

Summer of Solutions Hartford  
United States  
Wesleyan University  
Jennifer Roach, United States, Wesleyan University  
Soshartford.wordpress.com

**Project goals:** Summer of Solutions Hartford provides garden internship positions for Hartford youth to work in local community gardens alongside volunteers, teach gardening and cooking classes to neighborhood youth, and to participate in a summer-long workshop series on food justice, sustainability, and community resilience.

**Additional funders:** As part of the youth-led nonprofit Grand Aspirations, we work with a network of funding partners to support our initiatives. In 2014, those partners included the City of Hartford, COMPASS Youth Collaborative, Wesleyan University's Patricelli Center for Social Entrepreneurship, Capitol Workforce Partners, Newman's Own Foundation, Captain Planet Foundation, Hampshire Foundation, Deupree Family Foundation, and Goodwin College.

**Details of Summer 2014 project:** Summer of Solutions Hartford launched an urban farming internship program for young people to develop leadership skills in food justice activism and to work as a team to create safe, green spaces in the city of Hartford, Connecticut. With the help of the Davis Projects for Peace and additional funders, we designed a meaningful and powerful experience for our 22 interns. While most of our interns committed to a seven-month program, ten high school-aged participants interned for six weeks over the summer. This was a great opportunity to expose young people to the wonderful work happening in their communities, and to provide them with a peace-building activity for the summer.

Since 2011, we have been organizing a nine-week summer program. This was the first year that we worked with our new, seven-month program. There were some unanticipated challenges, but overall the new model has proven to be a success. Most importantly, it has allowed us to build deeper relationships with our partners at all our gardens, enriching our interns' experience in the program, and providing a better service to our partners. For example, at the Burns Latino Studies Academy, our team has worked with 14 classrooms on a regular basis. Instead of offering one-time trips to the garden, our team worked with each teacher to design a series of garden classes for their students that complemented their classroom studies. For our school partners, this means that their students get a much greater educational benefit from the garden. For our youth interns, this means that they get to practice thinking creatively about the garden as an educational resource and write curriculum for the younger students. Overall, we have worked with more than 350 students through our school gardens this year, providing them with an alternative, hands-on educational experience in the outdoors.

We were very excited this year to partner with the Connecticut Trash Museum and Resources Recovery Project to build our first public educational garden at the museum. The museum is focused on educating the public about waste and recycling, and ways to reduce their environmental impact. The museum already had a hands-on exhibit about composting food scraps using a worm bin. We used three large windows next to it to build three examples of how to grow food using recycled materials in small urban spaces. Since many people visiting the museum may only have a small outdoor space or a kitchen window in which to grow food, we focused on affordable and small-scale projects. We built a gutter garden, a hanging bottle garden, and a window box. There is also an activity station at the exhibit where kids can practice folding their own seed trays out of recycled newspaper. This project is an excellent opportunity for us to reach a large public audience, as the museum receives over 50,000 visitors each year, and extends the life of our efforts this summer into the longer term.

One challenge we encountered this year was coordinating our work schedule with students' own high school classes. When we organized the teams in the spring, we incorrectly assumed that whatever work schedule fit for an intern in the spring would still work for them when classes resumed in the fall. However, a few of our interns changed schools over the summer, or started college at the end of August,

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so some schedules needed to be adjusted. In a few cases, this meant that they worked at a different school garden and needed to build relationships with new students there.

The seven-month Urban Farming Internship was a huge step in making Summer of Solutions Hartford a sustainable project in the long-term. By asking for only a 10-hour-per-week commitment from our interns, spread out over seven-months, we have greatly increased the accessibility of the program for working students and adults. The interns graduating from the program this year are more prepared than in any previous year to take on leadership roles as program coordinators. By cultivating talented and passionate local leadership in this way, we are setting up the program for long-term success.

**Defining Peace:** If asked as a high school student to define peace, I would have associated it with non-violence. Since I have been lucky enough to participate in urban agriculture work in Hartford, my definitions of peace and of violence have changed. Peace is non-violence, but it is also justice. While food inequality may appear like a problem of logistics, it is in fact a form of violence against low-income communities and communities of color. Unequal food access disproportionately burdens these communities with hunger, nutritional deficiencies, diet-related diseases, and preventable deaths. There cannot be peace in a community where there is systemic violence, just as there cannot be peace where people cannot nourish themselves with the foods their bodies need to thrive. Food and farming have an incredible potential to bring about peace.

There is a shortage of healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food in the Hartford area. Frog Hollow, the neighborhood where Summer of Solutions Hartford is based, has a 43 percent poverty rate, and a 16 percent unemployment rate. Some 99 percent of the students at our neighborhood school are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch. Due to these economic challenges, as well as transportation concerns of getting to the one large grocery store in the city, many people have trouble accessing healthy food. Community members invoke many creative strategies in planning how to acquire enough food to feed their families, which often takes more time in low-income, low-access communities than more affluent ones.

Building the infrastructure in Hartford to grow healthy and affordable food in the city directly increases access to the building blocks of a healthy community, creates green spaces, and involves neighbors in positive and rewarding projects. Hartford has incredible resources to offer such as plentiful land, rich agricultural histories and knowledge, and community enthusiasm. Summer of Solutions Hartford works to bring these resources together to create spaces for local food production and education. In the short term, school gardens create space for children to be outside and build a relationship with the natural world. In the long term, gardens encourage a community's local investment, and build resilience.

**Personal Statement:** Systemic problems like food justice have many interconnected solutions, some of which should come from policy-makers, such as changes to the Farm Bill and NATO. But creating a national food system that provides for all people, consumers and farmers, takes community activism, organizing, and hard work on the ground to build powerful alternatives. Someone needs to start shoveling if we want to build a more resilient and more just local food system.

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