



LGFCU
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

2015
**EXCELLENCE IN
INNOVATION**
Awards Program

recognizes the

Catawba County Library

for development and implementation of the

Community Garden Program

Team Member:

April Green

LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project Number	GG-4
Title of Program	Community Garden
Program Category	General Government
Submission Date	6/11/2015 10:05:00 AM
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County Manager	Tom Lundy
Supervisor	Suzanne White
Implementation Date	1/2014
FLSA Designation	Exempt
Project Team Members	April Green

Description of Productivity Improvement

In 2013, the lot adjacent to the library parking lot stood empty and neglected. However, in January 2014 the Catawba County Library turned a vision into reality by developing a community garden that provides the perfect setting to foster a collaboration between community partners to grow healthy local foods, promote literacy, encourage learning about nature, and provide fruits and vegetables to local citizens in need. Now, through a tremendous demonstration of community, this once overgrown eyesore is a location where people gather to work in the garden growing food for their neighbors, enjoying hands-on library programming, or just to enjoy the serenity of nature.

A primary objective for the garden program is to provide fresh produce for meal production and distribution to local food assistance programs within our community during the growing season. Our harvested produce is donated to The Corner Table in Newton, NC to provide nutritious meals. With feeding the hungry as a goal, the community garden has proved to be a project that encourages participation across generational and socio-economic barriers, providing opportunities for learning and educational activity for all ages. In collaboration with the NC Cooperative Extension of Catawba County, the library has hosted gardening days and workshops that promote a healthy, knowledgeable, and engaged community. Boy Scout Troup 303 from Maiden, NC worked with the library by filling raised beds, spreading mulch, planting and watering vegetables. Girl Scouts planted vegetables and flowers and learned the difference between seedlings and seeds. All of these children learned about planting vegetables, increased their physical activity and felt pride in growing food to help feed people at the soup kitchen.

The support for this added community amenity has been demonstrated in the level of support provided to implement the project. In addition to the many volunteers working in the garden, the library executed a successful Citizeninvestor crowd-funding campaign funded by individuals and the Friends of the Library. The project has garnered several small grants, corporate donations of time and money which further reinforces that the community garden is an amenity local citizens want to have and support.

The community garden was incorporated into several adult and children's library programs. It provides the perfect setting for early literacy and elementary programs allowing children to observe firsthand how plants grow and produce the food we eat. The hands-on experience enriches children's vocabulary and understanding. During the 2014 summer reading program children learned which vegetables were needed to make pizza sauce, they then harvested those items from the garden, washed and blended them into pizza sauce and each baked an individual pizza. Another program included kids learning about the importance of making healthy choices such as eating cucumber slices as a crunchy alternative to potato chips.

The Library hosted two garden related author presentations to the adults in our community. In May, Nan Chase, author of *Eat Your Yard* gave a presentation about how to landscape your yard in edible plants and in September the author of *The Seed Underground*, Janisse Ray spoke of the urgent need to save the world's seeds, ultimately saving plants on the verge of vanishing forever.

Currently, our community garden includes 12 raised beds, and more than 30 container gardens including a variety of flowers and herbs. Since its inception in January of 2014 the garden has enjoyed much publicity and additional support. In 2015 the Catawba County Leadership Academy began a project to develop space not used for the vegetable beds into a beautiful reading garden with a wheelchair

accessible pathway. This expansion project has also received donations of materials and labor from a local high school masonry class as well as corporate support as the 2015 BB&T Lighthouse Project.

Our community garden is not a service that is commonly provided by other public libraries. We have been innovative in creating entertaining, healthy and educational programming for our residents. We have transformed a wasted space into a place where the community comes together to share in hard work, learning, literacy, sustainable gardening, local foods and fun. It is a common ground where people can work side by side to harvest tomatoes, squash and perhaps a side of humanity and friendship.

Description of why this project was initiated

In the past decade the economic downturn affected the entire Catawba County community such that more and more families were struggling to provide enough food to eat. Between 2004-05 and 2011-12, Catawba County saw an 86% increase (18,495 to 34,384) in Food Assistance to families. According to KidsCount data center over half of Catawba County Schools students received free or reduced lunch in 2011-2012. Even though food assistance and reduced lunches address this issue of feeding the hungry these programs fall short of educating citizens about making good choices in the foods they eat and providing the means to make those choices. As a result 31.7% of 2-4 year olds, 30.5% of 5-11 year olds and 49.5% of 12-18 year olds in Catawba County are considered to be overweight/obese. The problem is that there is not an easy way to educate people and provide the means for them to eat more nutritious foods. That is one of the primary reasons we started the community garden project.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

The library's community garden project provides a higher level of service and an added community amenity that contributes to building a healthy community by providing opportunities for all ages to learn about gardening and by helping to produce healthy foods that are shared with local people in need of nutritious meals. Participants have reported that they increased their physical activity, learned how to improve their gardening skills, or gained a stronger sense of well-being by helping local people to have access to healthier foods.

The library strengthened our partnership with county's Cooperative Extension program to implement the Catawba County Farm & Food Sustainability Plan by providing gardening classes and demonstration events for different levels, incorporating both organic and conventional techniques. This collaboration continues today with monthly gardening sessions provided by the director of our local Cooperative Extension. This is an additional program provided to our citizens that would not be possible without the expertise of our partner agency.

By providing fresh produce for meal production and distribution at the Corner Table and other identified local food assistance programs during the growing season this project impacts a humanitarian effort to end hunger. The donation of these additional resources to establishments such as the Corner Table enables those agencies to serve more citizens.

By integrating healthy gardening, foods, and community sharing concepts into literacy programming

with active participation in the community garden project the library hopes to have a positive impact on the overall health of our community. A healthier community could in turn result in healthcare savings in the future.

Other descriptive information

CONTRIBUTIONS OF PARTNERS 2014

Scotts Miracle Grow-- cash grant \$500.00

Robinson Builders-- Cash Donation \$200.00

Walmart --Cash Donation \$500.00

Lowe's Home Improvement -- lumber, plants, and seeds

Home Depot--plants and seeds

Citizeninvestor crowd sourcing site --varying cash donations

Catawba County Library Friends of the Library --irrigation lines and \$8,000.00 cash

Hawksridge Farms, Inc. Hickory NC --planting pots, landscaping fabric

Newton Boy Scouts Troup 303 - volunteer hours

Catawba County Friends of the Library - \$2500.00

Catawba Girl Scout Brownies--volunteer hours

Catawba County Cooperative Extension--consulting, teaching and volunteer hours

Catawba County Landfill--donation of mulch

Target of Hickory--supplies, water and volunteer hours.

CONTRIBUTION OF PARTNERS 2015

Hawksridge Farms, Inc Hickory, NC multiple plants and shrubs

Newton Conover High School construction department - building expertise labor for paved path

Mr. and Mrs. Towery - donation of concrete materials for paved garden path & three benches (value approximately \$5000)

BB&T Banking Newton, NC \$3,500 cash and volunteer hours

NC Cooperative Extension Program -- consulting, teaching and volunteer hours

Kitchen Garden International (KGI) Grant--2'X8' elevated raised bed.

Catawba County Friends of the Library - \$500.00 cash donation