

# Roots of Change for Peace, Educational Equity, and Food Justice

Partner Organization: Fraternity Christian Temple  
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*"Peace is no mere matter of men fighting or not fighting. Peace, to have meaning for many who have known only suffering in both peace and war, must be translated into bread or rice, shelter, health, and education, as well as freedom and human dignity - a steadily better life."*

*-Ralph Bunche, Nobel Peace Prize Winner (1950)*

## Project Summary:

In hopes of positively changing the food insecurity and high school graduation rate statistics in Pasco, WA, I am partnering with a community church in the eastside of Pasco. Through this organization, I will be running a community garden and summer day camp for middle and high school students called "Roots of Change." The Napier Initiative has generously provided a \$10,000 grant. This grant along with the financial support provided by the Davis UWC Scholars Program would fund the staffing costs necessary to employ interns that will co-run the program and the costs of materials necessary to set up and run this community project. Having reliable committed staff is essential to the success of this program for it will ensure the creation of safe, peaceful, and cooperative learning environment for students. The students attending Roots of Change will collectively decide the design of their garden and will play a key role in its execution and success. Middle through high school students living in Pasco will be eligible to be a part of this summer program. My hope is that this summer program becomes an after-school tutoring program during the school year and again takes place in the summer of 2015.

## Background:

Tri-Cities is a mid-sized metropolitan region in the southeast corner of Washington State. Composed of about 264,000 people, the Tri-Cities is made up of three towns: Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco. Of these three towns, the eastside of Pasco is the side of town from which people are told to stay away. In Franklin County (of which Pasco, WA is a part of) household food insecurity increased from 11.1% in 2006 to 15.4% in 2011. More than half of the population in the county is Latino/Hispanic, and at least a third of the population is under 18 years of age. Furthermore, the Eastside of Pasco has a relatively high number of households (7.3%) without vehicles that are more than one-half mile from a supermarket. 22% of the population in the city of Pasco lives under the poverty line. In other words the community in Pasco, WA unfortunately meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture's description of households with a high likelihood of food insecurity.<sup>1</sup>

Through my academic work at Scripps College, I have been able to learn about food swamps and food deserts; systemic injustice; racial politics and environmental justice. The experiences of my family and friends in Pasco have allowed me to understand the theoretical discussions my classmates and I had in the classroom at a deeper level. I was able to understand that the food choices that my family and friends in this community made were not a reflection of them as individuals but instead one of a food system that greatly limited their access to affordable quality nutritious food. The fact that the same people that work in the food industry (as agricultural workers or workers in food processing plants, for example) are not able to afford fruits and vegetables was a great irony and contradiction to me.

Along with issues of food justice, Pasco has one of the highest high school dropout rates in the State of Washington. According to 2011 statistics of the Pasco School District, only 63.8% of students graduated from high school on time, meaning that almost 40% did not. The current number of elementary, middle, and high school students failing their math, reading and science subjects are astounding and disheartening.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, a large number of youth (ages ten to seventeen) from minority backgrounds are referred to and detained by the Benton-Franklin County Juvenile Court.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have shown that community gardens can be a successful alternative for young people exposed to the drugs and crime economy, significantly reducing the devastating effects drugs, crime, and poverty have on their young lives.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) statistics, 17.6 million households (14.5 percent) were food insecure in 2012. Food insecure households are households that at some point during the year had difficulty providing enough food for all their members due to lack of resources. In a country where child obesity is a major public health concern, you have on the other side of the coin, 1 in 10 children experiencing food insecurity in the United States. In their 2012 report on Food Security in the U.S., the USDA found that rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average for households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line, households with children headed by single women or single men, and Black and Hispanic households. Food insecurity was more common in large cities and rural areas than in suburban areas and exurban areas around large cities.

<sup>2</sup> In 2011, the Pasco School District reported that: 50% of fourth graders failed in Reading, 62% of fourth graders failed in Math, 46% of eighth graders failed in Reading, 66% of eighth graders failed in Math, 69% of eighth graders failed in Science, 38% of tenth graders failed in Reading, 81% of tenth graders failed in Math, 78% of tenth graders failed in Science.

<sup>3</sup> 2012 Annual Report to the Washington State Legislature by The Department of Social and Health Services Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/main/legrep/Leg1211/Racial%20Disproportionality%20in%20the%20JRS.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ferris, John, Carol Norman, and Joe Sembik. "People Land and Sustainability: Community Gardens and the Social Dimension of Sustainable Development." *Social*

**The Project:**

I believe that one of the best ways to get quality, local, organic, nutritious food into the homes of the community is to let kids get so excited about fruits and vegetables to the point they want to grow, eat, and take them home. I've seen it happen at San Antonio High School in Pomona, CA and I know it can happen in Pasco as well. The church I am partnering with has agreed to provide space on their property for the community garden. The kids attending Roots of Change will collectively decide the design of their community garden and will play a key role in its execution and success. Middle through High School students living in Pasco will be eligible to be a part of this summer program. The recruitment process will begin with families from the church and will be disseminated through word of mouth and supportive teachers at the local public schools. Flyers will also be posted in parks and public housing units in the neighborhood.

The number of students that will be a part of Roots of Change's summer day camp will depend on the number of employed interns and volunteers willing to commit to this two-month (July and August) summer program. Again, interns and volunteers will be recruited first through the church, personal contacts, and the local community college. In order to ensure a good child to teacher ratio, my estimate is that with 4 paid interns and at least 1 volunteer we will be able to host at least 45 students. Along with gardening, cooking, food justice discussions, environmental justice workshops, art and music projects, the summer program will also include a math and reading academic enrichment component. Students will take placement exams at the beginning of the program to ensure that they receive the individualized help they need in efforts to ensure that their reading, writing, and math skills are at grade-level. In order to ensure the continuation of the community garden beyond the two-month program, In mid-August the garden will be divided into community run plots with 'team leaders' who will be responsible for general operation and coordination of gardeners for the rest of the summer and during the school year.

**Project Logistics:**

- *February*: disseminate community meeting flyers, continue planning curriculum with local public school teacher
- *March*: hold community meeting to let parents know about summer day camp and begin registration, continue planning curriculum
- *April/May*: continue registration, recruit and interview potential interns and volunteers
- *June*: hold two community work days to set up garden and summer day camp space, train interns and volunteers
- *July/August*: Program
- *August*: discuss with volunteers creation of after school tutoring program

**Expected Outcomes:**

- Collective vision, design, and implementation of a Community Garden that in providing quality and nutritious food, much needed academic enrichment, and a safe space for young people will be supporting the creation of peace in Pasco, WA.
- Students will gain a variety of skills for their personal enrichment and consequently the enrichment of the community:
  - Collaboration skills through collective work on community garden
  - Critical thinking and analytical skills they need to better understand their world and work towards peace
  - A deeper understanding of our community garden's role in creating Peace, Food Justice, and Environmental Justice
- An alternative for young people exposed to the drugs and crime economy, significantly reducing the devastating effects of poverty, drugs, and crime on the lives of young people and creating a road to peace in their lives and in the community

**Prospects for Future Impact:**

Ultimately, my hope is that this summer program becomes an after-school tutoring program during the school year and takes place again in the summer of 2015. I see this community garden and summer-day camp as the starting point of a potential future member-driven community organization through which community members can come together to demand change, create structures of peace, and transform their neighborhoods. I am committed to this vision and have therefore decided to live in Pasco, WA for at least two years. Whether I decide to stay in Pasco, continue to coordinate this program, or organize through other avenues, the project will be set up to be sustainable and community driven. My passion is to organize and challenge unjust structures through collective action. Consequently, embarking on this project will allow me to give back to my community while also further sharpening my community organizing skills.

There is so much that I have learned during my time at Scripps. But, the most important thing I am taking away with me is the fact that I will be using every single kind of privilege I have to see transformative structural change take place in my community. Establishing Roots of Change with the financial support of the Davis UWC Scholars Program is one way I