



HOPE Garden – 100 Projects for Peace Application

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Community need and project description

In January a Town Council member proposed to ban panhandling within 15 feet of downtown businesses. This policy represents ongoing and building tensions that exist between the local homeless and the community at large. Many citizens feel threatened, merchants fear losing business, and the community has reacted with “out of sight, out of mind” policies. This tension inhibits collaboration and collective action to alleviate homelessness, breeding greater inequalities and chronic homelessness. HOPE (Homeless Outreach Poverty Eradication) Garden is proposed to include the excluded, remedy tension, and peacefully develop social and economic networks, leading to sustainable solutions to homelessness.

The HOPE Garden project will give homeless participants the opportunity to work together with a network of volunteers and mentors. The garden will be structured as an inclusive program to employ the homeless in a community garden. People living on the streets and in the shelters will apply to the program; after being accepted, they will plant, cultivate, and harvest their crop. Produce as well as value-added products will be sold on the UNC campus and in local farmers’ markets. Beyond focusing on homelessness and poverty, the project promotes environmental sustainability and local food systems. HOPE Garden will teach and practice bio-intensive agriculture (BIA), an organic and remarkably efficient technique for small-scale applications. BIA creates flourishing gardens by maximizing use of available resources and minimizing waste and expenditures. Training and job experience in innovative garden methodologies will provide gardeners with skills for the current and future job market.

Project for Peace: Summer 2009

This summer I will use the Davis Projects for Peace grant to break ground for HOPE Garden by establishing an orchard. Rows of peach, apple, and fig trees will share space with blueberry and raspberry bushes, organically filling the available land. Surrounded by a fence to exclude foraging animals, the garden will create an inviting, serene environment for community members and the orchard will be the base of a fully productive urban farm.

The inclusion of an orchard in HOPE Garden is important. First, it is conducive to a training program that serves a wide range of participants while sustaining itself via production. Fruit trees are hardy and reliable with a high produce to input ratio and allow participants the opportunity to pursue specific interests and skills. For example, they can choose to harvest the fruit, bake pies, or operate a fruit stand. In addition, the grandeur and color of fruit trees will provide a place for community members to come alone for a peaceful walk or gather for fellowship.

The actual construction of the orchard is as significant as the eventual fruits, and it is important that the orchard be HOPE Garden’s pilot project. Organized and replicable work caters to untrained, beginning participants and volunteers alike. The permanence and potential of an orchard provides an exciting beginning and incentive for sustained participation; participants and volunteers can identify with and eventually see the literal fruits of their labor, season after season.

Project goals and role within community

A community that lives in peace establishes equal access to resources and opportunities, fosters inclusion, and provides for the security of all citizens. HOPE Garden will promote employment security, food security, and the overall security that comes from strong community ties. It will promote peace by bridging the gaps that exist in the Chapel Hill community, while providing program participants and the community at large with greater communal security. Low-income households participating in the community garden will be provided with greater food security, and homeless program participants will be equipped with sustainable employment skills and opportunities. Beyond these tangible benefits, the garden will promote even greater peace by serving as a public space that truly bridges the gaps in our society. The garden will create an inclusive atmosphere, facilitating a better understanding of local issues while encouraging greater community engagement from all involved.

The goals of the HOPE Garden Project are to:

- Provide participants with skills training, job experience, a means to establish credibility, and a source of income
- Guide participants in methods of effective money management and saving
- Build support networks and community for those involved in the project

- Connect participants to a broad spectrum of social and medical services
- Encourage the development of local, equitable food systems
- Provide the disadvantaged with access to nutritious, affordable food.

Rather than a traditional volunteer system of the server and the served, homeowners and homeless will work together in HOPE Garden with a common goal and a shared experience that will encourage genuine discussion and understanding of the issues of homelessness and poverty. This connection will initiate solution-oriented action.

HOPE Garden will be linked directly to the community by:

- Inviting community members to lease or sponsor a plot in the garden
- Creating a common space for community enjoyment and as a venue for public events
- Providing BIA training for the local community.

Program's feasibility, sustainability, and future impact

For 10 weeks, I studied BIA at an agriculture institute in Tanzania; then as an intern for an NGO's Sustainable Agriculture program, I taught BIA to local Tanzanian farmers marginalized by disease and land degradation. I have struggled between devoting myself to international vs. domestic issues: the scale and urgency of international needs are heart-wrenching, but in the end, I find that I am better equipped to make a real and lasting contribution in the domestic arena. Constant exposure and proximity make me very familiar with problems, solutions, and especially stages of the process; as I serve, I am able to learn from and improve my own work. I am especially involved with hunger and food security issues as I work in various community gardens and collaborate with the Atlanta Community Food Bank. I plan to dedicate the fall '09 semester to work full-time to fully establish HOPE Garden. As a current sophomore, I have time to ensure HOPE Garden's solid foundation; so when I leave, mechanisms will be in place to ensure that HOPE Garden will not only persist but thrive.

HOPE is a student group at UNC dedicated to serving those living in poverty in the local community. The group provides direct services and mobilizes the university and surrounding community via awareness campaigns. HOPE Garden is a project of HOPE and therefore will have continued, keen, and competent management. HOPE Garden ties into UNC's mission to be a constructive asset within the community. With university support, HOPE Garden stands to provide for and benefit from faculty research, student internships/volunteerism, and inter-institutional collaboration. For example, NC State's Landscape Architecture Department wants to incorporate the garden into the classroom and a master's thesis, and HOPE Garden has connections to UNC's APPLES Service-Learning Program, Environmental Institute, and School of Public Health. Most importantly, the garden will be located on a free bus line on Homestead Road next to the site for the new IFC homeless shelter, close to UNC and residential developments.

HOPE Garden has gained support from many local groups and is poised to succeed. An APPLES Service-Learning grant will cover basic equipment costs; a pending Strowd Roses Foundation grant will provide water and public infrastructure; the Active Living by Design committee of the Town of Chapel Hill is a fervent voice for HOPE Garden in local government; and the Parks and Recreation Department has agreed to provide oversight and resources.

In the first stage of this project, the garden will hire a few homeless individuals to be the pilot program participants. In the long run, the garden will provide a stipend to one participant-employee to manage the garden and coordinate other participants. After graduating from the program, participants will be linked with employment opportunities that utilize their newly acquired skills in both commercial and residential settings.

The orchard will be beautiful and productive in itself, but the true value of this Project for Peace is how it would encourage and open doors for similar projects. A successful, visible venture will immediately shape public sentiment needed for HOPE Garden's reception and extension. Its continuity and stature all but guarantee that the garden remains in the (healthy!) hearts and minds of the local community. And, most importantly, its replicable framework and a mobilized, vitalized community will surely encourage other communities to follow suit.

The tension that surrounds the issue of homelessness in the Chapel Hill community is not insurmountable, especially with the help of the Davis Projects for Peace award. By bridging societal gaps and confronting local issues through collective action, HOPE Garden will not only directly advance the condition of homeless people, but will also open the doors for future solutions to local conflicts.