



THE LOCAL COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE

2014 COMMUNITY GARDEN PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Local CFC offers a Community Garden program that is aimed at increasing knowledge and skills around growing healthy food, reducing social isolation, providing leadership opportunities and increasing access to healthy food for low-income community members. In 2014, 176 garden members contribute 3,011 hours of work into the garden. 57 garden sessions were offered with an average attendance of 21 gardeners per session.

Gardening knowledge and skills shared included: starting seeds, sprouting methods, thinning, vermicomposting, garden bed preparation, planting, watering, weeding, pruning and feeding grafted tomato plants, transplanting, making shelves, amending garden beds, soil science, worm sorting, dead heading, harvesting, seed saving, and winterizing the outdoor garden.

In a written final evaluation, The Local asked participants from the Community Garden program during the 2014 growing season to describe what they liked best about the program, the changes that they experienced as a result of participating in the program and their suggestions for program improvement. 24 surveys were completed in total. Here is what we heard:

4/24 participants were under 12 years of age, 6/24 ages 13-18, 1/24 ages 19-25, 12/24 ages 26-55 and one was over 56 years of age.

New Friends and Welcoming Environment:

22/24 participants made new friends in the community garden program.

24/24 participants felt welcome when attending the program and 19/24 felt comfortable asking a question and sharing their thoughts in the garden.

Increased Gardening Experience and Knowledge:

20/24 participants learned new gardening skills that they will use in the future. They also commented that through the program they learned how to work together as a team and the importance of eating healthy food and being physically active. Overall the comments included:

- “Anyone can grow their own food. Even in small spaces.”
- “Giving back is a great feeling.”
- “Growing food is fun.”
- “Hard work is worthwhile.”
- “Gardening is an essential skill to have.”
- “There are a variety of ways to grow certain plants, i.e. tomatoes.”

New Food Knowledge:

19/24 participants felt more confident about choosing healthy foods in the grocery store and 21/24 felt more confident growing and harvesting vegetables as a result of their participation in the program.

Improved Access to Fresh Fruits and Vegetables:

19/24 participants said it was important to take vegetables that they harvested home from the garden.

Healthy Behaviour Change:

14/22* participants were eating more fruits and vegetables because of participating in the program. 8/22 did not increase their fruit and vegetable consumption, five of whom were consuming the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables prior to joining the program.

9/20 felt that their level of fitness changed because of their involvement in the garden program. One participant described working in the garden as an “exercise class.”

Favourite Things:

Participants’ favourite aspects of the program included, the delicious food harvested and opportunity to try new foods; the social aspect; and the opportunity to help plant, water and grow vegetables and “play in the dirt.” Many participants had great things to say about the program, including:

- “[The garden was] a place to meet new people and learn new skills.”
- “The welcoming atmosphere.”
- “The kids’ enthusiasm.”
- “I made a lot of friends and felt more a part of a community.”
- “[I] enjoy[ed] coming together and seeing a number of people from varying backgrounds working together for a common goal.”

Most Significant Change:

Participants shared ways in which participating in the program had led to changes in their lives including feeling better after eating fresh fruits and vegetables; meeting people and making friends; trying new foods and learning more about growing vegetables and other plants; and getting connected to other programs at the CFC. Other important changes participants shared included:

- “Thinking about what I eat.”
- “Develop[ing] a better sense of my place in the community.”
- “[I started] growing vegetable on my porch and eating more vegetables.”

- “This program not only teaches practical skills but builds confidence, community and friendships.”

Program Feedback:

20/20 participants said that they would recommend the program to other members of the community!

The suggestions participants had for improving the Community Garden program were:

- Recruit more people to the program
- Create some special activities for the kids
- Encourage school classes to participate in the workshops and tours
- Provide greater clarity around how and when to plant vegetables and herbs
- Create more garden beds and programs

*(*Note: Some participants left questions blank, therefore, not all results are out of 24)*