

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.

Addendum- Summer Reflection Question responses:

I hope to connect with at least 20 working professionals over the course of my summer. I'm working for Sustainable CAPE, a non profit on Cape Cod that focuses on local food and educating about the health of the community and environment. The staff is pretty limited, so I anticipate becoming very close with them as time goes on. The program that I am working on, Grow-a-Row for Neighbors, involves collecting fresh local produce and delivering it to the surrounding food pantries. We collect at two farmers markets every week, and also have organized volunteers to pick up food further up Cape to bring to a pantry there. Through this program I will interact with many different kinds of working professionals, from the food pantry staff to farmers. I am looking forward to working with a variety of people to gain insight into different lifestyles.

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Response 2:

My motivation for doing things that I am passionate about is helping other people. It is very important to me that the people around me in life are happy, and I try to do whatever I can to make that happen. This motivation applies to both my friends and family, and whatever general community that I happen to find myself in. This is what led me to create Grow-a-Row for Neighbors, which provides assistance and support to locals with low incomes, as well as the local farmers.

Response 3:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L86gQQBYSc4>

This song is always able to make me feel better after a bad day. I grew up on Cape Cod, and when I was little, my dad would always play a Neil Young cassette on our drives to the beach. There were a bunch of songs that I liked on the tape, but this was always my favorite that I would ask to hear each time. It always brings back fond memories from when I was younger and life was simpler, and has a calming effect when I'm in a bad mood.

Response 4:

Grow-a-Row's mission statement could read: "Connecting local produce with community members in need."

This mission is necessary because many of the locals on Cape Cod are considered low income. Farmers' markets are notoriously expensive, so many locals cannot do much of their

shopping there. However, the health of each member of a community is important, and our program allows people who can't afford to shop at local farmers' markets to have access to fresh local food, which is much healthier than the food generally found in a food pantry.

Response 5:

The most transformative experience that I had through my fellowship was going into one of the food pantries that we work with and speaking with one of the workers there. She said that she could see a visible change in the choices that people were making when shopping there. Due to the increase in fresh produce in the pantry, she said that people were shifting away from the ramen and canned goods that had been popular before, and towards the local food. This was in part due to the increased availability, as well as the fact that people were becoming more comfortable with how to cook and prepare various kinds of produce. The experience was transformative for me because it was the first time that I had seen how our program was positively affecting the community "at the source". This information backed my enthusiasm for the work, and motivated me to work even harder to get more produce into the local pantries.