



New Roots Community Farm

Environmental Justice Case Study

Summary

The New Roots Community Farm is a bright spot of green among the busy streets of City Heights. Created in 2009 by the International Rescue Committee, it is now operated by the City Heights Community Development Corporation but is largely upkept by community volunteers. As a host to over 80 gardening plots, the farm provides community members with the opportunity to cultivate and grow fresh and healthy food to either eat at home or sell at local Farmer's Markets.

Like the Mount Hope Community Garden, New Roots is much more than just a garden and offers gardeners a way to earn supplemental income. In addition, the farm largely serves immigrants and refugees in the area – facilitating therapeutic time in nature and quality time to connect with the community, while sharing and using cultural practices to cultivate food.

The success of the project in enhancing the City Heights community has been praised by former First Lady Michelle Obama, who visited the farm in 2009. The federal recognition highlights the value in these community spaces and is reflective of the value of places

Drivers and Funding

The New Roots Farm was brought to fruition by the International Rescue Committee as part of a program to enhance economic security among the organization's refugee stakeholders. The program encourages self-sufficiency through growing and selling food, which in turn provides options to people who have less access to grocery stores, farmers markets, and other healthy food outlets.

The IRC used the California Endowment, a funding source from the Building Healthy Communities state initiative, to lease an empty city lot on 54th street in Southeastern San Diego. With the help of various partners and gardeners themselves, people are able to grow food for themselves and to share with family and surrounding neighbors. Funding allows City Heights CDC administrators, gardeners, and volunteers to not only maintain the Farm but also make enhancements to improve efficiency and sustainability. For example, the group was able to build a greenhouse which has allowed gardeners to reduce their cost by providing the opportunity to grow crops from seedlings on-site. Other elements of the Farm, such as a palapa and outdoor furniture, are used to create an environment that welcomes members to spend time in the garden, for their own enjoyment, or to join community gatherings. Through gardening at New Roots, immigrants

and former refugees are able to keep cultural traditions alive, while experiencing peace and solace. It is a place where people can step out of the stress of their everyday lives and immerse themselves in an experience of joy and purpose.

Health and Environmental Concerns

New Roots Community Farm primarily addresses health concerns by allowing City Heights residents to grow and buy fresh produce, increasing the amount of healthy food that is available in the neighborhood. People can choose nutritious food options instead of relying extensively on unhealthy options like fast food restaurants or convenience stores. This can help avoid negative health outcomes that are associated with unhealthy food such as diabetes, high cholesterol, and obesity.

New Roots Community Farm is also an example of a thriving urban greenspace that contributes to the health of locals and the environment. Plants and trees from the Farm create cooler temperatures and remove pollutants from the air to create a hospitable environment for physical activity. The space also serves as a natural protector of the adjacent Chollas Creek Watershed. Overall, the Farm supports the local ecosystem by protecting the habitat of native plants and absorbing stormwater while facilitating time outdoors, which has been linked to mental health and overall well being.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The people supporting New Roots Farm have met challenges with strength and perseverance. The City Heights CDC is challenged by a lack of steady funding for the Farm. Because of this, gardeners and volunteers put in their own time, effort, and money to operate the project in lieu of a full-time paid staff. People continue to maintain the space because of the value it brings to their lives. For many gardeners, it is a second home and a lifeline. Other neighbors and community members wish to participate as gardeners but are unable to because of the limited size of the property. The number of families and individuals interested in gardening at New Roots far outnumbers the plots that are available. This has prompted the City Heights CDC to oversee a competitive application process for people who are interested. The ability to garden at the New Roots Farm is a coveted asset in the City Heights Community for economic security, mental health, and overall well-being. This is shown by the high demand for membership and by the commitment from existing members to preserve it.





Outcomes

The New Roots Community Farm serves to enhance the overall health and well-being of immigrants and refugees in City Heights in many ways, including:

- Enhances economic security by allowing gardeners to earn supplemental income by selling their food and teaching them skills that empower them to start their own businesses.
- Benefits the physical health of community members by increasing the amount of fresh, healthy food available in City Heights. Gardeners grow their own food and other people in the community can purchase it at the City Heights Farmer's Market.
- Provides greenspace where people can enjoy the benefits of spending time in nature including enhanced mental health and relaxation.
- It allows people to gather with others in the community and bond over shared cultural values and practices.

By increasing healthy food access, the New Roots Farm supports Environmental Justice goals while contributing to a resource that brings community members joy, security, and peace.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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