for myself.”*

Shannon quickly became an integral part of the farm, and found her niche in the kitchen, where she earned the title of “Farm Mom.” In addition to the daily farm work, she also prepared a hearty lunch from the produce grown onsite for the entire team. By the end of the season, Shannon had an apartment and had moved on to a culinary job. She is continuing to train in the culinary arts, and has recently enrolled in evening classes in the Sauté Program offered by Utah Community Action.

*“The farm crew became my new family. They helped me find my confidence. They helped me realize I could do this on my own.”*



Before joining Seeds of Success, Maggie and her two sons were struggling. Maggie was unemployed and she and her kids were living in a local shelter. In June 2019, she took a brave step to join Seeds of Success and pursue her Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) certificate. With a fiery determination and a drive to help others, Maggie completed her CNA training and is now employed full-time in Inpatient Rehab at Intermountain Medical Center, making over \$2,160 per month! She continues to volunteer with WCG both on the farm and in recruiting single moms for Seeds of Success.

*"Being a CNA can give you balance as a single mom to work and be present with your kids. It opens so many doors to advance a career in the medical field to support your kids and yourself. Since getting my CNA, I get to work and be with my kids. It allows for me to be a better mom and to make a difference in people's lives. I am financially independent, stronger within myself, and I am able to take time to rediscover and enjoy the things I love in my life."*

