



GREENING our communities

through Live Green Toronto Grants



PROJECT:

Grow to Learn

In one season, PACT's four urban agricultural gardens generated 15,000 lbs. of produce with an estimated market value of about \$40,000.



For more information about PACT, visit pactprogram.ca or email ben@pactprogram.ca.

PACT Urban Peace Program

The PACT Urban Peace Program is an award-winning Canadian charity that builds peace in urban communities by empowering, supporting and encouraging youth to reach their full potential.

PACT believes it is the community's responsibility to provide quality programs at early stages of life, and they work in partnership with courts and schools to help young people realize their potential.

The goal of the Grow to Learn program was to transform urban high schools into after-school living classrooms where youth, teachers and community volunteers would grow organic produce and donate the harvest to food banks across Toronto. Through their Grow to Learn program, PACT intended to tackle hunger, climate change, youth's disconnection from food and nature, and our over-dependence on pesticides and herbicides.



"PACT is setting an extraordinary example for everyone in this province."

Donna Cansfield, former Minister of Natural Resources



Call 3-1-1



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

PACT's Grow to Learn project engaged students and staff at four schools:

At Emery CI, 32 faculty and staff volunteered to work on the project, which was tied into the Grade 9 and 10 applied science curricula. Many students chose to work on the project over the summer and received a small honorarium. Along with many high school students the project also engaged students from a daycare, an adult learning centre, and a development disability class. Parents were very enthusiastic and suggested that even more land be used for urban agriculture.

At Thistletown CI, 24 culinary arts students and six faculty and staff were involved in the project. The school's woodshop instructor was particularly enthusiastic, building trellises, raised beds, a foot bridge, compost bins, a shed and benches for the site. The project also resulted in a composting initiative and seed workshops. During the first summer, PACT hired four student leaders to care for the space.

At Elmbank JMS, parents, particularly Jamaican and Somali mothers, devoted a lot of time to the project. Seed workshops were held in classrooms. PACT also hired four summer students to care for the garden.

At Lakeshore CI, 20 students were dedicated to the project and sometimes worked through very bad weather. Perhaps as a result of this dedication, Lakeshore CI produced the best seedlings of the four schools. Teachers incorporated the project into the curricula of various classes including family studies, science, geography and food and nutrition.

PACT reports that many of the student participants have adopted long-term behaviour changes as a result of working in the urban agriculture gardens. In the first year of the program, more than 1,000 students participated. No gas-powered mowers were used at any of the sites.

2010 Community Investment Program Grant (\$20,000)



Challenges

Urban agriculture is very labour intensive and requires many volunteers. It was sometimes difficult to find garden coordinators with the right combination of project management, interpersonal and pedagogical skills. To overcome the challenge, PACT developed a system to reward hard-working students.

Volunteers at one site had to till by hand what would become one of the largest (22,000 sq. ft.) urban schoolyard gardens in Canada.

What's next

PACT expects the Grow to Learn program to produce 25-30,000 lbs. of food per year going forward. They enlisted Ryerson School of Nursing students to help them understand the nutritional impact of the program. Students will develop even more skills with the addition of canning lessons and by learning techniques to extend the growing season.

“PACT Grow to Learn has found a successful way to address food security and improve environmental and nutritional awareness.”

Cecilia Rocha, Associate Professor, Ryerson University's School of Nutrition and Director of the Centre for Studies in Food Security