

Polly Watson
Summer 2019

Grow-a-Row for Neighbors Summer Fellowship Report

This summer I expanded a program that I co-founded three years ago called Grow-a-Row for Neighbors. We encourage people to grow an extra row of produce in their gardens, and then donate it to us when they harvest it.

The purpose of the program is to make healthy local food accessible to low income residents of our community. We have a table at the Truro Farmers' Market where we began our program, and this year began running a table at the Wellfleet Farmers' Market as well. The donated vegetables are dropped at our table and then we have a volunteer come pick them up and drive them to the local pantry. We also expanded further up-Cape to Harwich, through the help of two highschool volunteers.

The biggest challenge was getting the word out to people about planting the extra row in their gardens. I hung posters around the towns in the beginning of the growing season and received many more donations of actual produce than in past years. We also accept cash donations that we use to buy from the farmers at the end of each market, so that tourists or people without gardens can contribute. This method has been the most popular mode of donation in the past, and was again this year. The program itself also did much better than in the past, bringing more than 240 pounds of fresh produce into the local pantries. This fellowship enabled us to more than quadruple the amount of local fruit and vegetable donations over prior years.

The fellowship exceeded my expectations, both in what it taught me about myself and the skills I acquired and improved. Working on expanding Grow-a-Row, and seeing visible effects in my community has helped me realize my passion for helping others. This enthusiasm is something that I already saw in myself, but did not quite understand the extent to which it influences my interests and decisions. It was very fulfilling to hear food pantry volunteers say that my work was really making a difference to people, and that those who shop in the pantries were now gravitating towards the healthier options offered there. The fellowship also allowed me to gain experience in organizing a smoothly running program and coordinating volunteers.

I feel that the discovery and improvement of these skills opens many doors for me that I had previously not been aware of in terms of future jobs or opportunities that I may be offered. I enjoyed my work this summer and felt it was meaningful and important. I hope to incorporate elements of what I learned expanding Grow-a-Row for Neighbors into my life going forward.