



Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story and Lessons Learned

We're growing more than just carrots: How a Community Garden can help grow a healthy neighborhood!

Intervention Summary

Central Long Beach is a diverse, low-income community that has limited access to healthy, affordable foods. This is especially true when it comes to finding fresh fruits and vegetables. Crime and perceived safety are also top concerns for local residents who live in and around the Martin Luther King Jr. Park (Mary Butler) neighborhood, located in the heart of Central Long Beach. The Long Beach Peace Garden, located at MLK Jr. Park, was originally established by the Weed and Seed Collaborative as simply a safe place for neighborhood residents to come together. Now part of the Healthy Active Long Beach Program (NEOP), the mission of the garden has been expanded and now, in addition to being a safe place for residents, seeks to create more opportunities to promote healthy eating and physical activity through educational activities while also serving as a healthy food source for the neighborhood. The Peace Garden is the only community garden that does not charge any fee to participate and “adopt” a plot.

With the support of NEOP funds, Healthy Active Long Beach has been able to increase the selection of edibles grown in the garden, enhanced use of the garden by conducting nutrition education workshops and food tastings, and established relationships with neighborhood programs and partners to improve access to the free fruits, vegetables, and herbs grown in the garden.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

This year our goal was not to simply maintain the garden, we wanted to find a way to produce more produce and also find ways to reach out to more local residents. There were two potential barriers to our plan. The first, the garden is located next to the Health

Department's Central Facilities Building at Martin Luther King Jr., Park and we do not have the space to physically extend the square footage of the garden. The second, is that many local residents don't know about the garden and/or cannot access it during regular business hours when staff are working in the building. We met as a team, along with our gardeners, volunteers, and community residents to discuss ways in which we could achieve our goals despite issues. Together we came up with several possible solutions to overcome the barriers and still achieve our goals.

To overcome these barriers we got creative! We knew we could not make the garden any larger, but we figured we could make better use of the spaces outside of the official garden plots. Working together with our gardeners and volunteers, and using donated tires, we created containers along the outside of the fence that faces the main park area. We filled them with soil, vegetables, and herbs. We also made use of the small spaces in the front of the garden to grow additional fruits, vegetables, and herbs most requested by visitors to the garden. By increasing this space we have added more growing space and have also increased access to the garden for local residents who are not plot tenants and/or who cannot visit the garden during business hours. In addition, we have used pallets to grow lettuce and created herb containers out of recycled water bottles which now hang along the fence.

We've also increased access to the fruits, vegetables, and herbs growing in the garden by setting up a "produce stand" to provide free samples of freshly harvested items from the garden. LHD staff and volunteers will harvest from the community plots, wash and bag the items and provide them to local families and individuals along with recipe cards and other educational material. When possible, we also provide samples of a NEOP recipe that features some of the items we are giving away that day. We set up the stand when many families are coming to pick up their kids from the on-site childcare center, Boys and Girls Club and/or afterschool program operated by Parks and Recreation.

Finally, to increase awareness of the Garden we have increase the number of community events, tours, workshops, and food demonstrations we offer at the garden. We've also partnered together with local community groups to provide a facility for them to host community meetings and events. Through all of these efforts we've managed to grow the garden, despite staying the same size!

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Our short-term strategy is to maintain our current programs and work together with local partners to increase participation in the garden. Long-term, we would like to not only grow this garden but would like to help establish similar garden programs throughout Long Beach! We hope our efforts are sustained by the local residents who now see the garden as their own, who show up to volunteer and bring supplies when possible, and by local community partners who are willing to provide support to assist with projects we are not funded to do.

Contact information about this Narrative

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