

**Name of the participating institution: Wesleyan University**

**Name of all student participants: Jennifer Roach**

**Title of project: Summer of Solutions Hartford**

**Dates of the project: June 1-August 31**

**Country where the project will be performed: USA**

**Organizational Description:**

Summer of Solutions Hartford is a food justice and youth leadership development program based in Frog Hollow, Hartford and a chapter of the youth-led nonprofit Grand Aspirations. The Hartford chapter was co-founded and is led by Jennifer Roach, a Wesleyan senior. Our objective is to increase access to healthy food and community green spaces in Hartford by empowering young people as innovators in the food justice movement and providing them tools and opportunities to create solutions to food inequality in the city. Since 2010, our team has run a 9-week summer program for youth interested in urban agriculture. Together, our team built two community gardens and 5 schools gardens. We teach gardening and hold events such as open-mic nights, pot-lucks and arts activities to bring people together in the gardens. Together, we transform abandoned urban land into valuable community resources where young people can work together to produce this way we cultivate safe, green spaces in our community. In this way so are creating peaceful spaces in our community: spaces where people can explore nature, create a sense of harmony among their neighbors, support each other in their agricultural learning, and feel empowered to make healthy choices for their families.

The youth participants learn how their local food system works and how to change it so that they and their communities can lead healthy lives. They learn hands-on by working with students and community members in the garden every day and by participating in afternoon leadership trainings. For example, our leadership development program trains participants in public speaking, facilitation, non-violent communication, and personal goal setting. Each year, Wesleyan students have contributed to the program as participants and Program Leaders. In 2013, 100% of participants reported that after the summer, they would be “confident” or “very confident” in teaching someone else how to start a garden and 76% of participants reported that they wanted to participate as program leaders, participants, or national team members next year.

**Project Description:**

Beginning in the spring of 2014 we are expanding to a 7-month urban agriculture internship program to better serve our project sites and provide a more thorough agricultural education for our interns. In addition, we will partner with Capital Workforce Partners, a youth employment initiative to run an Urban Farming 101 program for 10 high school students in July.

Each participant will dedicate 20 hours/week to the program for five weeks. During this time, they will work closely with an internship team in the gardens. They will teach gardening and cooking classes in the elementary schools, work with community members to organize events, and cultivate thriving growing spaces. This summer program allows us to reach high school students who do not have experience growing their own food, and who cannot commit to the 7-month internship. It exposes them to new career possibilities in food work. Every year, Capital Workforce Partner participants have returned to participate in our full programs.

**Our Impacts:**

The impacts of this program on our internship team have incredible potential. In the past three summers, participants from Summer of Solutions have gone on to start sustainability projects in their own schools, find jobs working in food and sustainability in Hartford, and return to the program as leaders for the following summer. It has changed the way they understand their food system. For

example, a former participant wrote on our survey; “Summer of Solutions has taught me the importance of the environment and importance of organic food and eating healthy. I now can help take better care of the environment and prevent pollution.” - Participant, 2013. By training our interns in leadership skills, we are creating a ripple effect through our community.

By building gardens in abandoned lots, we transform the character of the street. Before the Zion Street Community Garden was built in 2011, those lots were home to 6-foot tall weeds, garbage, and hiding places for illicit activities. Now, we have 120 raised beds where our neighbors are growing healthy food, teaching their children how to garden, and building relationships in their neighborhood. The Hartford Police told us that crime rates decreased on our road after we built the garden. The garden has ~70 members and hosts events for an additional ~30 neighbors in Frog Hollow. By opening up these vacant lots to the community, we built a welcoming space that has a vibrant presence in the neighborhood and discourages local crime. Our garden serves not only as a food source, but as a community gathering place, and green space for children. That public community presence discourages crime in the neighborhood.

At each of our 5 school gardens, we used empty land at the school to create natural educational spaces. We currently work with 350 students at our 5 school gardens through summer school activities, but we expect to reach at least 600 students as we expand our science programming through the school year. The students have a hand in every aspect of the garden, from planting to cooking the harvest. These classes provide a peaceful learning setting as an alternative to their daily activities. 41% of children in Hartford and 57% of the children in Frog Hollow live below the poverty level and suffer many barriers to healthy food. By integrating gardening into their school curriculum, we are creating a safe space for them to learn and a healthy food source. Our internship structure will allow us to expand to new schools each year, multiplying our impact in Hartford and engaging thousands of students in urban agriculture.

### **Funding our Project:**

Our budget is \$47,957. Starting in 2014, we are creating internship funds at 4 local colleges to provide a \$2,500 stipend for one student each year. Additionally, each project site will contribute \$2,500 for 300 hours of labor. This funding model ensures the sustainability and scalability of our program. These contributions will provide our program \$22,500.

We are seeking \$10,000 in support from Projects for Peace to provide stipends for five interns and one Program Coordinator to work 10 hours/week with Summer of Solutions Hartford from June 1<sup>st</sup>-August 31<sup>st</sup> 2014. These stipends will equalize access to the program for a low-income youth and will be crucial to building a strong and diverse team. In addition, this grant would support two Program Coordinators to work additional hours to facilitate the Urban Farming 101 program, fees and travel support for the August Gathering, and bikes for our interns. We will use \$500 to repay our neighbors for use of their water during the hottest months of the year, and will purchase local organic compost to provide fertility in the gardens.

In addition, we are seeking sponsorship from The BraitMayer Foundation, The Green Fund, Simply Organic 1% Fund, The Awesome Foundation, and the Captain Planet Foundation. Our complete budget and request amounts are attached.

We hope Projects for Peace will invest in our young leaders to build safe green spaces for youth to learn through the Summer of Solutions Hartford.