

Briarpatch Garden Project

Winter 2020



With Gratitude...

Kidlinks World and Briarpatch Youth Services are appreciative of the ongoing support from PLATO that has allowed us to continue our cooperative work with vulnerable young people in Dane County.

The garden project has expanded in the last year, enabling more youth to engage in the important work of growing food, learning agricultural skills, and making a difference in the

community through produce donations to a local food pantry. With the continued support from PLATO, we have been able to develop the project in three meaningful ways:

1. We have expanded the number of young people and programs that we partner with to two. We are still working with [*Briarpatch Youth Services*](#) and have now added youth from [*The Grow Academy*](#), which is based in Oregon, Wisconsin.
2. We hired garden coordinator, Reum Currie, to assist with the project and be a role model for the young people.
3. Finally, *Briarpatch* has an employee, Matt Rosen, to accompany teens to the garden every week. Matt loves to garden and having him as a supervisor has been helpful with consistency in staffing as well as with productivity in planting, weeding, and harvesting.

The Impact

In the summer of 2019 we began working with youth in *The Grow Academy*. *The Grow Academy*, a part of the state's Division of Juvenile Corrections, is "a residential program offering comprehensive treatment for County and State supervised youth as an alternative to incarceration as well as a step down for youth returning to the community." One aspect of *The Grow Academy* is its agriculture-based educational program, which is the connection to our garden project.

Working with *Briarpatch* and *The Grow Academy* youth groups, we saw both the garden and the children flourish. When they first arrive at the site, the young people claim that they don't like to work in a garden. Yet often by the time they leave it is obvious that they have enjoyed themselves. In essence, "They arrive with a scowl and leave with a smile." Working in the garden broadens their perspectives. The garden project has had an exceptionally positive impact on one young man in particular. He has now graduated from *The Grow Academy* and is working hard to turn his life around.

Some of *Briarpatch's* student interns have worked on farms and love to garden. They are knowledgeable, energetic, and inspiring to the youth they bring to the project. Reum Currie, our garden coordinator, is also an inspiration to these young people. He is personable, has good leadership qualities, and is an excellent gardener. He usually brings music and a soccer ball, the latter of which everyone kicks around in the last 10 minutes of their time at the garden. It is a reward for all that was accomplished. Reum's relationship with the young

man from *The Grow Academy* (mentioned above) was impactful to his success and ability to graduate. We look forward to having Reum return for the 2020 season to help us expand the gardens and work with more students.

Our impact has also been measurable. In the 2019 season we harvested and donated **1,210 pounds** of fresh produce to the River Food Pantry – in spite of some difficult challenges. The extremely wet weather meant that some crops (e.g., corn) were not able to be worked into the fields on time. We also faced losses due to wildlife; woodchucks and deer ate down the green beans, beets, sweet potatoes, and Swiss chard. Therefore, we had to install fencing to save the remaining crops. Nevertheless, the feedback from the pantry was positive. They love the diversity of fresh produce that we deliver. In addition to a variety of vegetables, we provide unusual foods such as lemongrass, okra, celeriac, parsnips, a wide range of pepper varieties, and heirloom tomatoes.

Additionally, we worked with over 50 young people from *Briarpatch* and *The Grow Academy* during the 2019 growing season. The consistency with their supervisors helped significantly in forming and maintaining good relationships.

“They arrive with a scowl and leave with a smile.”



Education

We continue to educate youth on sustainable gardening techniques, proper garden tool use, pest identification, and appropriate harvesting methods. We share with them the importance of global access to food, allocation of the workload in farming, and the value of having a healthy diet. The students need to work together to plant, weed, harvest, and clean the produce that goes to the food pantry. Therefore, they also learn teamwork skills. The outcome is a sense of accomplishment once they have filled the crates with all the prepped vegetables, herbs, and even some flowers.

While learning about various agricultural topics, the students also learn about the projects in South Africa in which Kidlinks World is involved, including an urban farming project in Alexandra township and a school garden in a rural village.





After being part of the garden project in 2019, one Grow Academy youth requested the opportunity to shadow workers at Avant Gardening and Landscaping, a business that provides the land for the garden project. We were able to arrange this for him.

Funding

PLATO Funds Disbursement

	Garden Year #1 2017-2018	Garden Year #2 2018-2019	Garden Year #3 2019-2020
Balance Forward			\$637.60
PLATO Grants	\$2,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$2,000.00
Seeds & Plants	\$397.82	\$793.25	
Tools & Supplies	\$1,122.31	\$431.65	
Stipend for intern/mentor	\$979.87	\$1,137.50	
Total Expenditures	\$2,500.00	\$2,362.40	
Available Funds	0.00	\$637.60	

Growing Forward

With the growing number of youth involved in the garden project, there is a need for more supervision. In addition to having Reum Currie return for the 2020 season, it would also be incredibly helpful to have another garden intern/mentor involved.

We plan to expand the garden and add more perennial crops, such as berries, rhubarb, and asparagus. In order to protect some of the crops from deer and rabbit damage, we will need to invest in additional hoops and fencing in some areas.

As the number of young people involved grows, we will need a few more tools so no one has to sit out when there is work that can be accomplished.

We would like to invite supporters of *Kidlinks*, *Briarpatch*, and *The Grow Academy* to see the work that we are doing. To that end, we are planning to host a garden tour on July 29, 2020. Please join us!



Kidlinks garden coordinator, Reum Currie.