

SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Growing for Good

Fresh news from Southside Community Land Trust

FALL 2021

It's in her nature to help others

Last spring, Tarshire Battle was hired as SCLT's garden programs director to manage 21 community gardens and oversee training, resource distributions and leases for almost 400 gardeners. Along with seasoned staff—Andrew Cook, SCLT's community growers coordinator and Bishnu Poudel, community garden associate—she also supports another 40 or so properties around the state.

Tarshire, who also goes by Tasha, is unfazed by heavy lifts. During her two decades in human services she has helped people experiencing addiction, homelessness, incarceration, domestic abuse and other kinds of trauma by finding them jobs, shelter, nutritious food, healing and connection. It's her life's work.

She also brings a love of plants. Growing up in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood, Tasha heard about a program at a community garden,

Cont'd on back page



SCLT's Director of Garden Programs, Tarshire Battle, planting garlic at Roots2Empower Farm.

Patients follow doctors' orders to eat (locally grown!) veggies

"People are over the moon excited to get something that's so needed. It's really beautiful," said Virgilio López, Navegante program coordinator at Clinica Esperanza in Olneyville. He was talking about patients who've been "prescribed" fresh produce from SCLT's VeggieRx Program.

Patients are identified by the Navegantes, bilingual, multicultural community health workers who determine what's interfering with their health, and connect them to programs like VeggieRx. They chose 25 families for the program last spring.



Staff from Care New England, including Brady Dunklee, Mark Glovasky, Kathleen DeAngelis and Christie Torres, and SCLT's Jazandra Barros, who manages our VeggieRx Program.

"The program alleviates a lot of stress on people who live in multi-family households and who had not been getting enough healthy food, especially since the pandemic began," said Virgilio.

Clinica Esperanza offers primary care to roughly 5,000, mostly Spanish-speaking patients per year, with a focus on prevention.

SCLT partnered with Integra Community Care Network, a division of Care New England, to pilot VeggieRx last year. Integra increased its funding in 2021 to serve more patients at Care New England Medical Group clinics in Pawtucket. Bank of America also provided funding this year to partner with Clinica Esperanza in Providence. VeggieRx went from reaching 30 households (120 people) in 2020 to 60 (240) this year.

Clinical Nurse Director Kathy DeAngelis at Care New England's Family Care Center (FCC) said patients included last year's families plus "people with multiple pre-existing conditions who were also food insecure." The FCC is one of three Pawtucket clinics in Integra's network participating in the initiative. "Nurses who had the most direct contact with patients were usually the ones who drove referrals," she said, while residents wrote the prescriptions.

Cont'd on page 3



We need to talk about the toll our food systems take on climate

Dear friend,

While COP26, the UN's Climate Change Conference, is now behind us, we hope that passionate debates and protests will keep the pressure on world leaders. Going forward, we expect to see more emphasis on the role of food systems in global warming. A year ago, the World Wildlife Fund reported that "all the elements and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food account for up to 37% of all greenhouse gas emissions." Promoting sustainable agricultural practices and eating more plants on a daily basis must be part of any global solution to climate change.

In this newsletter we describe SCLT's growing role connecting farmers in our network to produce prescription patients receiving nutritious food as prevention

and intervention for diet-related diseases. In year two of our VeggieRx Program, we partnered with two more clinics, doubling our impact in Pawtucket and Providence.

We welcome your support for this work through SCLT's 2021 Annual Appeal. While produce prescription programs around the country are cost-effective means for responding to people's urgent needs, their financing is unreliable. We count on funders and individual supporters like you to help make this program possible.

Be safe this winter,



Margaret DeVos
Executive Director



Rochelle Lee
Board President

PS: Please consider a special Annual Appeal gift this year to commemorate SCLT's 40th anniversary. You can use the enclosed envelope or go to our website, www.southsideclt.org

Pilot links SCLT with storied Federal Hill House

Funding from Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza's Office enabled SCLT staff to provide fresh produce to food-insecure families at Federal Hill House (FHH) throughout the 2021 growing season.

"The pilot was initiated to serve families that don't qualify for food stamps, but still can't afford to buy fresh produce," said Jennifer Hill of FHH. Vegetables and fruits were delivered twice per month for 25 families.

FHH has served mostly immigrant and limited-English speaking residents since 1887, in response to the waves of Irish immigrants who arrived in the 19th century, followed by waves of Italian immigrants. These days, it offers a multitude of programs for roughly 2,500 people of all ages who

mostly live in the Federal Hill, West End and Olneyville neighborhoods.

"They have their arms out to help people everywhere," said Jennifer.

She was responsible for ordering the produce through SCLT's Produce Aggregation Program, combining vegetables that worked together for proposed meals. She then supplemented the produce with rice, sauces, bread and other ingredients from the Food Bank.

This one-year pilot was recommended by the Mayor's African American Ambassadors Group, whose Food Disparities subgroup focuses on closing gaps in the local food system that lead to food inequities for Black and African American people.



Jake Stanton joined our staff this summer to help run the Produce Aggregation Program.

Doctors' orders *Cont'd from front page*

Produce prescription programs like VeggieRx are among the few ways Rhode Islanders at-risk of diet-related diseases can obtain free, nutritious produce from providers overseeing their health. The concept aligns particularly well with SCLT's mission as it helps people on both ends of the transaction—Rhode Islanders who love to farm and their neighbors who can't afford to buy their food.

Across the country, as more attention is paid to the social determinants of health (including poverty, education, access to medical care, housing and job status), more healthcare providers and community organizations are starting produce prescription programs. But, their numbers remain small.

According to a field scan published last April, commissioned by Wholesome Wave and conducted by DAISA Enterprises, 108 produce prescription programs were created across the country between 2010-20. There are likely many others not included in this total (like VeggieRx) that provide the benefits of nutritious food but lack the resources and extra staff needed to closely track health outcomes.

The report found that the programs "tend to be complex and high-touch by design—operators must simultaneously build community trust and strong partnerships while managing participant recruitment, organizing logistics, encouraging prescription redemption, tracking and analyzing evaluation data, and reporting to funders on their outcomes."

During the 10 years the field scan was conducted, 14 of the 108 programs ended because of a lack of sustained funding. Many wonder if the resources spent on longitudinal studies to prove their effectiveness are really needed for a program that addresses such an obvious need. Kathy, from the Pawtucket clinic, agreed. "The thing is, we know that eating fresh food keeps us healthy," she said.

The Wholesome Wave report also notes the "devastating consequences to low-income families of abruptly ending nutrition incentive programs that are often a lifeline to putting fresh fruits and vegetables on the table."

To keep this from happening, SCLT and our community partners hope to continue matching patients with food through VeggieRx.

—Jenny Boone, Grants & Communications Manager



Every other week from June-November SCLT fills roughly 150 bags of local produce for patients participating in our VeggieRx Program.



Rollie Wesen, SCLT's Jazandra Barros and Margaret DeVos, and Michel Nischan outside our office.

Healthy food activist Michel Nischan returns for a visit

This fall, SCLT hosted one of the country's best-known food policy experts, Michel Nischan, on a tour of our South Side properties. Michel is a co-founder of Wholesome Wave, which develops programs, platforms and seed funding for community organizations to make fresh food affordable to historically underserved Americans. He is also a four-time James Beard Award-winning chef. Rollie Wesen, COO of the Jacques Pépin Foundation and associate professor at Johnson & Wales, kindly arranged the tour.

When the group returned to SCLT's office. Michel immediately noticed the perfectly bundled, bright green scallions, plump chayote and dark kale in bins on the deck. Farmers had just harvested their crops to be sold through our Produce Aggregation Program. "Look at how gorgeous these are," he marveled.

Michel's appreciation for good food, and for what it takes to grow it, comes from spending his summers working on his grandfather's farm in Missouri. Wholesome Wave's programs intentionally enable people to obtain fruits and vegetables at farmers markets in order to support sustainable local food systems.

Michel and co-founder Gus Schumacher are credited with getting the USDA to include \$100 million in the enormous 2014 Federal Farm Bill to be spent over four years on produce prescription and nutrition incentive programs. The funding increased to \$250 million in the 2018 Farm Bill. Ultimately, he and other food security and nutrition advocates believe these programs, which more than pay for themselves by preventing and curbing costly diet-related diseases, should be covered by Medicaid and Medicare.

"Outcomes from our programs have proven that healthful food makes a huge difference in improving the lives of community members struggling with poverty and low-income," he said.

SCLT, he noted, creates "a double-bonus impact through their VeggieRx program by providing produce to under-served community members that is grown by farmers in the same community. Talk about local!"

We could not agree more.

—JB

It's in her nature

Cont'd from front page

much like SCLT's youth program, run by the anti-poverty organization Action for Boston Community Development. She went there almost every day after school and spent her summers working at a farm in nearby Concord.

"Being outside and getting vitamin D, learning about herbs and that fresh food equals good health, was transformative," she recalled.

After college Tasha earned a master's degree in Public Administration from Northeastern University and another in Mental Health Counseling and Behavioral Medicine from Boston University. Most recently, she worked as a mental health discharge planner at the RI Department of Corrections, helping people transition to life outside prison. The experience was mixed.

"I got tired of seeing people going back and forth, being released but not being able to get a job, and ending up back in prison," she said.

It motivated her to start Roots2Empower, a social enterprise located on a small farm in Pawtucket. Its aim is to help formerly incarcerated men and at-risk youth break the cycle of recidivism. She and her partners teach agricultural and entrepreneurial skills, including creating business plans and finding microloans to launch a business idea.

Tasha attributes her endless energy to "determination, and always having an

arsenal of skills." It runs in her family. Her mother was one of nine children born to sharecroppers in the small town of West Point, Mississippi. Her grandmother, Queenie, somehow found time to make and sell buttermilk and cheeses to help support the family. But Tasha's own mother had a different future in mind.

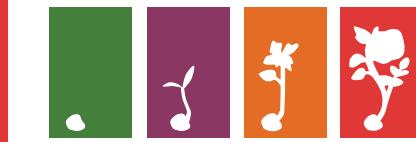
"When she was 15, she responded to an ad for a maid, and soon after got a one-way ticket to Boston in the mail," she said. Her mother stayed and raised two children.

Her Uncle John, the only sibling who didn't leave, used farming to get out of poverty. "He worked on a cattle ranch making \$1.50 a week, and used his savings to buy a calf, then more calves and then a bull. He eventually bought 17 acres of land and built a family home on it."

Drawing strength from nature has been a theme in Tasha's own life. She is a Master Gardener and an herbalist. She's also a self-taught artist and an active community organizer involved with RI Poor People's Campaign, Renew RI, RI Reclaim, the Formerly Incarcerated Union and Gather Together United as One (and probably many others), as well as her church.

Tasha brings her many passions into her work at SCLT. To connect with her about these, or about herbal teas, tinctures and salves, email her at Tarshire@southsideclt.org.

—Jenny Boone, Grants & Communications Manager



SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

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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