

The Free Farm in San Francisco California – An Intergenerational Gift

Author:

Margaret Dyer-Chamberlain
The Free Farm
E-mail address: mdyerc@stanford.edu

Brief Description:

The Free Farm is an all-volunteer organic farm that gives away all of the produce that it grows. The Farm works with senior centers and senior housing in its neighborhood, creating a beautiful and thriving intergenerational gardening community.

This submission was selected as part of a national challenge issued to leaders in all communities seeking new “best practices” and “best possibilities” for the future of nutrition and aging.

I am a volunteer at the Free Farm, a loosely organized all-volunteer urban garden in San Francisco. The Farm was established two years ago, on land loaned to us from St. Paulus Lutheran Church, which burned down some years ago. The Church, which proclaims a ministry of welcome and help to vulnerable and homeless individuals, has been an incredible host to us as we have gardened in the city. All of the produce that we grow is given away to those who most need fresh, organic food. (*Check out our website.... www.thefreefarm.org*)

Over the last year, I decided to reach out to social service, church and other organizations in the neighborhood of the Free Farm, because I wanted to more intentionally embed the Farm in the neighborhood. Senior Centers in the area proved to be extremely receptive to learning about the Farm, and so I focused on these organizations. I visited senior centers nearby, and I did planting workshops with the seniors. I am working with two senior centers to plant gardens on site that will be tended by the seniors. I've also done pruning workshops, designed to help seniors work on the trees and plants growing at their Centers. Several seniors in the neighborhood have become volunteers at the Free Farm, which has led to wonderful intergenerational relationships between the seniors and the young people at the Free Farm. It is clear that the seniors love the vitality and youth of the Free Farm “hipsters” and that the hipster crowd loves to talk with the seniors about life and history and experience.

In urban gardens, I believe that we can teach one another about nutrition, healthy living, and the joy of community. I love the intergenerational relationships that the Free Farm has nurtured --- young people feel like “rock stars” as older people great them each week and ask for their gardening help. Older people feel that their life experience, wisdom and advice is welcomed and treasured by youngsters who could be their grandchildren. Across the divides of age, social class, race, and life experience, fast friendships are formed. Community is born, and what an amazing blessing that is in our complicated and fractured world.