

LFS 350 Final Community Project Report: Herb Garden Program Enhancement

Group 8

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Introduction

Ever feel as though you are missing that one ingredient for completing the perfect home cooked meal, or have friends coming over that you are trying to impress but missing that little touch of flavor? Imagine having the ability to walk down your street and being able to obtain that missing ingredient free of charge. This option is available and already being implemented in some communities globally and can be seen in the city of New York (Gregory and Leslie 2016). Locations which allow a community to come and freely interact by obtaining different herbs and produces they need are referred to as community gardens (Houlberg 2014). Locally these gardens can be found in the West End of Vancouver which are currently set up by Gordon Neighbourhood House (GNH).

GNH is a non profit organization who recruits volunteers to help implement different community projects and events in hopes of creating a close knit community, (Gordon Neighbourhood House, 2017). One of their programs, which our group was assigned to, was their



Figure 1. The locations of the 10 herb gardens set up by GNH (J. Liu, personal communication, October 20, 2017).

community Herb Gardens.

GNH has 10 herb gardens scattered in different locations of the West End area. These herb gardens are put in place for members of the community to come and freely harvest fresh herbs to bring home for their cooking needs. A community garden which allows for community members to freely interact with is a beneficial system which promotes food literacy in urban cities. Urban cities are usually distant from agricultural lands and often create a barrier with one another. Members in urban city areas usually hold a non-agricultural job creating a feeling disconnected relation with farming and agriculture (Rutledge et al., 2011). Having the community gardens implemented within the West End of Vancouver allows for individuals to have hands-on experience and be up close to sources of nutrients. Through working with the community gardens, the community bond can be strengthened and community members can benefit from having better mental health and personal wellness (Bellows, 2004).

Although the implementation of these gardens seems appealing, they are unfortunately not receiving the attention GNH wishes to achieve. The gardens are currently receiving little interaction and its full potential is not being utilized. There is also an issue of misuse through vandalism and theft of some plants. Our goal for the Herb Garden project was to improve the community's engagement with these gardens by first identifying the underlying issues that inhibit their interactions. Our approach was by interviewing the community members and developing a new sign for the herb boxes to better foster interaction between the two.

Methods

Since our project is highly based on the behaviours and opinions of the members in the West End community, surveys and interviews were used as our approach for data collection. Firstly, in order to understand the frequency and how community members interact with the gardens, an online survey was designed and distributed to the volunteers who care and maintain the gardens. Survey questions can be seen in appendix. After that, interviews with the community members were conducted beside herb box #7, which is one of the box with a higher foot-traffic. Questions being asked include, “have you heard of or noticed these herb gardens before?,” “did you know that these herb gardens are free for anyone to use?” and “have you ever harvested from the gardens?”. Tea samples were prepared with the mint harvested from the herb boxes and they were offered to the interviewees in efforts to showcase how herbs can be used. Following the survey and interviews that we have conducted, a new signage for the herb boxes was designed and proposed to our community partner. The new sign was designed to be more visual-based and eye-catching, as well as providing clearer instructions on the proper way to harvest the herbs.

Quantitative data was collected from the online survey, while qualitative data was obtained through on-site interviews. The survey questions which were given to the volunteers targeted to obtain information on the frequency of interactions between community members and the garden boxes. Volunteers were also asked to provide some suggestions on the enhancement of the herb boxes in order to make improvements that are in line with the community needs. On the other hand, the interview questions were mainly focused on the community’s knowledge and usage

of the garden boxes, as well as their comments and feedbacks on the herb garden program.

Results

From the survey that was sent out to the volunteers we received some very helpful information. The volunteers who responded to our survey gave us insightful advice by commenting a need for a clearer sign with instructions on how to harvest the herbs. The volunteers also mentioned issues with vandalism and theft that they have witnessed.

From our interviews with the community, we became aware that many people were unfamiliar with the herb gardens. According to our data (Figure 2), 21 out of 31 interviewees (68%) were unaware of the herb gardens, and for the 10 interviewees (32%) who were aware of the gardens, most of them thought the gardens were privately owned and the herbs were unavailable for public usage, therefore had never utilized them.

The Awareness on the Existence of Herb Boxes in the West End Community

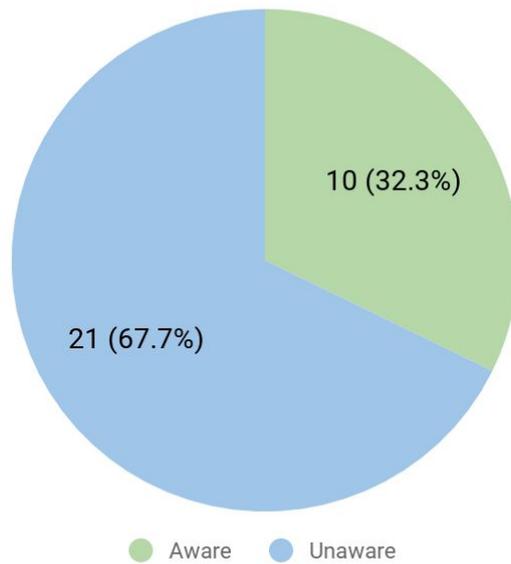


Figure 2. Number of community members who were interviewed (n=31)

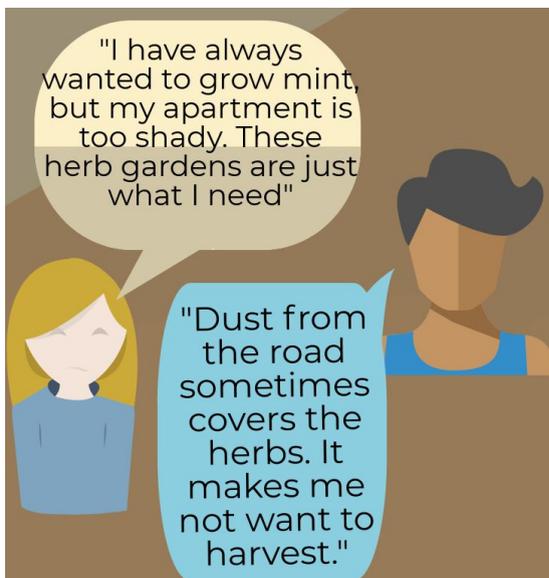


Figure 3. Comments received from the community regarding the herb boxes.

Discussion

After conducting on-site interviews with the community members in the West End, our group has identified the level of interactions between the community members and the herb gardens, along with some potential changes to be made on the gardens. Over half of the community members were unaware of the existence of the herb gardens, indicating the lack of community engagement and knowledge. Amongst those who were aware of the gardens, less than half of them has actually interacted with the gardens, signifying the shortage of knowledge on how to interact with the garden in the West End community.

Through the interviews, we realized that most of the community members were interested in interacting with the gardens, but they thought the herb gardens were privately owned by the residents nearby and were not sure how to engage with them properly. Using the asset-based community development, we focused on a positive change for the community (Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G., 2003). Taking into account the inputs from our community partner through face-to-face meetings and volunteers using an online survey, we drafted a sign with increased visuals of the different herbs and steps to harvest. This will hopefully allow the community members to harvest properly with respect, and not alienate any new herb garden users.

Through improving the community awareness on the herb gardens, we hope that more people will understand how to interact with the gardens and utilize the

herbs, which could improve community relationships, knowledge, health (Guitart, D., Pickering, C., Byrne, J., 2012), and ultimately food literacy.

One of the limitations of our project is time constraint. Due to the limited time, we were not able to obtain much response from the herb box volunteers through the online survey. Also, we only conducted an in-person interview with the community member at one box location, which may limit the number of inputs we have received. In addition, due to the weather condition, our group was not able to implement some of our ideas into the project, such as painting the herb boxes to raise the awareness of the community members and differentiate the boxes from privately owned ones.

Conclusion

Through the project, we were able to gain a better understanding on how members of the West End community perceive the herb gardens. We found that a large portion of the community was unaware of the existence of the gardens and therefore did not utilize them. Based on the responses we received from both the survey and interviews, we have successfully identified some of the contributing factors inhibiting the use of the herb gardens as well as clarified some uncertainties that GNH had on the herb boxes.

Although we have designed a new signage as an approach to one of the issues, the effectiveness of it has still yet to be assessed. There are also other challenges that we have not had the chance to specifically address due to time constraint, such as the effect of the box locations on the growth of the herbs and vandalism. We hope that future CBEL projects can continue the herb garden

enhancement program by developing strategies that will address those specific issues. We recommend creating a barrier for the herb boxes from getting dusts from the road or relocating it to areas that can support their growth better. Moreover, having a proper label or sign for each herb plant would be helpful for users to identify the herbs. We also suggest students to send out online surveys earlier or attempt to conduct face-to-face interactions with the volunteers to maximize the amount of data obtained. In addition, the interview can be conducted at different box locations, so that a larger variety of comments within the community can be captured.

The herb boxes are great assets for West End community to use and enjoy. However, to maximize its potential, improvement on the herb boxes to support plant growth as well as its accessibility to users needs to be refined.

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APPENDIX A - Critical Reflections

Student 1

The CBEL project has been an amazing opportunity for me to be able to implement the knowledge gained from lectures and reading into a real-world setting. Our group worked hand in hand with Gordon Neighborhood House (GNH), and our community partner Joey to improve the awareness of community members on herb boxes from GNH. I would say our project was successful and Joey managed to get some good insight on the community's mind. From this project, I not only better understood how neighborhood houses work and function, but also how community members approach community gardens. Furthermore, I gained skills such as collaboration, efficiency, and time management. I have also learnt the importance of keeping a constant update flow between group members, our TA (Susanna) and Joey. By having a constant flow of idea exchanges and updates, there will not be any tension between members and the project will proceed more favorably. The flexible learning hours also gave us an avenue to meet up and discuss about the project and do meetups with Joey. Finally, the most important lesson I learnt from this project is that having a well laid out outline and proposal is very important. This is because, we had a little more freedom on our approach to the project compared to the other groups. As a result, we felt that it would be best to just do things step by step. Looking back, having a better thought out plan on our methodology and the kind of result we are aiming to achieve could have led to a better team atmosphere. All in all, the experiences I gained throughout the project are memorable and I would do it again if I had the chance to.

Student 2

Our CBEL project with GNH provided me a valuable experience in community work, which is also beneficial for my future study and career path. Although we have encountered different challenges such as uncertainty, unexpected changes in our project, and time constraint, this project really provided me with a lot of great stories to tell in the future.

Through creating our project proposal, blog posts, and creating an infographic, I have gained a lot of knowledge on how to better express our ideas to the public in a professional way. Although it was quite difficult to excel in everything that was new for me in such a short period of time, it was a really great opportunity to learn how to self-motivate and self-reflect from time to time in order to get the most out of the course.

After completing the course, I have learnt a lot about food justice. This project allowed me to see some issues happening in the community and implement what I have learnt in class to help solving these problems. For example, we identified that herb gardens can affect the food literacy of the community members, and that was where we started with our project objective, which was to teach the community how to better utilize herbs in their daily lives.

Moving forward, I hope our project can provide useful information and insights to future groups who are working on the herb garden enhancement program. Although we may not have accomplished much during this term, I believe that our findings and data are crucial for the community.

Student 3

Our CBEL project with Gordon Neighbourhood House has been an amazing learning opportunity. Not only was I able to learn about neighbourhood houses and all the great programs and support they provide but I was also able to learn how to deal with conflict and real life challenges that go along with working on projects in the community.

Through the course of the project I learned a lot about making project proposals and communicating professionally with our community partner Joey. Our project proposal was very hard to write as none of us had ever written one and we were all full of ideas which most of them we were not able to accomplish due to time restraints and weather conditions. Our community partner was very good at explaining our project with us and gave us a lot of freedom for what we could do with it.

Through this project I have learned more about food literacy and how by teaching people about for example the herb gardens they are able to harvest their own food and hopefully spread the message to other people in the community.

Student 4

The overall CBEL project was really rewarding and memorable for me personally. In the beginning, I thought that the whole project would involve a lot of planting herbs and learning how to grow them. However, I discovered that the project has a more meaningful context revolving around the idea of community assets and its importance for community growth. This idea is something that is not very common from where I come from. I was also particularly interested in how Gordon neighbourhood house created its charitable initiatives with the aim to eliminate stigma of receiving charity and encourage a more welcoming community for anyone who needs help. This has helped me to see how we can help achieve food justice for everyone. Overall, Joey and GNH have taught me that more than just helping others in need by giving out food, we can contribute more to their long term well being by educating and welcoming them to be a part of the community.

Aside from the knowledge that I have gained from the experience, I have also grown as a individual. Our journey working together as a group was not a smooth sail. There are conflicts and challenges that we have faced over the course of the project. I learned that the key in maintaining a good teamwork is to have a clear and open communication with each other. Also, setting a fair division of work is something that I feel need to be strongly addressed in future group projects.

Student 5

The CBEL project is something that I have not experienced before, and probably will never have a chance to experience again in the future. It was a great opportunity to work with a community partner, and design methods to enhance the program based on the community needs. At first, judging from the topic, I thought our project was mainly about harvesting and farming herbs. However, after diving into our project I realized it was more community-based, more planning and promoting to the community members.

Through the project and the course, I learned a lot more about food justice. Getting outside and exploring communities allowed me to address some community-based issues and try solving it with knowledge I gained in classrooms. It was challenging yet sometimes upsetting, to know that certain problems would need a longer time to be solved.

This experience makes me reflect on myself, as a city resident, am too careless about our own community. Most of us are too busy focusing on our lives and neglect what has always been available to us; therefore the resources are always put to waste. Also, the project strengthened my group-working and communication skills, which I am highly thankful for.

Student 6

Working with the Gordon Neighbourhood House community has allowed me to realize the importance of food and its community. This, for me, means being able to bring an entire community closer to one another through different ways involving food. Some examples regarding the herb gardens from GNH are; being able to have conversations on how harvest herbs, learning recipes from one another or even maintaining the gardens as a community. All these different aspects community gardens have help create an engaging atmosphere for all ages to learn agricultural practices. Having the opportunity to assist GNH with their herb gardens has shown me that although we may all come from different situations and backgrounds, food is something we can all share in common. The herb gardens which our project involves allows anyone in the community to freely gather what they need. This concept was new to me before starting this project, after the course of my time spent with the herb gardens I feel appreciative of GNH's efforts in implementing the herb gardens and its accessibility.

Our time allotted for our project was brief, both GNH and myself have taught each other valuable lessons to move forward with. By being able to supply GNH with data from we collected from community members on the herb gardens, they will hopefully be able to make use of our given information and improve future projects to come. For myself I was taught that even though things may not come out the way they were planned, there is always another path to get to that destination.

APPENDIX B - Online Survey for Volunteers

QUESTIONS RESPONSES 2

Herb Garden Enhancement Program

Description (optional)

How often do you see people interact with the gardens ? *

- 0-3 people per day
- 4-7 people per day
- 8-11 people per day
- 12 + people per day
- Other...

How often do you visit the garden? *

- Once a day
- 3 times a week
- 2 times a week
- Once a week

Have you ever witnessed people improperly using the garden? *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

⋮

If yes, how?

Long answer text

Do you have any suggestion or comments to improve people's awareness and interaction with the garden? *

Long answer text