

VeggieRx pilot promotes wellness—and health equity

“Let food be thy medicine.”

This adage is attributed to the ancient Greek physician, Hippocrates, often referred to as the father of Western medicine. However, today the advice is deeply neglected, although it could solve many of the diet-related health inequities we face in our communities.

This summer, in collaboration with the Integra Community Care Network, the Family Care Center of Pawtucket, the Pawtucket Family YMCA, and Groundwork RI, SCLT participated in its first produce prescription pilot, VeggieRx, which is enabling healthcare workers to “treat” patients with nutritious food.

As described by Integra Program Manager Brady Dunklee at the start of the pilot, “[through VeggieRx] we hope to demonstrate that we can connect food-insecure patients to healthy produce while sourcing from small farmers and gardeners in local communities.

“We view this work through a health equity lens,” he continued, “food insecurity and economic scarcity disproportionately impact communities of color, a dynamic that the pandemic has accelerated. This model finds supply and demand in communities



Produce shares like this one were distributed to 90 Medicaid participants and 10 seniors in Pawtucket every other Friday, from July through November.

that are hardest hit and brings in healthcare providers as part of the solution.”

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TerraCorps expands into RI, empowers SCLT and other land trusts



Rachel Brown is one of two TerraCorps Members who began working with SCLT's program staff in early September.

SCLT and six other land trusts are getting a needed boost this year thanks to TerraCorps, an AmeriCorps program that just launched in our state. Each land trust is hosting service members for one-year positions that will strengthen and extend their programming.

TerraCorps has operated in Massachusetts since 2010. In partnership with Serve RI, it expanded to the state to help build the capacity of community-based non-profits focused on environmental stewardship, sustainable agriculture, and food justice.

In September, SCLT welcomed Jack Christensen as a sustainable agriculture coordinator and Rachel Brown as a youth education coordinator/sustainable agriculture coordinator. Jack brings skills as a writer and advocate for the natural world and extensive field work, including stints at seven different organic farms!

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Global pandemic underscores local need for a more just, responsive food system

Greetings! If you haven't yet heard, construction has begun on SCLT's future home at 404 Broad Street in South Providence. (See opposite page.) The timing could not be better: the pandemic and resulting food supply disruptions confirm the need to obtain much more of our food from trusted, local growers and suppliers. SCLT's programs are preparing people for exactly these kinds of food systems jobs, both around the state and within our immediate South Side neighborhood.

This issue also reports on a new partnership with TerraCorps, a workforce development program, and our VeggieRx pilot. The latter has delivered bi-weekly shares of locally grown, fresh produce to low-income families and seniors in Pawtucket from July through October.

Programs like these are crucial to helping improve the health of all people in our state, not just those who can afford the high cost of nutritious food. Please support our work by donating, either by using the enclosed envelope or by going online www.southsideclt.org/donate. Giving will make you feel good (we promise)!

Be safe this winter,

Margaret DeVos, Executive Director

Rochelle Lee, Board President

VeggieRX *Cont'd from front page*

Working with seven of the farmers in SCLT's Produce Aggregation Program, VeggieRx has distributed over 500 shares of vegetables every other Friday since July to patients of the Family Care Center and seniors at the YMCA. Each share includes vegetables harvested days before by farmers in Providence or Cranston.

Vegetable prescription programs are a relatively new response to the need for equitable access to the health and economic benefits of growing and eating locally. The first programs, piloted by Wholesome Wave, emerged in 2010 and have since expanded to 12 states (including RI) and D.C. Recent produce prescription programs have been funded with \$250 million from the 2018 Farm Bill. Data and insights from these programs will help determine future funding.

Along with federal dollars, funding for the programs has also come from state, corporate, and private foundations. However, state and municipal-level legislation and public health policy is also needed. A critical step will be for healthcare agencies, providers, and patients alike to advocate for these programs in health insurance plans.



Family Care Center's Carol Green sorts fresh produce with SCLT's Jazandra Barros and Craig Demi.

Doctors, especially primary care physicians, play a key role in the program's success because of their influence over patients.

"VeggieRx has been a great way for us to promote healing and wellness while engaging with the community outside the confines of the clinic," said Sam Donovan, a Brown University resident at the Family Care Center.

SCLT, Integra, and the Family Care Center have held monthly Zoom

conversations about the future of VeggieRx once the pilot ends in November. All foresee this as an ongoing partnership with room for growth in Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Providence.

Food-as-medicine is not a new or innovative approach to health and wellness, but it is one that is worth exploring in a much deeper way. With universal healthcare still being debated, it may be awhile before programs like food-as-medicine are widely available. **Yet, imagine a world where we are all afforded access to fresh, local vegetables grown by a farmer not far from our own doorstep, one in which equity is created through every bite of food on our plate.**

— Jazandra Barros, SCLT VeggieRx Project Director



Work on SCLT's new home in Trinity Square is underway

Construction started in mid-October at 404 Broad Street in Providence, with plans to move into the facility in summer 2021. We can't wait!

The location, just a few blocks from our current office in the South Side, was chosen specifically to expand SCLT's community-based programs. In addition to our Farm-to-Market Center, Youth Enterprise Center, and a commercial kitchen, the 12,000 sq. ft. building will include space for three healthy food businesses that are owned by, employ, and serve people from the surrounding community.

These may include a cafe, greengrocer and caterer or food producer. One tenant has been identified so far, and we are in talks with others.

The renovation has been envisioned by Union Studio Architects. Peregrine Group was hired as the project manager in 2020, along with general contractor Case Construction.

Since our GROW! capital campaign began in 2018, individuals have given to SCLT at unprecedented levels. They share our belief that each of us play an important role in building out our local base of stakeholders and restoring and sustaining healthy communities, particularly as we confront ongoing and COVID-related hunger crises affecting our friends and neighbors here in Rhode Island.

Enthusiasm for the project has enabled the GROW! Committee to raise the campaign goal to \$4 million from \$3.5 million. Recently, SCLT received significant funding from the state (through RI Commerce's Rebuild RI Tax Credit Program and RI Housing's Acquisition and Revitalization Program), along with a generous anonymous donor and many others. We are now in the final stretch to raise the remaining \$400,000. We are extremely grateful to all who have supported this project so far.

If you would like to support the campaign, please contact SCLT's Director of Development, Shana Santow: 401.273.9419, ext. 103 or shana@southsideclt.org



Local artist shares refugees' recipes and stories

Jazzmen Lee-Johnson was working with food-insecure youth and refugees in Providence, which got her thinking a lot about food access and cultural traditions. With support from SCLT and several local agencies, she created a graphic novel cookbook, *Things We Share*, combining practical information, along with cultural and personal history to celebrate resilience and community health.

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TerraCorps *Cont'd from front page*

“Now that the industrial food system is starting to visibly spasm as a result of COVID-19,” he said, “I’d like to pursue longer-term work in farming or gardening.”

Rachel, a self-proclaimed “environmental nerd,” spent several years in Philadelphia working in environmental and outdoor education, and in youth development.

“I’m excited to help fulfill Southside’s mission by working alongside youth, and to learn more about food justice in action,” she said.

“Rhode Island is under a high level of threat from land over-development, putting overall environmental and societal sustainability at risk,” said David Graham Wolf, TerraCorps’ president and CEO. “Rhode Island’s nonprofits have a demonstrated need for the capacity-building work that TerraCorps supports, making expansion here a natural next step.”

Lizz Malloy, TerraCorps’ state co-director (and program alum) said, **“Rhode Island is a wonderful size for us to launch a cohort and build relationships with new organizations.”**

TerraCorps’ other Rhode Island partners this year include: Aquidneck Community Table, Aquidneck Land Trust, Audubon Society of RI, RI Land Trust Council, Westerly Land Trust and Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council.

Rachel and Jack joined SCLT at a challenging time, with Zoom staff meetings and remote working, but they’ve adapted like pros. We look forward to when we can come together as a staff again, sharing our latest news, bad puns and communal lunches.

—Jenny Boone, Grants & Communications Manager



Before coming to SCLT, Jack Christensen served as a TerraCorps Member at the Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance.



Southside Community Land Trust’s mission is to provide access to land, education and other resources so people in Rhode Island can grow food in environmentally sustainable ways and create community food systems where locally produced, affordable and healthy food is available to all.

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