

Warren J. Baker Endowment for Excellence in Project-Based Learning Robert D. Koob Endowment for Student Success

FINAL REPORT

I. Project Title: The Garden Project

II. Student(s), Department(s), and Major(s)

(1) Jillian Broeckel-Bleher, Landscape Architecture, BLA

(2) Ellie Gertler, Sociology, BA

(3) Georgia O'Farrell, Sociology, BA

III. Faculty Advisor and Department

(1) Dr. Ryan Alaniz, Sociology

(2) Cesar Torres-Bustamante, Landscape Architecture

IV. Cooperating Industry, Agency, Non-Profit, or University Organization(s)

(1) Restorative Partners, Non-Profit

(2) SLO County Jail Honor Farm

V. Executive Summary

Over the year, the Garden Project involved students, community members, officers and inmates in a unique experience of growth in both skill-acquisition and in personal development. Student volunteers from various majors and some community member volunteers participated in weekly visits to the farms to check on crop growth, aid in tasks, and work alongside the inmates. Officers at the county jail oversaw these work sessions, sometimes also assisting in the garden. Every visit was an opportunity

for students of sociology, landscape architecture, and journalism (among other majors) to see rehabilitation in action and also learn how to plant and care for vegetables, fruits, and ornamentals. Perspectives varied, but in the garden everyone was on the same level, digging in the dirt, pulling weeds, planting seeds, or harvesting crops. These shared activities enabled conversation and interaction between everyone involved, promoting community learning and individual growth.

In addition to regular weekly garden sessions, semi-regular Saturday morning work sessions were sometimes arranged to involve more inmates and volunteers in projects. For instance, autumn weather did not arrive till late into 2015, so a cool-season crop planting session was conducted in November. Roughly a dozen students and inmates worked together this Saturday morning to plant potatoes, carrots, beets, onions, and peas. The extra hands enabled more work to get done and impacted a greater number of participants – both students and inmates.

Ultimately, every part of this project was a growing experience for the inmates, Cal Poly students, County Jail officers, and Restorative Partners volunteers. Many students stepped out of their comfort zone to participate in the Garden Project; they experienced a different approach to incarceration, took part in promoting rehabilitation, and learned more about their impact in our community.

A survey of both inmates and students conducted near the end of April confirmed that all involved were positively impacted and inspired by the Garden Project. Inmates expressed work motivation and stress-reduction. All appreciate the fresh fruits and vegetables supplied to the jail kitchen.

VI. Major Accomplishments

- (1) Involvement of a dozen or more Cal Poly students in collaborating with Restorative Partners and helping in the Garden Project at the county jail.
- (2) New garden and orchard designs created and implemented by inmates and student volunteers working together.
- (3) Several seasons of crops planted, grown, and harvested with success.

(4) Green house constructed and necessary tools and materials gathered.

VII. Expenditure of Funds

This grant funded the purchase of many garden materials necessary for ongoing garden development at the SLO County Jail Honor Farms. For instance, at the start of the summer an analysis of the soil revealed that the existing garden areas were lacking in nutrients and that pH levels were too high. Thus, natural fertilizer and soil amending compost was purchased with funds allocated through the grant. At the Men's Honor Farm, a crew of inmates obliged to assist in tilling the soil with added nutrients prior to planting summer crops of tomato, bell pepper, squash and more. The Women's Honor Farm inhabitants likewise helped to prepare their smaller garden for planting of warm season crops. Seeds, garden tools, garden pots and other items needed for this planting season and other season to follow were also purchased with grant funds.

Over the last year in the Honor Farm garden, successful improvements of the garden layout maximized growing space and increased production levels. Collaboration with the officers overseeing the garden program to involve more inmates in the program is an ongoing process that can only improve with continued financial support. Plans are under way for the Garden Project to be self-sustaining in future, through fundraising and possible produce sales. The inmates are as a whole excited about learning in the garden, growing good things to eat, and engaging in positive garden therapy. None of this would be possible without regular purchases of garden supplies - especially soil amendments, seeds, irrigation parts, natural pest control items, etc.

VIII. Impacts to Student's Learning

The Garden Project was and continues to be a positive experience for Cal Poly students, such as Ellie Gertler, Georgia O'Farrell and myself. We, along with the other student volunteers, have gained a deeper understanding of how education is not only a blessing to us but also a tool for helping others. We

experienced and saw how the things we have learned at Cal Poly could be applied towards a goal – that of rehabilitation through gardening for inmates of the SLO County Jail. We learned more about our own skills, were challenged to think differently about how we impact our community, and ultimately have emerged from this project as individuals with greater aspirations than before.