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GROWING YOUTH PROGRAMMING AT GARDEN CITY HARVEST THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

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GROWING YOUTH PROGRAMMING AT GARDEN CITY HARVEST
THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

By

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Bachelors of Science, Westminster College, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2013

Professional Paper

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Growing Youth Programming at Garden City Harvest through Participatory Action Research

Chairperson: Dr. Neva Hassanein

This professional paper presents a program evaluation and strategic plan for the youth development farming programs at Garden City Harvest (GCH), a non-profit in Missoula, Montana, which coordinates community-centered agriculture projects and facilitates sustainable agriculture education. The youth programs, Youth Harvest (YH) and Youth Farm (YF), hire adolescents of 15-18 years of age to work on their urban farms to learn about sustainable agriculture, job readiness skills, and social-emotional well-being. As the organization continues to expand, especially with the addition of a new facility, GCH administration and staff are interested in learning how the programs impact the youth employees and how future programming can provide more empowering and meaningful opportunities for youth.

To inform GCH on the strategic development of the youth programs, I facilitated two focus groups of past youth employees of YH and YF; the first group identified the strengths and areas of improvement of the programs, and the second group developed recommendations for programmatic growth. From interviews with staff at nine similar youth programs around the country, I identified best practices and ideas for program development that could be adopted by GCH to bolster their programs. Using a participatory action research approach, I recruited youth from the focus groups to assist in thematic data analysis and in the development of the recommendations, particularly how GCH could provide new employment opportunities for youth in the winter season. Possible winter programming activities include: implementing a culinary program where youth learn basic cooking and food preservation skills, offering advanced professional development workshops for youth, and facilitating youth-led education workshops to local high schools. This professional paper is a detailed summary of those findings and recommendations that will be available to GCH staff for the future development of the youth programs.

Acknowledgements

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To the staff members of the youth programs I interviewed, thank you all for your time and for sharing your professional experiences about working in this field. You are all creating such amazing opportunities for youth in your communities.

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Abbreviations

ACL	Assistant Crew Leader
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
CYE	Critical Youth Empowerment
CC	Cultivating Community
FW	Food What?!
FYI	Food Youth Initiative
GCH	Garden City Harvest
GRuB	Garden-Raised Bounty
GD	Grow Dat
HR	Home ReSource
MAP	Massachusetts Avenue Project
MCPS	Missoula County Public Schools
PYD	Positive Youth Development
PEAS	Program in Ecological Agriculture and Society
RIC	Rooted In Community
SPFB	South Plains Food Bank
GP	The Garden Project
TRYGH	Tom Roy Youth Guidance Home
YF	Youth Farm
YH	Youth Harvest
YPAR	Youth Participatory Action Research

Chapter One: Project Overview

Introduction

In the United States, the lives of young people¹ are typically dominated and controlled by the power and decision making of adults (Jennings et al. 2006). From a legal perspective, young people possess limited constitutional rights, which restricts their agency and makes them dependent on adults. Additionally, young people are commonly stereotyped by characteristics such as naive, lazy, apathetic, irrational, and impulsive, which further solidify their marginalized status in society (Kokkola 2013). It is also often assumed that youth will succumb to negative behaviors such as drug abuse, violence, teen pregnancy, and academic failure, if they are not properly supervised and managed by adults (Cammarota 2011). These societal viewpoints have significantly impacted how organizations and institutions that serve young people have been designed and developed.

An emerging theoretical framework, Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) theory, has challenged the common assumptions made about youth and what is best for their emotional, behavioral, and psychological development. CYE seeks to support and empower youth to become involved in the positive development of their communities and in larger sociopolitical change (Jennings et al. 2006). As a result, youth experience increased self-efficacy and self-awareness, positive identity development, a sense of purpose, healthy social relationships, and an enhanced sense of empowerment. In this context, empowerment is about gaining power and control within the social, economic, and political dimensions of one's life in order to

¹ The terms young people, youth, and youths all refer to adolescents in the developmental stage from childhood to adulthood. (See Schulster and Krasny 2010, pp. 209). For the purpose of this paper, I am referring to youth between the ages of 14-20 years old.

achieve a more equitable and high-quality livelihood (Cammara 2011). In relation to CYE theory, youth are celebrated as assets to their communities based on their innate skills, capabilities, and life experiences (Catalano et al. 2004; Pearrow 2008; Richards-Schuster 2012). Under this framework, young people have the power to create social change if they are included in real world opportunities, allowed to work in partnership with adults, and have the ability to critically reflect on sociopolitical processes, structures, and norms (Jennings et al. 2006). For youth to thrive, they need: a) access to opportunities that foster personal, social, and professional development, b) space and power to critically assess the social conditions that affect their lives, and c) opportunities to participate in meaningful civic engagement (Blanchet-Cohen and Brunson 2014; Checkoway and Aldana 2013; Jennings et al. 2006; Zeldin, Christens, and Powers 2013).

Youth farming programs are emerging across the country as a strategy meant to provide opportunities that foster personal and vocational skill development, enhance community development, and encourage critical civic participation. These programs emphasize that, through learning how to farm, young people will develop practical life skills, form meaningful relationships with others, and learn about the needs of their communities through service (Brigham and Nahas 2008; Hung 2004; Powell 2014). Training youth to become farmers is not the ultimate goal of these programs. Instead, many of these farm-based programs are committed to the holistic development of young people by empowering them to make change in their own lives. Although the literature on these programs is minimal, existing scholarship suggests that youth involved in farming programs experience a sustained sense of responsibility, confidence, and connection to others. Youth also learn essential job skills such as

time management, customer service, and basic financial literacy that are important for their professional careers (Brigham and Nahas 2008; Sonti et al. 2016).

One organization using a strengths-based approach with youth on farms is Garden City Harvest (GCH), a non-profit organization in Missoula, Montana, which coordinates community-farming projects and facilitates sustainable agriculture education. Of the many community efforts it has going, GCH has two youth development farming programs: Youth Harvest (YH) and Youth Farm (YF). These job-training programs hire adolescents from 15-18 years of age to work during the farming season to learn about sustainable agriculture, job readiness skills, and social-emotional well-being. Recently, both programs acquired new staff leadership who were interested in an evaluative assessment of how the programs impact young people. They also wanted to explore ideas about how to improve the youth programs.

My professional background has specifically focused on youth empowerment and sustainable agriculture. I have spent the last four years working in various capacities at youth farming programs from farm manager to program coordinator. My interest in this project stems from my own experience working with youth who I have seen grow immensely from working the land in collaboration with others. GCH is asking some important questions of its programs that I think need to be asked within other youth farming programs. These questions became the foundation of my research as I planned how to evaluate the youth programs at GCH and provide recommendations for programmatic growth: What are the youths' perspectives and opinions about how the programs could better meet their needs? How do adults provide more empowering opportunities for youth to take on greater leadership roles? What does it look like to work collaboratively with young people on an organizational and community level?

Background and Significance

Since 2003, YH has worked with youth ages 16-18 to cultivate holistic life skills through farming at the Program in Ecological Agriculture and Society (PEAS) farm in the Upper Rattlesnake neighborhood through a partnership between Willard Alternative High School and the Missoula Youth Drug Court. Over the course of a farming season, the youth learn about what it takes to grow food in Montana, participate in service to their local community by providing produce from a mobile market to senior citizens, and develop job and life skills by working together around a common cause. YH characterizes the youth they employ as “at-risk”, meaning they face numerous challenges in their lives such as: coming from unstable home environments with inadequate access to resources; experiencing drug, alcohol, physical, emotional abuse in their past or present; and/or struggling in school and either falling behind or dropping out (T. McDaniel, personal communication, October 16, 2017). YH bases its approach to youth development on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) model by building self-efficacy through its “Five C’s”: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion (T. McDaniel, personal communication, October 16, 2017). By cultivating skills that enhance the Five C’s within each youth, YH believes the youth employees will lead more successful, autonomous, and healthy lives.

Similarly, YF employs youth from the neighboring Tom Roy Youth Guidance Home (TRYGH) to work seasonally on its two-acre, urban farm on the west side of Missoula. These youth are older adolescents—about 16 years of age and older—who are in the foster care system and who will soon be transitioning out of the system once they turn 18 years old. TRYGH provides a transitional home environment that can host up to eight youth at a time. The

program focuses on helping young people become independent through developing essential life skills, healthy self-images, and positive relationships with peers and adults. Since 2010, YF partnered with TRYGH to provide seasonal employment opportunities that help youth develop essential job readiness skills for their professional futures, while also cultivating strong personal identities as they transition out of foster care (“Garden City Harvest”, n.d.). Youth employees grow food and help run the farm’s 40 member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, farm stands, and mobile markets that serve residents of Missoula.

Currently, YH and YF run seasonal programs for youth during the spring, summer, and fall. Youth are employees of the programs and receive stipends for their work. YH also serves as an accredited program for elective coursework at Willard High School. YH employs six to eight youth at the start of the season and YF typically hires between 10-12 youth from the TRYGH to work as their core team during the farming season. Additionally, YF hosts other youth groups to volunteer on the farm throughout the week.

Research Objectives

GCH wanted to explore how YH and YF could grow or change to better serve youth employees in their programs. They wanted to examine current programming to identify the strengths and potential areas for improvement. In addition, GCH staff members wanted to provide new winter programming so youth have more employment opportunities to make money, and so youth can continue to build on the skills they developed during the farm season. Based on a systematic review of youth development programs, researchers found that program frequency and duration were important factors in promoting positive youth behavior outcomes; programs that spanned nine months or more were among the most effective

(Catalano et al. 2004). It seemed like a natural step for GCH to increase the program capacity of YH and YF so more youth could benefit from more employment experiences throughout the year.

GCH recently completed construction of a new organizational building, the Farmstead, located at their River Road Farm location. The Farmstead was designed for multidimensional use: organizational office and meeting space, community workshops and event space, and agriculture season-extension use. GCH staff members are coordinating how to best utilize the Farmstead across all programs in the organization, including YH and YF. Staff members wanted to ensure that the use of the Farmstead furthers the youth programs' goals and objectives. Before concrete plans were made, GCH staff wanted to include the voices and perspectives of past youth about how their employment experience could have been improved and what recommendations they may have for future program growth.

Conclusion

In the United States, young people do not typically have access to opportunities that cultivate their holistic development, value their ideas and opinions, and encourage them to make change in their lives and communities. Youth development programs commonly provide services to help youth become successful in their futures, but rarely seek to work collaboratively with young people to make changes on issues in their lives and in their communities that ultimately will improve their overall well-being. Programs like Garden City Harvest's (GCH) are important to the well-being of communities because they provide youth with the space to learn, examine, and advocate for issues that affect their lives, while becoming more engaged leaders and young professionals. GCH is offering youth in Missoula a unique

opportunity to earn their own income, while also developing their professional skills, learning about sustainable agriculture, and giving back to their community.

In this research project, I operated under the Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) theory to bring the voices and experiences of past youth employees to the forefront as equal partners in the evaluative assessment of Youth Harvest (YH) and Youth Farm (YF). By utilizing youth participatory action research approaches, such as thematic data collection and youth co-researchers, I intended for this project to be an empowering experience for the youth involved because they would get to experience and contribute to actual program development of a non-profit organization.

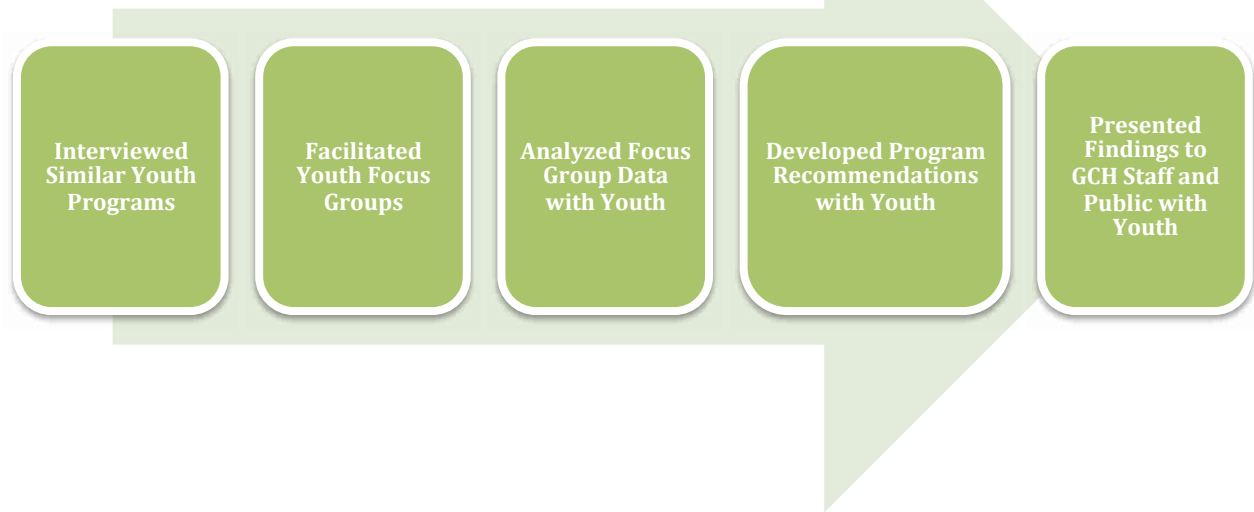
As an overview, in Chapter Two: Methodology, I discussed how and why I designed my research project, as well as provided a detailed account of what occurred throughout each step of the project. In Chapter Three: Lessons from Other Youth Programs, I provided a summary of the other youth farming programs I interviewed around the country, including their best practices and lessons learned in terms of programming. In Chapter Four: Focus Groups: Findings and Recommendations, I presented the strengths and areas for improvement of YH and YF. Additionally, I provided a list of specific recommendations the youth and I developed from analyzing the focus group data about how GCH could improve and grow the employment opportunities in the youth programs. I also discussed my own professional recommendations of short-term and long-term action steps GCH can take to implement the recommendations. In Chapter Five: Conclusion and Reflections, I summarized the execution of the project and discussed the lessons I learned as a researcher that could benefit future studies.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Overview

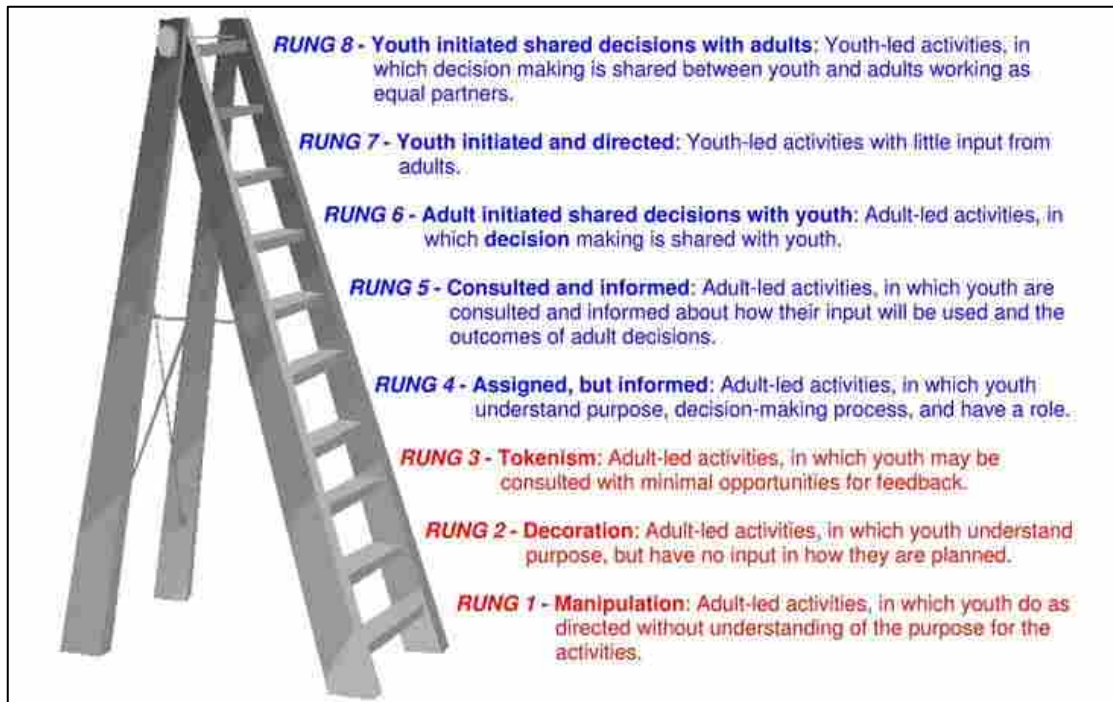
Through qualitative interviewing and participatory action research, my approach to this project was to learn from other youth farming organizations across the country, as well as to work collaboratively with past youth employees from Youth Harvest (YH) and Youth Farm (YF) to produce strategic growth plans for the programs. Building off Garden City Harvest (GCH) staff ideas for program development, I researched how other youth programs have addressed their own development such as lessons they learned and challenges they faced when scaling up their program capacity. Accordingly, I interviewed staff members from nine youth programs around the country whose missions are related to sustainable agriculture, youth development and empowerment, and community development. The analysis of the interviews was intended to guide GCH in their program planning in ways that align with their mission and that are feasible in terms of their organizational capacity. In addition, with the participation of former youth employees of YH and YF, I facilitated two focus groups to evaluate the programs' overall impact on youth, as well as to outline possible opportunities for future program growth. In collaboration with three youth co-researchers from the focus groups, we analyzed the data, developed recommendations for program expansion, and presented our findings to GCH staff members (See Figure A: Methodology). My goal for this project was to include youth throughout the research process as much as possible and to provide GCH with recommendations that are meaningful and empowering for future youth employees.

Figure A: Methodology



The practice of youth participatory action research (YPAR) is an emerging methodology used to engage young people as resources and partners, rather than simply as subjects, respondents, and informants, and thereby improve the quality of research by involving the very people closest to the topics explored (Checkoway, Figueroa, and Richards-Schuster 2003; Powers and Tiffany 2006). YPAR aligns with key dimensions of Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) theory that advocate for young people to be valued for their ideas and skills, as well as included in partnerships with adults to enact social change that impact young people’s lives and communities as a whole. YPAR projects have seen youth “climb the ladder” of participation, meaning they became more engaged and involved as they realized their involvement was important and valued by the researchers, and that the research was relevant to issues in their lives (See Figure B: Roger Hart’ Ladder of Participation; Funk et al. 2012:290). Some YPAR projects have received criticism for only providing youth with tokenized roles and low levels of participation while claiming to have provided more empowering opportunities (Funk et al.

Figure B: Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation



2012). To address this risk, I created opportunities for youth to participate in data collection, to practice critical data analysis, and to present our findings at an organizational meeting with key GCH staff members. I chose to utilize principles of CYE and YPAR in my research by involving youth as co-researchers to support youth towards higher levels of empowerment, self-efficacy, and purposefulness (Jennings et al. 2006; Powers and Tiffany 2006). Currently, GCH does not offer youth very high positions of influence in their organization. This may be rooted in their use of Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory in the youth programming, which does not directly prioritize equitable youth-adult partnerships or critical analysis of sociopolitical power structures, but instead focuses on cultivating competencies and skills in youth by taking a strengths-based approach to youth development. I chose to utilize a CYE framework in my research process to model the practical application of its empowerment practices to encourage GCH staff to adopt more CYE-oriented approaches in the youth programs.

Data Collection

External Youth Program Interviews

Through semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis, I examined nine youth programs across the country whose missions relate to farming and food production, sustainable food systems development, and youth empowerment and employment. I selected youth programs using Rooted In Community (RIC), a national network of youth and adults who are working towards bettering their communities through agriculture and food justice advocacy (“Rooted In Community”, n.d.). RIC has an online networking resource that lists dozens of youth programs around the country to promote partnerships between programs and organizations.

I identified programs that could provide applicable information and practices to GCH’s existing programs. Through criterion-based sampling, I selected programs with: year-round youth employment opportunities, advanced youth leadership positions, programming for at-risk youth populations, and/or four season growing cycles (Turner 2010). Initially, I contacted 12 youth programs and requested interviews with staff members who could provide insight into their program’s structure. Of the 12 programs I identified, staff members from nine of the programs agreed to be interviewed, resulting in a 75% response rate (See Table 1 for an overview of the participating youth programs). Staff members with a range of positions participated in my interviews, but generally they all work directly with young people. These positions included: youth program manager, youth program coordinator, director of education, operations coordinator, education coordinator, and youth development specialist. Each interviewee offered unique insights into their program’s theory, structure, and challenges they face when working with young people.

Table 1 List of Other Youth Programs Studied		
Program	Location	Selection Criteria
Cultivating Community	Portland, ME	Winter programming, youth empowerment focus
Food What?!	Santa Cruz, CA	Winter programming, youth empowerment focus
Food Youth Initiative	Raleigh, NC	Youth participatory action research projects, year-round youth employment
The Garden Project	San Francisco, CA	Work with at-risk youth populations, vocational development focus
Garden-Raised Bounty (GRuB)	Olympia, WA	Year-round youth programming, work with at-risk youth populations
Grow Dat	New Orleans, LA	Youth participatory action research projects, year-round youth employment
Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP)	Buffalo, NY	Value-added products, year-round youth employment, youth participatory action research projects
Project EAT	Hayward, CA	Youth participatory action research projects, youth empowerment focus, year-round youth employment
South Plains Food Bank	Lubbock, TX	Value-added products, vocational development focus

The interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions that related to the participants' job responsibilities, the programs' structure and youth employment opportunities, the programs' decision-making processes, challenges faced by the programs, and plans for future growth (See Appendix A for the Interview Guide). I utilized a semi-structured interview format to gain greater insight into my research questions, since semi-structured interviews are better adept at asking "why" questions and discovering what is important from the participant's point of view (Miles and Gilbert 2005). Participants answered questions as they interpreted them and I asked follow-up questions for clarification. All nine interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted between 45 and 65 minutes, with an average of 55 minutes. I explained that their identifying information would not be used in this report. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were coded by relevant

information that I deemed to be potentially useful to GCH. Quotes from participants are used throughout the analysis in Chapter Three: Lessons from Other Youth Programs of this report to add deeper meaning to the research findings.

Focus Groups

The two focus groups consisted of past youth employees from YH and YF in order to assess the impact of these programs on the young people, as well as to include their voices in the strategic planning of the programs' future growth. The first focus group was meant to gather data on the programs' strengths and areas for improvement. The second focus group concentrated on brainstorming ways to grow the programs to offer more empowering opportunities for future youth employees. The main research questions I was interested in answering from these groups were:

- **What are the strengths of Youth Harvest and Youth Farm?**
- **What areas could the programs improve to enhance the experiences of youth?**
- **What other opportunities, activities, or programmatic components could further the missions of YH and YF and empower young employees?**

I conducted focus groups because they are an effective and practical methodology used to help with decision-making and organizational program development (Kruegar and Casey 2009).

Focus groups can help participants generate ideas, build off each other's experiences, and sometimes produce more relevant data than interviewing participants one-on-one (Kruegar and Casey 2009). I asked Mary Jo Barrett, a licensed social worker in Missoula, to act as a research assistant during the focus groups to take notes and to help create a safe environment for youth to feel comfortable sharing openly and honestly. Barrett was present at each of the group sessions.

I identified youth participants from GCH employee records of the last three years so their feedback would be relevant to the current models of YH and YF. Both programs have undergone changes on a yearly basis, so including youth from the earliest years of the programs seemed unproductive. I contacted youth via phone calls, texts, and messages on Facebook to determine their interest in being involved in the project. As an incentive to attend the focus groups, a free lunch was provided at each session. The participants also received a monetary gift of appreciation in the form of \$10 cash and a \$5 Good Food Store gift card after participating in each focus group. I wanted to get an equal representation of youth who worked at YH and YF. My ideal focus group size was between 5 and 10 participants.

Approximately six participants took part in the first focus group. Ages ranged from 17-22 years old, five female identifying and one male identifying, and all reported their racial background as White/Caucasian. There were an equal number of youth from YH and YF present. Of the youth from YH, two worked during the 2017 farm season and the other participant worked the previous year in 2016. Two of the youth from YF worked the season of 2017 and the other participant had worked since 2015. Four of the participants currently attend high school in Missoula and the other two are employed locally. In the second focus group, five youth participated. Of those five youth, four had participated in the first focus group and one new participant was recruited. This participant worked at YH during 2011-2014, is 23 years old, and currently works in Missoula. Of the two youth from the first focus group who did not continue to the second group, one was not interested in being involved in the project because of other commitments, and the other participant did not show up to the second group.

The first focus group was held at Barrett's office in downtown Missoula in early January 2018. The session lasted an hour and fifteen minutes. We started off with an icebreaker activity

where youth introduced themselves and learned each other's names. In pairs, youth were asked to discuss what they most enjoyed about YH and YF and what they perceive the programs' strengths to be. Youth shared their thoughts with the rest of the group and I asked follow up questions for clarification. Then, the participants were asked to reflect on what they liked the least about the programs in a writing exercise. Once they wrote down their thoughts, they crumpled the papers into balls and placed them in the center of the group. We took turns picking up a paper ball, reading the comments, and writing them up on the flip chart to make a master list. From the master list, we identified areas of improvement for the programs. I concluded the first focus group by explaining what steps were next in the project and how youth could be further involved in the research. One potential limitation of focus groups is that they can result in participants using concrete operational thinking to respond in ways that they perceive as socially acceptable and desired by the researchers (Norris et al. 2012). I addressed this concern in my facilitation plans by diversifying the types of activities in the focus groups so participants were able to contribute information in various mediums such as verbal and written reflection, sharing in pairs, and sharing with the larger group.

The second focus group was held at GCH's River Road Farmstead during the first week of February 2018. Since the programs will utilize the Farmstead in the future, I decided to host the focus group there to allow participants to experience the space and generate ideas for program growth. I shared my research on the nine other youth programs by writing down short summaries of each program on flip chart sheets that were placed around the room. Through a group facilitation method called "dotmocracy", the participants placed stickers on the sheets of the programs they thought had the best opportunities for young people. We debriefed as a

group and then more specifically discussed the possible opportunities that GCH could implement to grow their programs.

Youth Research Team

After the focus groups, three youth participants assisted in analyzing the data from the sessions and developing specific recommendations for growth of YH and YF. Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of the data collected. Prior to analyzing the focus group data, I hosted a short training session where I explained the basic steps of data analysis to the youth co-researchers, particularly how to thematically organize the data and determine relevant findings. Later, as a team, we coded the transcripts based on the main questions in each group session and narrowed down the data to determine our key findings. Throughout this process, I strove to guide the youth as they determined what information was most relevant to developing program recommendations that would enhance programming at GCH. I wanted them to have ownership over the analysis process and feel supported by my involvement. By involving youth in the analysis phase of the project, they were able to corroborate that the thematic findings accurately reflected what participants meant in the sessions, which may have strengthened the accuracy of the findings (Harper and Carver 1999). After analyzing the data, we developed a list of key recommendations of how to improve and grow YH and YF to present to GCH staff.

Limitations

I experienced several challenges that potentially impacted the analysis and findings of my project and there are a few changes that I would suggest to similar projects in the future.

First, the recruitment of youth participants was a major task. I utilized recommendations from GCH staff of which youth to contact to participate in the focus groups. One staff member helped make contact with youth to introduce the project and who I was. I made phone calls, and sent text and Facebook messages over three weeks to set up the first focus group. A school counselor at Willard High School also conveyed information to several young people I was trying to reach. Many youth did not respond to my attempts to reach out or did not have functioning phone numbers. Afterwards, I considered the possibility that the incentives I offered were not enticing enough to easily recruit youth participants. Moving forward, I would suggest offering youth greater gifts of appreciation to make their time worthwhile. I would also suggest conducting focus groups while youth are still involved in programming to increase the likelihood of their attendance.

As much as I attempted to include youth in the research process, I wish I had involved them more deliberately in the background research of the other youth programs, as well as the interviews with staff members. I missed an opportunity to include the youth in that step of the project, which could have produced different ideas for growth of YH and YF; however, the information gained from the interviews was presented to the participants who were still able to create their own opinions.

Conclusion

I conducted interviews of other youth programs across the country to help youth participants brainstorm innovative opportunities that Garden City Harvest (GCH) could adopt in the youth programs to further engage them in sustainable agriculture, job readiness training, and community development. In two focus groups of past youth employees from Youth Harvest

(YH) and Youth Farm (YF), we evaluated the programs' impacts on the participants, as well as envisioned new opportunities that GCH could implement to further develop their programs.

Three youth from the focus groups assisted in analyzing the data gathered from the sessions and developed specific recommendations for program growth to present to GCH staff.

Recruiting youth to participate in this project was my greatest obstacle, and by providing more enticing incentives, I believe more youth would have joined the project. I also recommend that future evaluative projects be conducted during current programming to ensure that youth are available to participate. To improve the youth participatory action research process of my project, I could have included youth in the background research and interviews of the other youth programs around the country.

Chapter Three: Lessons from Other Youth Programs

Overview

Researching and interviewing staff from other youth farming programs proved to be a fascinating part of my research because of the innovative ways young people are building their local food systems across the country. There are many inspiring programs, each with their own approach, that are seeking to better the lives of youth in their communities through stewarding the land and connecting communities to their food system. I summarized the practices of nine programs that may provide Garden City Harvest (GCH) with innovative ideas for their youth programs, as well as examined some of their organizational challenges. Table 2 displays the potential transferable opportunities of the programs that GCH may be interested in adopting, and links the opportunities to the corresponding programs that currently provide them. Figure C provides an overview of key dimensions of the other youth programs to help organize the information.

Table 2: Transferable Program Opportunities for Garden City Harvest	
Opportunities	Corresponding Program
<i>Recruiting community gardeners</i>	Cultivating Community
<i>Developing professional skills</i>	Garden Project, Grow Dat, SPFB
<i>Utilizing college-aged interns</i>	Cultivating Community, Grow Dat, GRuB
<i>Creating value-added products</i>	Project EAT, SPFB, MAP
<i>Facilitating youth-led educational workshops</i>	Cultivating Community, Food What, Project EAT
<i>Conducting youth participatory action research</i>	FYI, Grow Dat, MAP, Project EAT
<i>Integrating social justice curricula</i>	Grow Dat, Project EAT, Food What, FYI, MAP, GRuB, Garden Project

Figure C: Overview of External Youth Programs

Programs Offered	Cultivating Community	Food What?!	Food Youth Initiative	The Garden Project	GRuB	Grow Dat	MAP	Project EAT	South Plains Food Bank
	Youth Growers, Culinary Crew, Youth Leadership Intensive, GROW Interns	Spring Internship, Summer Job Training Program, Fall Project Management Program, Winter Community Education Program	Summer retreat and monthly meet ups during school year	Earth Stewards Summer Program, School Year Program	Summer Employment Program, GRuB School Program	Leadership Program, Advanced Leadership Program, Food Justice Program	Summer Program, Summer Introductory Policy Program, School Year Program	Garden Mentor Program, ProFRESHionals	Academic School Year Program, Growing for Urban Business
Youth Compensation	Summer Program: \$400/month Spring/Fall programs: \$400/10 weeks	Summer program: \$200. Spring, Fall, & winter program: 2-5 credits & \$175	Volunteer positions	Summer: \$11/hr for 8 weeks. School year apprenticeship: \$13/hr	Summer: \$1,000 and 1 elective credit. School year: 3 credits	Paid stipend + bonus	Paid stipend	Paid year-long internships	Paid summer positions, volunteer positions in school year
Schedule	June-July: Mon-Thurs all day September- November: Tues and Thurs after school February-March: Tues & Thurs after school, and several Saturdays	Spring: 1 day/week after school, 11 weeks Summer: 4 days/week, 9am-3pm, 8 weeks Fall: 1-2 days/week after school, 8-10 weeks Winter: variable days after school, 8-10 weeks	School year: 1 day/week after school Summer: 4-6 day retreat	Summer: 11 weeks School year: every other Saturday	June- July: Mon-Fri all day, 7 weeks September-May: Mon-Fri afternoons (11:30am-2pm)	January-June: 1 day/week after school, several Saturdays July-August: Break September- December: 1 day/week after school, several Saturdays	Summer: 4 days/week Fall & Winter: 1 day/week after school and several Saturdays	Depends on specific youth program	School Year: Saturdays, 9am-1pm Summer: Mon-Fri, 7:30am-12:30pm
Budget	\$872, 156	\$440,600	N/a	\$2,037,049	\$932,700	\$1,028,633	\$824,391	\$200,000	\$14,039,150
Staff Members	1 full-time staff	6 full-time staff & 4 part-time youth staff	2 full-time staff	5-6 office staff, 10 farm staff, and a few college interns	4 full-time staff & various AmeriCorps positions	7 full-time staff & several seasonal, part-time alumni youth	6 full-time staff	2 full-time staff	4 full-time staff
Strengths	Community garden recruitment; cooking classes; YPAR projects; college interns & Food Corps members	Youth-led community education workshops	YPAR projects; responding to interests of youth	Relationship building with police officers; job readiness classes	Building garden boxes for residents; utilizing AmeriCorps youth counselors; providing youth with school credit	YPAR projects	Advanced youth roles in organization; YPAR projects; value-added products	Youth-led garden workshops; YPAR projects	Value-added products
Challenges	Only one full-time staff; conducting program evaluations	Keeping in touch with alumni	Providing financial support for projects, field trips, and conferences	Acquiring funding	Serving youth who are not enrolled in school	Transportation; designing leadership roles for youth in organization	Providing enough positions for youth employees	Dependent on government-funded grants	Need a new facility; providing enough positions for youth
Contact	https://www.cultivatingcommunity.org/	http://www.foodwhatinc.org/	http://eds.ncsu.edu/youth/food-youth-initiative/	https://www.gardenproject.org/	https://goodgrub.org	https://growdatyouthfarm.org/	https://mass-ave.org/	https://projecteat.aace.org/	https://www.splfb.org/give_help_programs

*Some of the budgets represent the youth program’s operational budget, and some represent the entire organization’s operational budget.

Cultivating Community, Portland, Maine

Cultivating Community (CC) is a non-profit organization in Portland, Maine that seeks to build a more sustainable food system in its city through community gardening, food security advocacy, youth development, and farmer training. They offer year-round, paid internships for high school-aged youth. One, full-time staff member coordinates the youth programs.

Programs:

- *Youth Growers: June-July*

During the summer, two programs (12 youth each) operate for one month each and work Monday through Thursday. Youth work on various urban garden sites and learn basic farming skills. They help run a weekly CSA program where youth package weekly food shares for community residents. Youth also volunteer at hunger relief organizations, attend cooking workshops, and go on field trips around the city. They are paid \$400/month.



Photo Credit: Cultivating Community

- *Culinary Crew: September-November*

Youth work Tuesdays and Thursdays after school. The program focuses on advanced cooking skills; there is a cooking workshop once a week, and then the group prepare meals for community organizations whose clientele experience food insecurity. Youth get paid \$400/10 weeks.

“It's really not about growing vegetables... Most young people are not going to become farmers... Youth are like: ‘I want to be part of something. I want to make some money. I want to meet people. I want to be involved in a community.’”

Staff member, Cultivating Community

- *Youth Leadership Intensive: February-March*

Youth work Tuesdays and Thursdays after school and several Saturdays. Youth attend regional conferences, go on field trips, dive deeper into food issues in their community, and volunteer with other community organizations. They also develop and lead nutrition, farming, and food-focused workshops for the public. Youth also create outreach materials and recruit residents to join CC's community gardens. Youth get paid \$400/10 weeks.

- *GROW Interns: April-July*

Through this advanced leadership program, alumni youth work as peer leaders in the upcoming summer program. About two to three youth work a few days after school and several Saturdays. They learn garden planning and propagation skills. They also learn group facilitation skills as they practice the workshops they will be leading in the summer program. They earn a pay increase for the advanced role.

Lessons Learned:

CC altered the focus of its programming due to youth feedback and now focuses more on developing cooking skills and learning about food systems advocacy. Youth wanted to learn skills that were applicable in other job settings. The cooking classes could be replicable at GCH because of the new commercial kitchen and educational space at the River Road Farmstead. Additionally, having youth help recruit residents for CC's community garden plots seems like a transferable activity that GCH could adopt in the off-season months. Through community-based research, youth could learn more about which populations in Missoula are food insecure and how to include these groups in GCH's community gardens. They would develop leadership and public speaking skills through conducting outreach and hosting educational workshops on basic gardening skills for community residents. CC also utilizes college interns and Food Corps members to support their one staff member. The seasonal staff members make it possible for CC to provide a diversity of programmatic activities.

Food What?!, Santa Cruz, California

Food What?! (FW) is a youth empowerment organization that uses farming to connect youth to their local food system, and

to develop "strong, healthy, and resilient teens" ("Food What?!", n.d.). They work with youth who are from families with limited resources, struggling with substance abuse, have



Photo Credit: Food What?!

experienced trauma, or are in alternative high school programs. FW consists of six full-time staff members and four part-time youth staff members.

Programs:

➤ *Spring Internship*

About 50-60 youth make up five cohorts that meet once a week for 11 weeks. They earn two to five school credits and \$175 stipend. They work on the farm, participate in job skills workshops, and cook a group lunch each day.

➤ *Summer Job Training Program*

The program employs 20 youth from the Spring Internship to work four days a week from 9am-3pm for eight weeks, plus four youth leaders from the previous year. They work primarily on the main farm site, attend more advanced job training and food justice workshops, and also help manage various school gardens. Youth earn an hourly wage, which culminates to about \$2,000 at the end of the summer.

➤ *Fall Project Management Program*

About 15-20 youth from the Summer Program are hired for an 8-10 week leadership program where they learn more about farm-based business management and engage in community service projects.

➤ *Winter Community Education Program*

About 6-10 youth make up this short winter program where youth learn how to teach a series of educational workshops about gardening, nutrition, and food justice issues to local high school classes. Working in pairs, youth spend two days learning the curriculum, and then each team teaches three workshops.

“They get to teach their peers ... about farming and food issues ... and they feel more ownership over what they know. The other high school students take our youth more seriously than if I was to come in and teach the same content.”

Staff member, Food What?!

Lessons Learned:

The Winter Community Education program could be replicable at GCH and would allow youth to further develop public speaking, leadership, and facilitation skills. This could also be a great opportunity to spread awareness of GCH to the local high schools and recruit more youth. FW is brainstorming how to keep in better contact with their alumni network so past youth are

somehow connected to the organization. They hire some alumni back as peer leaders to provide more advanced leadership roles, which can increase those youths' self-efficacy and purposefulness. FW is also strategizing how to start a food truck to bring more revenue back into the program, and provide youth with business management and food preparation skills.

Food Youth Initiative, Raleigh, North Carolina

Food Youth Initiative (FYI) is a network of four youth programs in North Carolina that are working to make change in their communities around issues of food access, justice, and sustainability. They conduct participatory action research on food issues that affect their lives, participate in professional development trainings, and build relationships with other youth leaders. FYI consists of two full-time staff members who work within the non-profit organization, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, which is a partnership of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and North Carolina State University.

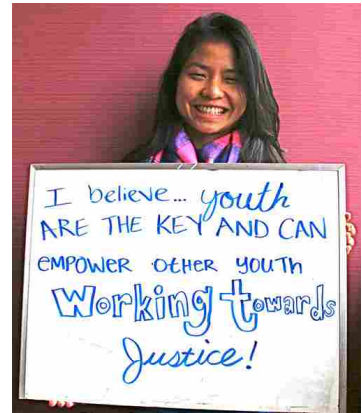


Photo Credit: Food Youth Initiative

Program:

Youth in the FYI network meet occasionally throughout the school year and for a four to six day summer retreat. During the retreat, youth share what their programs are doing in the community and network with other youth leaders. They attend professional development workshops, go on field trips to food hubs and local restaurants, and take part in an action project during the retreat. For example, at one past retreat, FYI organized a photography

workshop because youth wanted to learn how to artistically communicate issues in their lives to the public. The young people took pictures of what their food community looked like and the photos were showcased at a free community event.

Lessons Learned:

FYI seems to excel at responding to youths' interests and designing programming to meet their needs. While FYI wants to keep the vision of the program centered on building a more just and sustainable food system, they recognize they need to be flexible about what skills youth believe are important for their futures. A goal of FYI's is to find a way for youth to raise money through their retreat project each year, and to set aside money in a group fund to support future youth projects. One aspect of FYI's program that seems to be challenging is how infrequently the youth programs get together to network and complete action projects. This seemed like a limitation to how much community development FYI can achieve each year.

The Garden Project, San Francisco, California

The Garden Project (TGP) runs an urban farm near the San Francisco County Jail San Bruno Complex through a partnership with The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, The San Francisco Sheriff's Department, The San Francisco



Photo Credit: The Garden Project

Police Department, and other community organizations. TGP used to only offer employment and job training programs for ex-offenders, but since 2004, has begun offering employment-

training programs for at-risk youth from surrounding communities. TGP staff consists of five to six office personnel, 10 farm staff, and a few college interns.

Programs:

➤ *Earth Stewards Summer Program*

Youth work on the farm during the summer and earn \$11 an hour for 11 weeks. TGP's goal is to employ as many youth as possible; sometimes their summer program can reach up to 150 youth. They provide employment training, experiential education, and opportunities for community engagement. All of the produce they grow gets donated to people who are food insecure. TGP utilizes local police officers as adult mentors. Officers work on the farm with youth and provide youth with referrals to external resources, such as counselors, social workers, and other governmental agencies.

"[Having officers work on the farm] grows the relationships between the officers and the kids to the point where the officers no longer see the kids as threats and the kids no longer see the officers as controlling figures... [Instead], collaboration happens."

Staff member, The Garden Project

➤ *School Year Program*

Every other Saturday, about 20-50 youth work and get paid \$13 an hour during the school year. They continue doing farm work, but also do landscaping and weed removal at surrounding locations. TGP provides educational support classes once a week where youth can bring their homework and receive assistance. Youth do not get paid to attend the education assistance classes.

Lessons Learned:

TGP adapted the focus of their program by listening to the needs of youth. They have found that youth care about learning "21st century skills" such as money management, budgeting, marketing, social media design, etc. (Interviewee #4). They are in the process of partnering with a local community college to provide youth with more access to higher education and job training. Interviewee #4 voiced how important a role the college interns play in their program. The college interns are typically returning TGP youth who worked previous

seasons and they help with agriculture-related tasks during the summer. They are able to step into higher levels of responsibility and leadership, which can be very empowering and enhance feelings of ownership in their work at TGP. Not all of the interns have gone to college and TGP stresses that going to college is not the path for everyone. More importantly, the interns serve as role models to the younger folks and can share their college and work experience with them.

Garden-Raised Bounty, Olympia, Washington

Garden-Raised Bounty's (GRuB) model of working with youth is focused on integrating farm-based education into the traditional

education system. While they do run a summer

program, youth also spend the school year coming out to the farm and earning

school credit for the work they do. GRuB works with at-risk youth to provide them with an alternative to the traditional high school experience. Their core staff consists of a director of

youth programs and initiatives, lead educator, operations manager, farm manager, AmeriCorps youth counselors, and youth peer leaders.



Photo Credit: GRuB

Programs:

➤ *Summer Employment Program: June-July*

In a seven week program, about 20-25 youth work on GRuB's farm, learn about food justice through workshops, manage a CSA, lead volunteers through fieldwork, and engage with their local community through service. Youth earn \$1000 and one elective credit. Ideally, all 25 youth transition into the School Year Program at the end of July.

➤ *GRuB School Program: September-May*

Every Monday through Friday, youth spend their afternoons (11:30am-2pm) away from their high schools and work on GRuB's farm, participate in food-based workshops, as well as go on field trips to community organizations and local farms. In the spring, they build about 50-70 garden boxes for community residents.



Photo Credit: GRuB

Lessons Learned:

The two strengths of GRuB that stood out the most were that youth build garden boxes for residents, and the use of AmeriCorps volunteers as youth counselors. Building garden boxes is a great project that teaches youth basic construction skills, engages them with their community, and provides them with leadership roles in facilitating lessons in garden management to community residents. Youth can build the garden boxes in the off-season and conduct outreach to identify community residents interested in the garden boxes. GRuB also hires AmeriCorps service members as youth counselors to support youth who are struggling with challenging life situations, or emotional and behavioral disorders. The additional staff members are able to provide individualized support to youth with greater needs so the main staff members are able to manage the rest of the group.

GRuB is actually in the process of designing a new youth farming program that is not connected to a high school model. Their current programming is not accessible to youth who are not enrolled in school and they want to provide opportunities to other youth in the community who do not fit into the traditional educational system.

Centered on sustainable agriculture, food justice, and racial equity, Grow Dat (GD) in New Orleans works with high school-aged youth to help them become changemakers in their local food system. With a staff of seven full-time employees and several seasonal alumni youth leaders, GD inspires youth to ask critical questions about who has access to fresh, healthy, and organic produce, who does not, and why our food system is driven by dollars and not in the interest of people. Recently, they have expanded their youth programs to offer full-season employment positions for a greater portion of their youth employees.

Programs:

➤ *Leadership Program: January-June*

Throughout the introductory program, around 50-56 youth work one day after school and all day Saturdays on the urban farm site until the end of May. They take a two week break once school is over and then return in June for an intensive one-month session where they work four days a week, from 8am to 3pm. The program is focused on basic agriculture skills, personal growth and social skills, food justice workshops, and community service.

➤ *Advanced Leadership Program: September-December*

Of the youth who graduated from the Leadership Program, only eight are hired back to work in the fall as assistant crew leaders (ACLs). They go through training about how to lead a group through fieldwork, how to facilitate workshops, and how to address conflict in a group or individual setting. Those eight ACLs will continue working throughout the upcoming year with the new group of youth in the Leadership Program. GD also hires four crew leaders who are typically +19 years old and who are interested in learning more about youth development and sustainable agriculture. The crew leaders will lead groups of 10-12 youth in the Leadership Program with the support of the two ACLs.

➤ *Food Justice Project: Spring and Fall*

In response to high demand for their programs, GD recently designed a new program to provide more employment positions for youth who recently finished the Leadership Program, but who are not ready to apply for an ACL position. The Food Justice

Project focuses on developing leadership skills and a deeper understanding of local food issues. It runs once a week after school and every Saturday on the farm. Youth conduct participatory action research in collaboration with a local organization whose work aligns with GD's mission and vision. Through their research, youth learn more about local food issues and brainstorm ways to make change on a grassroots level. At the end of the program, youth present their research findings at a free community event.

"The idea is that young people are learning more about their community... and envisioning what food justice might look like in New Orleans."

Staff member, Grow Dat

Lessons Learned:

Interviewee #6 described the organization as a reflexive, open, and inclusive environment. GD designs programming by responding to the feedback they receive from youth, but Interviewee #6 noted that is an area they could improve further on. They currently do not have many formal roles where youth can hold real positions of influence in the organization. One aspect of their programming that was revised by youth was their attendance and standards policy. With the help of a few youth leaders, GD decided to incentivize attendance and adherence of the group standards by offering youth a bonus at the end of every two-week pay period. Under the new policy, youth do not have money taken away from their paychecks when they violate the standards agreement. Instead, they lose money from their bonus. In this sense, the policy respects the time they showed up for work, yet still offers leniency as youth learn what it means to have a professional job.

Another challenge discussed by staff at GD is how they balance creating a just environment for youth to work in when, at the end of the day, they go home to living in an unjust world.

We spend a lot of time constructing a space that is super safe for young people... Like an atmosphere of trust. We do workshops on gender and sexism, we do anti-oppression training. We do preferred gender pronouns all the time. It's a very warm and loving space... At the same time, young people are not going to live at Grow Dat for the rest of their lives. So they need to know how to write a resume and how to code switch and sound like an upper-class white person when they're in a job interview so that they get a job...

Interviewee #6

In response to this challenge, staff members at GD try to have deep conversations with the youth about their perspectives on the inequalities they may face in their lives. GD is evaluating its rationale behind its professional development workshops and hoping to find a balance between teaching youth what they need to know to be successful and how to dismantle those oppressive policies and systems through critical reflection and action. By acknowledging this tension, Interviewee #6 hopes that youth can find ways to take back power as a group and that they will understand how to combat inequalities in their lives. I wondered if this was a struggle the other youth programs face and how they reflect on the types of skills they decide are essential to teaching youth.



Photo Credit: Massachusetts Avenue Project

Massachusetts Avenue Project, Buffalo, New York

As a youth program interested in empowering youth to improve their communities, Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) employs youth in the following areas: farm education, outreach and policy, youth enterprise, mobile market, and community education.

MAP consists of six full-time staff members who work with youth in the various program areas.

Programs:

➤ *Summer Program*

About 10 alumni and 20 new youth make up the summer program. They spend their time primarily working on MAP's urban farm site. The mobile market coordinator hires 2-4 youth to help manage the mobile market around the city. Youth help identify areas and populations in the city that could benefit from the mobile market. Through this process, youth are introduced to workshops on food justice issues. Some youth become policy specialists and learn how to participate in city council meetings. They help make decisions about how urban land in the city is utilized and they conduct outreach to community residents about green space zoning laws to encourage people to start backyard gardens. They also focus on reforming school policies to be more equitable. They have run campaigns to increase sustainable food items in the cafeteria and more holistic nutrition curricula in classes.

➤ *Summer Introduction to Policy Program*

In a six-week program, youth come to learn the basics of policy formation and grassroots organizing. Led by college-aged interns, this program is for youth who are interested in making a difference in the policies of their community that affect people's access to healthy food and green space. This program supports youth in developing critical thinking and civic engagement skills.

➤ *School Year Program*

About 15 youth who worked in the summer program get hired back to work throughout the school year. The program runs by trimesters, so there are three programs that run eight weeks each, one day a week after school, and on Saturdays. The same positions that are available in the summer program are available in the school year.

Lessons Learned:

MAP also designs and develops various value-added products with their youth throughout the year. The products vary depending on what items are available on the farm and what the youth are interested in making. Interviewee #7 said that managing the production,

marketing, and sales of the products is not a burden on staff, even when the number of youth employees fluctuates. Through this project, youth are able to learn entrepreneurial skills that are applicable to other job settings. MAP seems to excel at involving their youth in food justice advocacy efforts in their community. One of the program's goals is to increase youth participation in food policy initiatives in order to create a more sustainable food system. This initiative seems to result in youth becoming more civically engaged and feeling efficacious in grassroots organizing efforts.

Project EAT, Hayward, California

Project EAT is a non-profit in the San Francisco suburban area that provides professional development training for adults in youth empowerment programs, supplies educators with curricula, and assists in capacity building for schools around Hayward that want to engage youth in food systems work. They help teachers facilitate farm-based curricula, maintain school gardens, and support youth food leaders. Out of a staff of 35 people who serve various organizational roles, two staff members oversee the coordination of the youth programs.



Photo Credit: Project EAT

Programs:

➤ *Garden Mentors Program*

About 15 youth are hired to learn and teach a series of eight garden and nutrition-based lessons during a yearlong paid internship. In the fall, they spend their time learning about basic gardening skills by working on various urban farms. In the winter, youth focus on developing their teaching skills and practicing lesson plans. In the spring, they

go out and teach the lessons at local elementary schools about 8-12 times. After the lessons, the garden mentors help the students manage their school gardens. The garden mentors are essential to the schools because they supervise the garden plots that otherwise would have to be overseen by a teacher or staff person.

➤ *ProFRESHionals: Youth Participatory Action Research Team*

Through this yearlong paid internship, youth identify an issue that is important to them and their community centered on wellness, nutrition, or food. They conduct research and analyze data about the issue. Finally, they develop recommendations and action steps to change policies and systems in their schools or community. For example, a city council decided to move a local high school to a new district for financial reasons, which would have prevented many students from attending their own high school. Through student organizing efforts, they successfully advocated for their school site to not be moved and, furthermore, to have a full service cafeteria and culinary education program implemented.

Lessons Learned:

There seems to be a high level of leadership and responsibility that youth can achieve at Project EAT. The program effectively utilizes high school youth as mentors for younger kids, which makes the youth mentors feel they are doing meaningful work, while the younger kids enjoy learning the material from “rock star high schoolers”, rather than adult educators (Interviewee #8). Project EAT works with many youth who come from challenging backgrounds, and thus their ProFRESHionals program seeks to empower those individuals to change issues in their communities. While the ProFRESHionals program is impressive, it also confronts the reality of the lives of many youth and their families.

We really have a lot of issues with our families and our communities just around processing the realities of living in a city that's sometimes violent. Students are experiencing all types of trauma and living in an oppressive system.

Interviewee #8

Project EAT is also looking at how to make the content of their workshops more relevant to young people. They recently have observed youth becoming more involved and passionate about political issues, and have tried to design workshops about social justice issues that are relevant to many young people such as an introduction to immigration policy. This adaptability is important in keeping the culture of Project EAT alive and to keeping young people engaged with their community.

South Plains Food Bank, Lubbock, Texas

The youth farming program of the South Plains Food Bank (SPFB) was established to serve youth whose families were clients



Photo Credit: South Plains Food Bank

of the food bank. It has evolved to serve a wide range of youth from different backgrounds, but primarily states that it aims to help “at-risk youth develop street smarts, life skills, and job skills” (Interviewee #9). Most of the food produced goes directly to the food bank. Two full-time youth coordinators and two full-time farm managers staff the youth program.

Programs:

➤ *Academic School Year Program*

During the school year, youth can volunteer on Saturdays from 9am-12pm at the farm and learn basic farming skills. This program is typically the first encounter youth have with SPFB and is meant to determine which youth are committed to working in the summer program.

➤ *Growing Recruits for Urban Business (GRUB)*

In the summer GRUB program, about 20-25 youth are hired to work Monday through Friday, 7:30am-12:30pm on SPFB’s urban farm, learning basic farming practices and participating in professional development and life skills workshops. Additionally,

through entrepreneurial workshops, youth learn how to develop and market value-added products made from produce they grew on the farm, such as salsa, jam, and soap. GRUB soap has been the most successful of these projects. They grow their own loofahs, make them into soap bars, and sell them to the community. Youth are involved in every step of the processes: from conceptualizing the product, buying the wholesale ingredients, creating a marketing strategy, to selling the product at local stores.

Lessons Learned:

The entrepreneurial components of SPFB's youth program seem to be the most applicable to GCH's future plans. Interviewee #9 explained that the entrepreneurial focus was important for youth who wanted to stay involved with GRUB, but who were interested in learning skills beyond farming and growing food. When youth are not working with the program, staff members take over managing the value-added products, which could be a potential burden for staff. This program seems to be more focused on providing youth with job and life skills than empowering them to critically engage and take back control of their lives and participate in community development issues. Youth do not seem to play key roles in the organization's operations and decision-making processes.

Conclusion

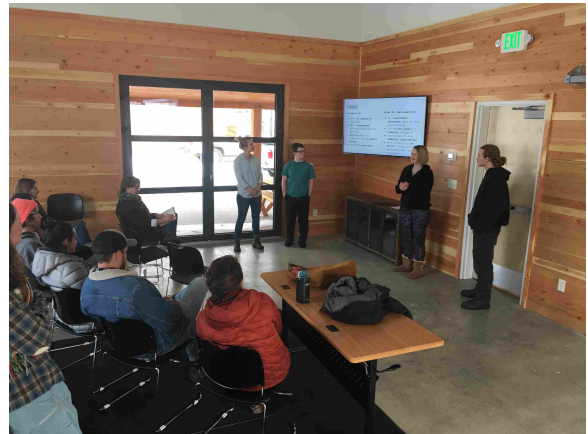
The various programs analyzed above all provide insightful elements about how to structure off-season programming, which activities and opportunities are meaningful to youth, and what resources are necessary to implement programming. Some of these transferable program opportunities that Garden City Harvest (GCH) could implement include: utilizing youth to recruit community gardeners, coordinating youth-led educational workshops to schools and the general public, hiring AmeriCorps interns and/or college-aged interns to mentor youth, integrating social justice workshops on issues that directly affect youth, creating value-added

products that teach entrepreneurial skills, and coordinating participatory action research projects that engage youth in social justice issues in their communities. In Chapter Four: Focus Groups: Findings and Recommendations, I provided short-term and long-term actions steps that outline how GCH could implement these program opportunities, with consideration to staff capacity and available funding. A resounding piece of advice that was expressed by the staff I interviewed was to listen to the needs and interest of the young people in order to develop innovative programming that is meaningful and relevant to their lives. The other youth programs who did this experienced youth becoming more engaged, thoughtful, and invested in the programming as they realized they could truly create change on a personal and community level. It seems highly possible that GCH could design and implement off-season programming that offers employment opportunities centered on food systems development, even in the winter months. With their current staff and a few additional interns, Youth Harvest and Youth Farm could create programming that advances the programs' goals of personal, vocational, and community development.

Chapter Four: Focus Groups: Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

Involving youth in the data analysis phase of this project proved to be very valuable because they provided deeper context to the focus group transcripts as we qualitatively analyzed them. Whereas I may have had one interpretation of the data, all three participants contributed their personal perspectives, which ultimately resulted in the



Youth presenting focus group findings and recommendations to Garden City Harvest staff. Photo Credit: Genevieve Jessop Marsh

development of programmatic recommendations that more holistically encompassed the needs of youth. The key findings regarding the strengths, areas of improvement, and a list of recommendations for future programmatic growth of Youth Harvest (YH) and Youth Farm (YF) are presented below. The identified strengths of the programs should be taken into consideration during program development conversations by Garden City Harvest (GCH) staff to ensure that the integrity of the programs is not lost. Youth identified aspects of the programs they enjoyed the least and that could be improved. The list of recommendations is a compilation of ideas gathered from the other youth programs studied, GCH staff, and the young people themselves. The recommendations section is separated into suggestions for winter programming opportunities and program funding strategies that involve youth (See Table 3: Overview of Findings and Recommendations for Youth Harvest and Youth Farm). Quotes from the participants are used throughout the report to provide context to their recommendations.

All participants consented to having their identifying information used throughout this report.

The chapter ends with my own personal recommendations of how GCH should implement action steps for both short-term and long-term program development of YH and YF.

Table 3: Overview of Findings and Recommendations for Youth Harvest and Youth Farm

Strengths of Programs	Areas for Improvement	Youth-Informed Recommendations
Created a supportive community	Providing more professional development opportunities	Implement a culinary program
Enhanced personal development	Expanding programmatic impact on the community	Building garden boxes for schools and residents
Strengthened professional skills	Offering year-round employment opportunities	Providing opportunities to attend conferences and field trips
Helped the Missoula community	Partnering with local organizations	Teaching gardening and food-related workshops led by youth for schools and residents
	Including youth representatives in ongoing program development	Conducting research and advocacy on local food issues
		Learning more advanced job readiness skills
		Including youth in community gardener recruitment for GCH
		Adopting a flexible winter program schedule

❖ *Strengths of Youth Harvest and Youth Farm*

“We all bonded from working on the farm together...those are some of the most amazing people I’ve ever met. We had fun too...we had huge water fights sometimes. It was so fun.”

Pride Old Dwarf, 17

➤ ***Created a supportive community:*** Participants valued the supportive community that formed between themselves and staff during the farming season. Youth found meaning and purpose within their work community. Through this experience, some youth were even connected to external resources in the community, such as counseling services and public assistance programs.

➤ ***Enhanced personal development:*** Participants experienced significant self-development through the course of the farm programs. They felt stronger, more capable, and confident as a result. More specifically, participants discussed how they learned to be independent leaders by training community volunteers on fieldwork tasks at the farms.

“I learned to advocate for my needs. I realized that things in my life are important, and that it’s ok to ask for help...you’re not being a burden by asking.”

Savannah Anderson, 17

“I learned to look for work that needed to be done. I guess you can say I now know what having initiative means.”

Zayne Sharrard, 18

➤ ***Strengthened professional skills:*** Youth valued the strong work ethic they developed as a result of working in challenging situations during the season. Through the mobile market, they practiced customer service, marketing, and money management skills by selling produce to senior residents. Youth appreciated learning the basic expectations of having a job: how to show up on time, communicate professionally, work with all types of people, and represent their place of employment with respect.

➤ ***Helped the community:*** Youth appreciated how the programs focused on helping others in the community. Such service made them feel part of something bigger than themselves and helped them realize they could have a positive impact on others. The youth especially enjoyed serving the community through the mobile market.

“Working at the [Missoula] Food Bank helped me improve my social skills and I got to see who was taking the produce I grew...it felt really good.”

Bridgitte Ball, 22

❖ *Areas for Improvement*

“I still don’t know how to write a good resume and I really want to learn that...also more training on improving my customer service skills since other jobs look for that.”

Savannah Anderson, 17

➤ ***Providing more professional development***

opportunities: Although there are some opportunities for professional development in YH and YF, the youth participants believe there is room for advancing these skills. They want more opportunities to practice their customer services skills and learn more about marketing, money management, and writing resumes.

➤ ***Expanding programmatic impact on the***

community: The youth feel the programs could have a greater impact on the Missoula community. Currently, the mobile markets only provide produce at senior citizens’ groups. Youth would like to expand the impact of their work to serve other populations in Missoula, such as people of low-incomes, people who are homeless, and/or people who are disabled.

“With mobile market, it mostly focuses on serving low-income elderly people. But there are a lot of people, like disabled people, who don’t have money or resources and need vegetables too.”

Bridgitte Ball, 22

“No place will hire me. I’ve applied to so many different fast food places and they won’t hire me [I think] because I’m only 17.”

Pride Old Dwarf, 17

➤ ***Offering year-round employment opportunities:*** Many of the participants discussed the challenges of finding reliable work in Missoula as a young person. Their experience working at GCH has been important in terms of earning their own money, yet also challenging since it is seasonal work. The participants agreed that it would be helpful if GCH offered employment positions in the winter season.

➤ ***Partnering with local organizations:*** The young people believe there are more opportunities to partner with other local groups in order to share resources. These partnerships could increase the diversity of experiences in the programs, especially during the winter months. For example, they suggested that GCH could partner with local chefs to host cooking classes for youth in the winter. Possible organizations to contact are: Empower Montana, Home ReSource, Missoula Food Bank, Missoula County Public Schools, and Opportunity Resources.

“Imagine if all non-profit organizations got together and like worked together. [Think] of how much we could do for our community. We could actually produce enough food in our community to support the entire city of Missoula without having to import anything.”

Jazmyn Saunders, 18

"I love telling my friends that I have a meeting to go to for the farm. It's such a cool subject that I get to help make changes to...I feel like a grown up right now."

Zayne Sharrard, 18

➤ **Including youth representatives in ongoing program development:** The participants were eager to continue conversations with GCH staff about the next steps for winter program development. They requested that one to two youth representatives be included in future staff meetings about program development in order to ensure that their voices and ideas help shape the youth programs. This opportunity would allow youth to gain more experience in non-profit management and program development.

❖ *Recommendations for Future Growth*

Winter Programming Opportunities:

➤ **Implementing a culinary program:** Since the River Road Farmstead has a certified commercial kitchen, GCH staff could coordinate cooking classes for the youth programs. GCH could host community meals where youth cook a farm-grown meal and community members buy tickets to provide income to the programs. Youth could also learn how to make value-added products to sell for profit in the community, thus strengthening their entrepreneurial, vocational, and customer service skills.

"I like the idea of making salsas and jams so we learn how to cook and also bring in money to the program."

Jesse Linton, 23

"I love the idea of garden boxes...I mean it's something we could make with Home ReSource!"

Zayne Sharrard, 18

➤ **Building garden boxes for schools and residents:** Youth could learn basic construction and garden design skills by building garden boxes for local residents and schools. The youth could coordinate the logistics of the project by designing outreach materials and hosting promotional events to sign up residents and schools for garden boxes. In doing so, they would develop their public speaking, leadership, and organizational skills.

➤ **Providing opportunities to attend conferences and field trips:** Youth could participate in regional and national conferences related to farming, food justice, and youth empowerment. These events would increase the sharing of information between GCH and other youth programs. During the winter months, youth could

"I think it's important to get out there and learn about what other people are doing and to teach people about what we do at Garden City Harvest. That way, we can have more ideas and make a better program."

Jesse Linton, 23

attend field trips to local farms, businesses, and organizations around Western Montana to meet local leaders in the sustainable food movement and learn from their experiences.

➤ **Teaching gardening and food-related workshops led by youth for schools and local residents:** Youth could advance their skills in public speaking and take on advanced leadership roles by facilitating gardening and food-related workshops for school classes and residents in Missoula. Youth would have the chance to be the experts in the knowledge they gained from the previous seasons. By impacting the lives of other young people, the youth may experience stronger self-worth, importance, and engagement in the program.

“It would be great to be part of something that is bigger than myself and be able to watch my actions make changes to other people’s lives. It would make me feel powerful when I see that happening. Give me a little power in my life would ya!”

Savannah Anderson, 17

➤ **Conducting research and advocacy on local food issues:** Implementing participatory action research (PAR) projects¹ in the winter could engage youth in deeper issues in the local community as they learn advanced research methods and critical thinking skills. Youth would also learn how to advocate for change through developing action plans or recommendations, and presenting them to officials in power. These projects could happen at an organizational, school, or community level, depending on available resources.

➤ **Learning more advanced job readiness skills:** Youth have expressed wanting more workshops specifically focused on resume writing, financial literacy, effective communication, and higher education preparation. GCH could partner with local organizations that have expertise in those subjects and have them facilitate trainings. These workshops could be implemented into the winter program since there is more time to focus on education than farm work. These workshops would support youth in becoming more confident and taking back more ownership of their lives.

“It would be nice to learn more ‘adulting’ skills, like how to write a resume, because I need help with that stuff.”

Jazmyn Saunders, 18

➤ **Including youth in community gardener recruitment for GCH:** GCH has a community garden program that connects residents to garden plots throughout Missoula. During the winter months, youth could help recruit and sign up gardeners for these plots. Youth would benefit from learning how to manage the recruitment process and working with community members. The youths’ efforts could relieve staff of coordinating this duty and help grow community gardens in Missoula by reaching a greater number of residents.

¹ See program summaries of FYI, GD, MAP, and Project EAT in Chapter Three for specific examples of PAR projects

“As a high school student, you’re getting a job to obviously make money. If you’re working four to five hours and only making \$60, it isn’t worth your time. More consistent hours would be nice.”

Jesse Linton, 23

➤ **Adopting a flexible winter program schedule:** Youth suggested the winter program could occur twice a week after school and several Saturdays, offering between 10-15 hours a week. Youth need adequate hours during the winter to earn enough money to justify their commitment, but they said working every Saturday would be too demanding for their school schedules.

Program Funding Strategies:

➤ **Involving youth in fundraising efforts:** Youth were interested in learning basic fundraising strategies to support the expansion of the programs. Youth could practice their public speaking and interpersonal skills through learning how to ask for donations from local organizations or businesses.

“I’m in student government and we have to do our own fundraising. I’ve learned that there are a lot of places around town that have money, but you need to know how to ask for it.”

Jazmyn Saunders, 18

“It would be super cool to make a food justice zine with weird carrot monsters and other veggie characters! I think people in Missoula would totally buy it...also making prints of farm-themed art would do really well too.”

Savannah Anderson, 17

➤ **Producing products for sale:** Youth had ideas about various products they could make during the winter that could be sold to raise money for the programs. Some of these ideas included: making farm-themed art prints, writing a food justice zine, and producing value-added products such as salsas and jams. These projects could produce an elevated sense of ownership of the programs in the youth as they become more invested in the business planning and creative design of the products.

➤ **Forming clubs at high schools:** Youth expressed an interest in forming clubs related to farming and food justice at their high schools to recruit other youth who may be interested in working for YH and YF. Additionally, the clubs could utilize the school’s fundraising platforms to raise money for donations to GCH. Youth would have the chance to be leaders to their peers as they share with them what they gained from being part of YH and YF.

Personal Recommendations and Action Steps

Taking into consideration the findings I gained from interviewing other youth programs, the information gleaned from the youth focus groups, and my academic background in youth empowerment literature, I formed a list of short-term and long-term action steps that I recommend GCH staff take as they move forward with developing the youth programs (See Table 4: Actions Steps for Youth Program Development).

Table 4: Actions Steps for Youth Program Development			
Short-term (1-2 years)	Resources Needed	Long-term (3-5 years)	Resources Needed
Implementing a winter culinary program	Partnerships with local chefs, small budget for basic cooking ingredients	Facilitating youth-led gardening and food-related workshops for schools and residents	Partnerships with school teachers and community groups, basic workshop supplies
Developing seasonal internship positions	Position descriptions, education credit	Coordinating youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects	Coordination with local partners, a strategic plan
Involving youth in GCH's community garden recruitment	Implementation plan	Conducting intermittent organizational assessments on youth-adult partnerships	Assessment guide, staff capacity for research
Providing more advanced job readiness workshops	Partnerships with local organizations		
Integrating social justice curricula	Develop lesson plans		
Including youth representatives in ongoing program development			

Short-term recommendations (1-2 year plan):

➤ Implementing a winter culinary program

By far the most popular program activity mentioned in the focus groups, starting a culinary program with access to the new commercial kitchen facility at the River Road Farmstead is the most feasible programmatic activity for the upcoming winter program. All of the youth expressed excitement and interest in taking cooking classes to develop their cooking skills in order to be more independent once they live on their own. These classes could be taught by local chefs, as done by some of the other youth programs I interviewed. They also liked the idea of hosting community meals with local chefs for the public as a way to generate funding for the programs. This type of community event was mentioned by several of the other youth programs as a tactic to expand their public presence in the community, highlight the work of local chefs, and to provide youth with an opportunity to present their work to the public, which would advance their public speaking skills.

Finally, the culinary program could also focus on developing value-added products such as salsas, jams, and other preserved foods. This is an idea that has been talked about by GCH staff and was brought up in the focus groups. Programs such as the South Plains Food Bank, Massachusetts Avenue Project, and Food What have implemented food entrepreneurial projects to teach business-related skills, such as product development, marketing, accounting, and customer service. This multidimensional activity could provide youth with more ownership and leadership in the programs as they become more invested in their business plans. GCH could partner with Missoula College's culinary program to utilize their educators and resources.

➤ Developing seasonal internship positions

While remaining committed to the youth programs' goals of personal, vocational, and

community development, I suggest that YH and YF consider developing seasonal internships for young adults by either recruiting past youth employees of YH and YF, students from the University of Montana or Missoula College, or Montana AmeriCorps volunteers. Ideally, hiring past youth employees of YH and YF would serve the greatest benefit to the programs since the alumni youth could mentor the new employees and experience advanced leadership roles in the programs. In the short-term, these internships could offer educational credit instead of an hourly wage to make the positions more financially feasible for GCH to create. As GCH secures more funding, I recommend they offer both an educational and financial stipend for the internships. Seven of the nine youth programs I interviewed spoke to how essential seasonal interns are to the execution of their programming. Having seasonal interns allows full-time staff to focus on the coordination of the programming, while the interns lead and supervise youth through daily work and activities. The youth also benefit immensely from having mentors who are closer to their age and who they can relate to about their life experiences, such as graduating high school, applying and going to college, getting their first jobs, etc. Thus, the youth programs staff at GCH could focus more on building community partnerships to increase the diversity of workshops and activities in the programs, as well as improving the quality of their own curricula.

➤ **Involving youth in GCH's community garden recruitment**

GCH manages the logistics of about 10 community gardens in Missoula each year. Part of their role is connecting community residents to available garden plots in the community. This could be a great opportunity to include youth in the gardener recruitment process by having them conduct outreach efforts in various neighborhoods of Missoula. Cultivating Community (CC) in Portland, Maine implemented this type of activity into their winter programming. Youth

helped create outreach materials, researched neighborhoods with low community gardener participation, and went door to door speaking to residents about how they could get involved in CC's garden plots. Through workshops on food justice, youth learned about how and why many people in their community struggle getting access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. This program opportunity could benefit GCH staff who are already doing community gardener recruitment by lessening their workload and, at the same time, providing youth with an experience to help others in the community become more food secure. Youth would be improving their public speaking and management skills, while also becoming more connected and invested in people in their community.

➤ **Providing more advanced job readiness workshops**

During the youth focus groups, the desire for more advanced job readiness trainings was a constant topic brought up by the participants. They discussed some of the vocational training they received in YH and YF, but ultimately felt that there should be a stronger emphasis on resume building, interview techniques, customer service, and money management skills. Additionally, many youth were interested in learning how to navigate higher education systems, such as applying for college and financial aid, enrolling in technical training institutions, etc. It may be difficult to increase the number of job readiness workshops during the spring, summer, and fall programs, since much of the time is dedicated to farm work. This action step may be better suited to implement into winter programming, and many of the youth programs I interviewed have made similar adjustments. The focus group participants liked the idea of GCH reaching out to more local organizations to host job training workshops such as the Human Resource Council, Missoula Federal Credit Union, Job Services, and University of Montana's Career Services. Since one of YH and YF's program goals is to increase

vocational skill development, it seems like a natural step to utilize the winter program for more intensive job training.

➤ **Integrating social justice curricula of relevant issues faced by youth**

Many of the youth programs that I interviewed have implemented social justice curricula that focus on relevant issues that affect the lives of youth and their communities. Grow Dat, in particular, facilitates trainings on food justice, racial equity, and gender issues to help spur critical learning among their youth employees about current social systems and policies that impact how people are treated based on a number of characteristics. YH has begun implementing some workshops that highlight social justice issues. YF has not yet included these types of trainings in their programming. This type of curricula should be prioritized in both programs because it enables youth to engage in deeper critical reflection of relevant issues in their lives, a core tenet of CYE theory, and empowers them to participate in developing solutions that challenge the root causes of social inequalities in their lives and in their communities. Ultimately, the implementation of social justice curricula would further advance the youth programming at GCH to be more empowerment focused and youth-centered.

➤ **Including youth representatives in ongoing program development**

Several of the youth who participated in the focus groups wanted to stay involved in the program development plans for YH and YF. We discussed possible ways to continue their involvement and they suggested that GCH staff invite at least two youth representatives to future staff meetings on program development. The youth hope that programmatic decisions will be more rich and relevant to future youth employees if youth voices are included in these ongoing conversations. This request was made to GCH staff at our presentation of the focus group findings and recommendations on February 22nd, 2018. Including youth as partners in

organizational meetings correlates with key dimensions of Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) theory that advocate for adult allies to elevate youth to actual positions of power in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Jennings et al. 2006). Empowerment of youth is the ultimate outcome of this power sharing since youth will have more capacity to take control over their lives and impact the social structures in their communities.

Long-term recommendations (3-5 year plan):

➤ **Facilitating youth-led gardening and food-related workshops for schools and residents**

This opportunity would allow youth to take what they learned about farming and food systems from previous seasons and teach others in the community the knowledge they gained. Similar to the work at Cultivating Community, Food What, and Project EAT, GCH could connect with local schools and community residents to host educational workshops on gardening and other food-related topics. Youth would improve their leadership, facilitation, and public speaking skills by creating workshop materials and teaching the workshops to others. Many of the youth from the focus groups said they wanted more experience in leading and teaching others; this is a great opportunity to impart more responsibility onto youth employees. This activity may be more of a long-term action step since GCH needs to identify and build relationships with teachers and community groups who would be interested in hosting and attending the workshops before youth begin coordinating the workshops.

➤ **Coordinating youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects**

This action step involves working with youth to identify issues in their lives or community that they believe need to be changed or improved. Typically, these projects start with youth conducting background research on an issue, surveying the community, and developing

recommendations or action steps to change local policies. Youth from the focus groups were interested in learning how to conduct research and help improve their community through advocacy and action. Many of the other youth farming programs have implemented YPAR projects as a way to get youth more invested in grassroots organizing and more empowered to make change in their own lives. Specifically, Grow Dat (GD) recently launched their Food Justice Project where youth conduct YPAR projects in collaboration with other local organizations whose work aligns with GD's mission. At the end of the program, the youth present their research and recommendations at a free community event. They also often lobby at the city level for policy reform on the selected issue. For GCH to start implementing this type of programming, they would need to build partnerships with other organizations in Missoula and make a strategic plan for how to facilitate the YPAR projects in the designated timeframe of the programs. Possible organizations to partner with include: Empower Montana, Home ReSource, Missoula College, Missoula Food Bank, and Opportunity Resource. This would require more involved program planning and coordination, which may not be possible in the immediate future.

➤ **Conducting intermittent organizational assessments on youth-adult partnerships**

In light of the current youth programming of YH and YF and staff interest in this evaluative project, GCH staff are clearly invested in developing authentic and equitable relationships with youth employees. In order to continue building on the youth programs at GCH, I believe it is necessary to conduct intermittent assessments of the organization's youth-adult partnerships to identify how GCH can further empower youth in the programs. There are many tools and resources available to help GCH conduct these evaluations efficiently and inexpensively. One program evaluation guide, *Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence: A Practical Guide*

for Program Assessment and Action Planning, is a free online resource that organizations can use to strengthen the quality of youth-adult partnerships and program opportunities for program participants, and identify key action steps to achieve their desired outcomes (Camino et al. 2004). I believe it is in GCH's best interest to continue enhancing their organizational approach to working with young people so they can keep providing exceptional personal, vocational, and community development for youth and the Missoula community.

Conclusion

Overall, the youth participants' employment experience working for Youth Harvest (YH) and Youth Farm (YF) was influential and meaningful. When discussing the strengths of the programs, the young people were filled with personal stories of their time working on the farms. The participants appreciated the supportive learning environment that formed during the growing season, as well as the amount of personal and vocational development they achieved through hard work and community service. It was clear from the focus groups that youth wanted more opportunities to stay involved with Garden City Harvest (GCH). As a research team, we recommended that GCH staff implement a variety of winter programming activities to increase the employment opportunities for youth, such as coordinating a winter culinary program, facilitating youth-led educational workshops, and providing more advanced job training workshops. These expanded opportunities are important because they provide critical support and mentorship to young people as they navigate the transition from high school to their next steps in life.

From my professional perspective, there are both short-term and long-term actions steps that GCH staff should consider when coordinating plans for the growth of YH and YF. In

the short-term, GCH could develop seasonal internship positions to help facilitate the youth programs, involve youth in the recruitment process of new community gardeners, implement a winter culinary program, coordinate more advanced job readiness workshops, integrate social justice curricula, and include youth representatives in further program development meetings with staff. These short-term action steps would provide more roles for youth to take on higher levels of responsibility and leadership, which would lead to youth being more engaged and invested in the mission of the youth programs. These action steps are feasible in the short-term because they do not require substantial funding or resources to implement and the current staff could most likely manage the additional program coordination. In the long-term, GCH could make efforts to build community partnerships with schools and residents so youth can facilitate garden and food-related workshops, as well as strategize how to support youth in designing participatory action research projects that relate to issues in their lives and the Missoula community. Finally, GCH could prioritize conducting intermittent organizational assessments to identify how to strengthen their youth-adult partnerships and program opportunities for youth. The long-term action steps would truly elevate the youth programming of GCH to a more empowerment-focused model where young people would be elevated to positions of influence in the organization, which would grow their self-worth and motivate them to continue making change in their communities.

Looking beyond the scope of this project, there are a few areas that I think more research is needed to understand the full impact of GCH's programs on youth. It would be valuable to learn about the long-term impacts on past youth employees of YH and YF, specifically how the programs' affected their employability. Do they feel the skills they learned in the programs prepared them enough to secure other jobs? If not, what elements were

missing or could have been enhanced to result in more employable youth? Additionally, I learned of a few past youth employees who started the programs but then decided not to complete the programs. I did not have the capacity to investigate why they chose not to continue the programs, but I did speak with one youth who informed me that she was unclear as to exactly what the position entailed until she started the program. She thought it was simply a job working on a farm, and was unaware of the other program elements such as the personal and vocational skill development aspects. I believe it would be valuable to speak to these other youth to find out their reasons for quitting the programs so that GCH can address any potential weaknesses or limitations of YH and YF.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Reflection

Young people in the United States are a very multifaceted population, many who are underserved by public support systems, and who face unique challenges as they navigate the transition between two worlds: one as a child and one as an adult. Current events in this country have brought youth issues to the forefront of the news cycles, such as the Parkland High School shooting in Florida, and some adults were even debating if it is



From left to right: Hannah Oblock, Zayne Sharrard, Jazmyn Saunders, and Jesse Linton. Photo Credit: Genevieve Jessop Marsh

possible for a group of teenagers to unite, organize, and coordinate a nation-wide movement against gun violence. Clearly, as a society, we are still questioning the capabilities of young people to be smart, passionate, and engaged individuals who care about their families, schools, and communities.

During my research on youth development and empowerment literature, I found that many scholars are having discussions about how adults can better support and work collaboratively with youth in order to help youth achieve more equitable and high-quality livelihoods. The associated academic frameworks, Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) theory and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), outline the dimensions that are critical to ensuring the transformation of our communities through working with young people in ways that cultivate individual-, inter-personal-, and community-level empowerment (Jennings et al. 2006; Ozer et al. 2013). CYE theory identifies key dimensions to achieving youth empowerment:

providing a welcoming and safe environment, cultivating meaningful participation and engagement, establishing equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, engaging youth in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes, involving youth in sociopolitical processes to affect change, and finally, integrating individual- and community-level empowerment (Jennings et al. 2006). Similarly, YPAR promotes the empowerment of young people by engaging them in the entire research process “from inception to dissemination” on issues where they have relevant life experiences (Funk et al. 2012:288). The goal is for youth to become empowered by their participation and to further engage in creating social change in their lives and in their communities.

Across the country, youth farming programs are emerging as an approach to involving young people in the sustainable development of their food systems and local communities. From working at various youth farming organizations over the past five years, I was amazed to see how powerful working with youth and adults on the land can be for the betterment of our bodies, our relationships, and our homes. From attending graduate school at the University of Montana in Missoula, I learned about Garden City Harvest (GCH) and the work the organization does with high school-aged youth on farms. This report is the result of the relationships I built with the youth development staff at GCH and my professional interests in developing youth-centered programming for teenagers.

This professional paper is meant to assist GCH in developing and expanding their two youth farming programs, Youth Harvest (YH) and Youth Farm (YF), to provide more empowering employment opportunities for youth. By taking a youth empowerment and participatory action research approach, I sought to involve past youth employees in evaluating how the youth programs impacted their lives and how GCH can expand their programming to better serve

youths' personal and professional needs. Many youth in the United States only experience programming that is meant to provide them with services, rather than valuing them as equal partners in the development of their communities. YH and YF want to provide more engaging opportunities for youth who typically do not have much control over their lives. Through qualitative data collection, I interviewed nine other youth programs from around the country to learn from their experiences working with young people on farms. I outlined elements of the nine programs' best practices and lessons learned that seemed applicable to the youth programming at GCH to help provide context to what other youth programs are doing around the country. By conducting focus groups with past youth employees from YH and YF, I learned about their perspectives of the programs' strengths and areas for improvement. In collaboration with three youth co-researchers, we developed a list of recommendations for how to expand the employment opportunities of YH and YF during the winter season to better serve the needs and interests of young people. We also made suggestions about how GCH could involve youth in program fundraising strategies and in future staff meetings on program development. Finally, I provided suggestions for short-term and long-term actions steps that GCH could take to implement the outlined program recommendations for YH and YF.

This project was my first experience utilizing the youth participatory action research (YPAR) framework. Throughout this journey, I learned many lessons from the youth I worked with, as well as gained deeper insight into what empowerment means and how to facilitate its process. I included multiple experiences in my project to engage the young people further than simply participating in the focus groups. As a research team of three, we analyzed the focus group data and developed recommendations for GCH. This aspect of the project was the most new to me, as I had to figure out how to involve youth in research methods, while sticking to a

deadline and maintaining a high level of academic integrity. Only two of the three youth researchers helped with the data analysis process, which made it easy to coordinate with them. All three youth researchers were involved in the presentation of our findings to GCH staff in February 2018. This was a great opportunity for the youth to express their perspectives and to be part of an organizational staff meeting. The youth researchers specifically asked GCH to include youth representatives in conversations about program development moving further, to which staff agreed. In April 2018, we will also be presenting our project findings to the public at the University of Montana's Graduate Research Conference. The youth are looking forward to sharing their achievements and participating in an official University event with other graduate students.

As the head researcher of this project, I learned that YPAR projects require more time than expected when involving multiple young people. The level of coordination, planning, and flexibility that the project required was challenging when official deadlines came into play. Looking back, I wish I had started this project during the spring of 2017 when youth were working in YH and YF. I could have established a more personal connection with them, which may have increased my recruitment of participants. I also would have been able to include the youth in more of the setup of the project, such as creating the research questions and methodology. The youth may have felt more ownership in the project and more investment in its execution.

From the youth researchers' perspectives, they enjoyed being included in this project because they had many opinions to share about their work experience with GCH. Zayne Sharrard, for instance, appreciated being involved in a project that he knew was going to make a difference in other youths' lives:

Living in Youth Homes, we are not given the opportunity to make change in the world. I'm supposed to focus on fixing my own life, not anything anywhere else. Kids are taught that the only way to change something is to learn as much as you can and go to college and then maybe you can make something happen. But kids are not given the chance to do something now for their community.

Zayne Sharrard, 18

From Jazmyn Saunder's perspective, this research project illuminated what is important to her in future job experiences:

Working with Hannah was an eye-opening experience. I learned more about my own values and the values I find in my work. I also felt driven to continue doing work that not only benefits me, but also benefits other kids and my community as a whole.

Jazmyn Saunders, 18

For Jesse Linton, he felt motivated by the work that other youth programs are doing across the country and he felt proud of the efforts that GCH is taking to empower youth:

I was thrilled to be part of the focus groups. I love being able to help an organization that has done so much for me. I loved learning about the other youth groups around the country. It is really nice to know that today's youth are interested in making their communities better, and it's wonderful to see that Garden City Harvest's youth development programs are moving in that direction too.

Jesse Linton, 23

Referencing back to the academic literature about youth development, participation, and empowerment, I felt this project was a practical application of CYE theory and the YPAR approach. Working with young people requires genuine interest between adults and youth. For the goals and objectives of these youth empowerment theories to be met, young people need to be truly elevated to positions of power in organizations where their voices are heard and respected. These approaches to working with youth need to become common practice in organizations, institutions, and communities so that young people have a real fighting chance to make a difference in their lives and in their communities. It should not be a special occasion when youth are asked to partner with adults on a project; it should be an expectation that

youth are included in decision-making processes as collaborators. I hope as Garden City Harvest continues to grow and enhance the local food system in Missoula that they continue to recognize the richness of the ideas and energy that young people bring to the table.

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Appendix A: External Youth Program Interview Guide

Youth Program/Organization: _____

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I am conducting interviews with similar organizations that work with youth on farms or in food system-related capacities. This interview will help inform a professional paper that I am writing for a nonprofit in Missoula, MT to help evaluate their youth farming programs. If it's ok with you, I will audio record this interview. Your identifying information will remain confidential if you so choose. Are you ready to start?

1. Let's start with you, what is your position at [organization]?
 - a. How long have you been in that position?
 - b. What are your duties?

Great, now I'm interested in learning about how youth are involved in your organization.

2. Please describe what programs, activities, and opportunities are available for youth at [organization]?
 - a. Probe: How long does the program run?
 - b. Probe: How many youth participate?
 - c. Probe: How many staff are needed to coordinate the program?

Alright, let's move on to talking about how your organization functions. These next few questions are about decision-making, program planning, and evaluation.

3. How does your organization make decisions about program development? As a team or by executive leadership?
 - a. Are youth involved in these processes?
 - i. If so, to what extent are they included in organizational meetings?
 - ii. If not, is there interest in finding ways to get youth more involved?
4. What are the levels of leadership and responsibility that youth can acquire through your programs?
 - a. Probe: How does your organizations manage its alumni youth once they can't work in the programs any longer?

5. When working with youth, what challenges has your organization faced?
 - a. Probe: In terms of program structure, program capacity, and financial stability of the program
6. When you think about your organization in the future, what ways do you think you could have a greater impact on young people?
 - a. What challenges might the organization have to overcome to meet these future goals?

Okay, moving on, I'd like to talk more specifically about the project I'm doing with Garden City Harvest and ask your advice on some of the challenges we are facing.

7. As I mentioned, GCH is brainstorming ways to provide more empowering opportunities for their youth, maybe by expanding their program into a winter session that focuses on food system knowledge, entrepreneurial skills, and other food related issues in the community. Do you have any experience developing off-season programming?
 - a. Probe: What advice do you have for designing a program during the farming off-season that is still centered on core issues of food and community?
8. Has your program experienced problems with youth retention?
 - a. Probe: How has it addressed this?
9. GCH works with a very specific population of youth who are in the foster care system, coming from drug court, or who attend the alternative high school. Does your program cater to a specific population of youth?
 - a. Probe: Why or why not?
10. If you had the necessary resources and capacity, what changes would you make to the youth program at _____?

Those are all the questions I have for you. Do you have any questions for me? Any final comments?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B: First Focus Group Guide

60-75 minutes, 2-3 activities

Opening (20 minutes):

Facilitator (F): I'm so glad you all could make it! I'm really excited to chat with you about your experience working for Garden City Harvest (GCH). Before we get started, can we go around and say your name, age, preferred pronouns, and your New Year's resolution? *(Questions will be written up on flipchart paper to help participants)*

Ice-Breaker: Names in the Air

F: Great! So now that we know each other a little better, I wanted to share some more information about what we are going to be doing tonight. Basically, we asked you all here to learn more about what it was like working on the farms at GCH, things you liked about the experience, things you would change or improve, stuff like that. I am going to use a recorder to capture all the great feedback you all come up with, but I want everyone to understand that what you say in this room is completely confidential and that I will only use the recordings to inform my report. If you don't want your name used in the report, I will change it. It's really important for all of us to feel comfortable and safe sharing personal things with each other. On that note, what are some other guidelines that you can think of that we might all agree on so that we can support each other and have a good discussion?

(Brainstorm with group some general group guidelines that everyone can agree to)

Introductory (15 minutes):

Main questions:

1. What did you like most about YH/YF
2. What skills did you learn that were useful or impacted you the most?
3. What activities, experience, lessons, were you the most interested in learning about?
4. How was the balance between farming, workshops, and working in the community?
5. To what degree were you able to take on leadership positions or more responsibility? Was that enough, would you have appreciated more?

F: To begin, we are going to partner up with the person next to us, and share 3-4 things that you liked most about working at YF and YH. After about 5-8 minutes, we are going to come back as a group and share some of those thoughts, and I'll write them up on the flipchart. Remember to think about why you liked those things so much. Ok great, let's make sure everyone has a partner and get started brainstorming.

(Group comes back together after time with partners, F has participants share back some of their discussions, and writes key topics/words on the flipchart. F encourages all participants to share their thoughts)

Probing Questions: What other activities did you enjoy doing? Either on the farm, in a workshop, or going out into the community? What skills did you develop that you are happy or proud about? Does anyone have something more to add to this list?

BREAK (5 Minutes)

Program Debrief (20 minutes):

Main questions:

1. What do you wish was different about the programs?
2. How do you think the programs could be improved?
3. What other experiences, opportunities, or skills would you like learn or do to make your experience more worthwhile?

F: For this next portion of the discussion, we are going to do some reflection on the ways that GCH could improve on their programs. To do this, each of you has a piece of scratch paper and a pen, and we are going to spend about 6-8 minutes writing down things that you wish were different about the programs, ways you think the programs could improve, etc. Once you have some thoughts generated on the page, I want you to crumble it up and toss it in the middle of our circle. Once everyone is done, we'll move on.

Ok, looks like everyone is finished. Let's all stand up and stretch for a second. Now, find a new seat in the circle. Ok, what we are going to do is, one-by-one, we are going to pick up a crumpled paper from the center and read out loud what is written down. There is no right or wrong suggestion and it would be great if the person who wrote the comment down were comfortable sharing more details with the group. I'll record the ideas and thoughts down on the flip chart so we can make a big list. As things get brought up, if the suggestion or idea is one that you also share, speak up to that too, maybe someone wrote something down that you also agree with but just didn't think of. It's really important that we focus on how these suggestions will help GCH and not only focus on what we disliked or had problems with.

(F manages the group dynamic through this activity and probes participants further if something is unclear or has yet to be said)

Ending (6-8 minutes):

Come back together as a group, have everyone stand.

F: Thank you all for participating this evening, I think we generated a lot of useful information that will be so valuable to GCH. Before we all head out, I wanted to end our session with a final activity. So for the next minute or so, think of a piece of advice that if you had the chance you would give to the coordinators of the programs (Tami from YH, Mark and Kaya from YF). Think

about all the ideas we've generated in the last hour and your own personal experience working on the farm. What's some advice you would tell them in one or two sentences for making next season even more successful. Take a moment to think and then we will close by each going around and sharing our piece of advice with the group.

(Encourage everyone to share. If someone is having trouble coming up with advice, come back to them and move on)

F: YES! Everyone, thank you so much for coming tonight! Your input is so important and will really help us improve the programs. If any of you are interested in being more involved in this research project, please come chat with me before you go. We are offering to pay those who are interested a stipend for the time they spend helping with the project. And it is great experience working on a research study, something you could put on your resume. There are lots of opportunities to get involved. Also, we are going to have a follow-up focus group in two weeks on (date, time, place). It would be really great if you all could make it, and we will have a free lunch and monetary gifts of appreciation for those who complete both focus groups. Before you go, please make sure to grab a Good Food Store gift card from (the assistant) and some of the leftover food!

Appendix C: Second Focus Group Guide

120 minutes, 2-3 activities

Opening (5-8 minutes):

Play game called Don't Look: participants stand in a circle and look down. At the count of three, everyone look up at one person, and if you lock eyes with the same person, you both are out.

Introduction (10 minutes):

F: Welcome back everyone! I hope everyone is full from the delicious meal and ready to start brainstorming. For today's discussion, we are going to build off some of the ideas we generated last meeting about the strengths and weakness of the YH and YF programs.

Let's remember what our group guidelines are before we begin. *(Review flipchart of the group guidelines)*. Is there anything we need to add to this list since our last meeting? Ok, let's get started.

GCH is interested in ways that it can improve or grow the youth programs to include more employment opportunities for youth, as well as more educational and skill development opportunities. Over the course of the last few weeks, I have been doing some research of other youth farming programs and what they are doing that is different or unique from GCH. For tonight, I want to share some of these ideas with you all to help us think about how GCH could grow its programs.

Activity (20 minutes): Voting by Stickers

F: Ok, you'll see that I have a few flip chart papers posted around the room. Each paper or station provides a summary of a youth farming program I interviewed with descriptions of some of the employment opportunities offered to youth. We are going to go to each station and talk a little bit about the programs. As you can see, there is also blank flipchart paper. These blank sheets are here for you to write down some of your own ideas about what GCH could start or include in their programs. We will all walk around and spend about 15 minutes total in this activity. You also have stickers. Please put stickers by ideas that you think are interesting, this is known as voting by your sticker. *(During activity, facilitator walks around and answers questions, makes sure everyone is participating, and offers help if needed)*.

BREAK (10 minutes)

Debriefing Activity: (20-25 minutes):

As a group, debrief the following questions:

- What stood out to you about these programs? Why?
- What aspects do you see being transferable to YH and YF?

Transition into thinking about what programmatic activities could be transferable to GCH. Remind participants about the mission of GCH and the youth programs, as well as the new River Road Farmstead.

- *GCH Mission*: To build community through agriculture by growing food with and for people with low incomes, offering education and training in ecologically conscious agriculture, and using our sites for the personal restoration of youth and adults.
- *Youth Programs' Mission*: Youth programming that enhances vocational, personal, and community development
- *River Road Farmstead*
 - Commercial kitchen
 - Conference room-meeting/educational space

Potential Questions for Program Visioning Process:

- What schedule seems realistic for a winter program? Saturdays? After school? Once a week? Twice a week?
- What skills are most important to focus on learning in the winter?
- What activities, workshops, or opportunities could be possible?

Closing (10 minutes):

Thank you all so much for participating! Your work is essential to helping GCH create more empowering employment opportunities for future youth employees.

Moving forward:

- What recommendations do you have for GCH staff as they plan to expand the program?
 - How should they plan to keep youth involved?
- How can we showcase the work you've accomplished here in the focus groups?
 - A certificate of completion or volunteer hours?
 - Writing up a story in the GCH newsletter or talking to the local newspaper
 - Grad Conference in April