

Partners for Places Project Lessons Report

Project Name: *McQuesten Urban Farm*

- **Year Complete:** 2016
- **Local Government:** City of Hamilton, ON
- **Local Foundation:** Hamilton Community Foundation

Project Purpose

To work with a multi-stakeholder, resident-led community group to develop Hamilton's first urban agriculture project as a social enterprise that will address the social determinants of health, sustainable environments and specifically food insecurity in the McQuesten neighborhood.

Key Lessons Learned

Lessons learned about tools and tactics through the project that other sustainability directors could use to advance their work.

The Hamilton Victory Gardens is adjacent to the McQuesten Urban Farm, and has been growing for three years. With the increase of an on-site staff and volunteer presence on a regular basis at the gardens, there was an increase in volunteerism and community involvement. Neighbors of the farm were increasingly drawn to the farm to visit the people working and partaking in events, and to ask the staff and volunteers questions about participation on the farm, evidencing interest from the community. Having the ability to communicate directly to a staff member increased community participation; it allowed for inclusive, celebratory, positive experiences to occur at the farm.

Positive word-of-mouth communications resulted from the community-staff interactions, and spread through the community, helping to build community participation on the farm. Generally, word-of-mouth communication was an asset to the farm; it raised the profile of the community development work occurring, it advertised the farmer's market and community workshops, and spread information about the Sprouts Summer Camp.

The informal, free-flowing interactions and input from community members that shared their experiences farming was (and is) a highly valued information source. This allowed the farm's daily objectives, as well as vision, to be continually engaged in and re-shaped. A Farmer's Log and Market Log were created for staff and volunteers to use to document data and experiences, acting as a living record for the farm.

Lessons for developing a collaborative process between a local government sustainability director and local place-based foundation(s).

The local government should develop a strong program around place-based community and environmental initiatives. Resident engagement and support for any projects supported by the local government and local foundations is crucial for their success. A positive and collaborative relationship between the local government, foundations, front-line community development agencies and residents and community associations can lead to project success. Without any one of these groups, projects won't achieve their full potential or fail outright.

Additional Information and Resources

The work at McQuesten Urban Farm continues to increase community food security, provide volunteer opportunities for citizens of all ages, add economic value to the community, and foster strong bonds amongst residents in McQuesten. Read more about their efforts [here](#) and [here](#).