

Growing Justice



Food Diversity Project 2011 Annual Report

WORKING FOR JUSTICE IN OUR COMMUNITY TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT
THROUGH EDUCATION, ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY.

WWW.OKTJUSTICE.ORG

OUR KITCHEN TABLE



Food Diversity Project

2011 Annual Report

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Neighborhood-based food gardens

OKT's Food Diversity Project focuses on growing food gardens throughout four target Grand Rapids neighborhoods: Baxter, SECA, Garfield Park and Eastown. These neighborhoods are not only considered "food deserts" but also have high incidence of lead poisoning, a condition that can be addressed through fresh vegetables and fruits.

Preparation

More than 60 community members attended these OKT educational events.

- Two educational workshops to discuss and select seeds.
- Two greenhouse workshops to plant seeds.
- Scheduled sessions at the Molesta commercial greenhouse where OKT peer educators directed the planting of 13,000 seedlings.

Achievements:

75 "food grub boxes" made up of 36 food plant varieties were distributed to cooperative food gardens at:

- Shelters housing women and children.
- A church serving low-income families.
- The Kent County Health Department WIC program.
- Health clinics servicing families in need.
- Seven urban growers and families started home container food gardens.
- Well House, a permanent housing alternative for the homeless.

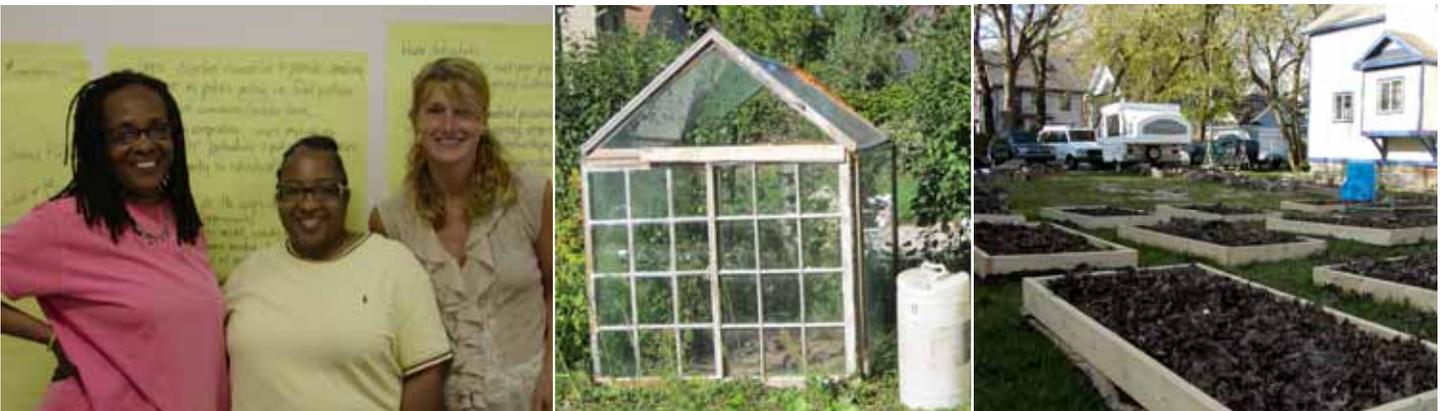
- 35 additional home growers were recruited for future gardens.
- Seedlings were shared with collaborative partners, community advisory leadership circles and peer educators
- OKT's "Garden Posse" visited growers weekly to provide gardening advice to home growers.

OKT and community members planted three food demonstration gardens, providing food within the targeted neighborhoods:

- Gerald R. Ford Middle School (a Southeast Area Farmers' Market site.)
- A neighborhood curbside food garden.
- Baxter Community Center.

In addition, OKT has met with physicians and other clinicians from the Cherry Street and Browning Claytor Health Clinics who have expressed an interest in referring their high-risk patients for home gardens. An African American midwife who attended an OKT event will refer her patients to OKT, as well.

These healthcare providers were attracted to OKT because, while they understood that food banks play an important role in fighting hunger, the food that is provided through these banks often exacerbates the conditions of patients with existing chronic diseases.





Addressing environmental hazards associated with food gardening

Because the targeted neighborhoods have legacy issues of lead and arsenic contamination, OKT worked closely with collaborative partner, Clinton Boyd, PhD, biochemist with the Sustainable Research Group (SRG).

Dr. Boyd presented workshops on soil sampling and field tested the soil of participating food gardeners and growers who sold produce at the Southeast Area Farmers Market, which was managed by OKT.

After results from the soil tests were complete, Dr. Boyd, along with an OKT representative, returned to growers' homes to discuss the results.

OKT hosted two educational workshops about food and the environment, environmental health disparities, plant health and soil testing.

- Approximately 40 community members learned about food self-reliance and the hazards associated with growing in certain locations. For example, curbside gardens might not be ideal for households with children with symptoms of asthma.
- Compost distributed to OKT program participants, demonstration gardens and farmers' market vendors was also tested.

Community Impact

One of OKT's home gardeners had lost four of her five children, as she was deemed an unfit parent.

As a result of working with OKT, she has decided to work with other women who have lost their children to Child Protective Services and teach them how to grow their own food as a strategy for strengthening their character as responsible parents.



Collaborations with local field partners

In December 2010, OKT held their first meeting with collaborative partners to launch the project and discuss goals. OKT has met with collaborative partners individually throughout the year and held three group meetings. Our partners have a common interest in expanding access to healthy food within Grand Rapids area urban neighborhoods.

OKT collaborative partners include:

- Inez Adams, PhD, evaluator
- Clinton Boyd, PhD biochemist with SRG
- Linda Campbell, MPH, The Building Movement Project, "The Commons," Detroit, MI.
- Farmers Leslie Huffman and Cornelius Williams, Vandalia Gardens Urban Farm in Cassopolis, MI.
- Jill Meyers, Kent County Health Department.
- Cheryl Macon, RN
- Cynthia Price, Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council
- Jeff Smith, urban gardener and director of the Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy (GRIID)

Our Kitchen Table also formed an informal partnership with the *Baxter Community Center*, which is located in one of the targeted neighborhoods. The community

center allowed OKT to plant a demonstration garden among its food gardens and conduct educational activities with neighborhood residents. Both, the community center and OKT are interested in forming a formal partnership during 2012.



Consultant Lila Cabbil, president emeritus of the Rosa Parks Institute, has worked with the OKT team and the Southeast Area Farmers' Market team regarding issues of power, particularly as they relate to challenges in minority groups. The goal is to create an environment where mainstream organizations value community assets and differences.

Community Impact

OKT's website, www.OKTjustice.org, was viewed about 4,900 times in 2011. It featured 65 new posts and 314 pictures.





Policy impacts for residents in the focused neighborhoods

OKT has raised political awareness in the community about:

- New Michigan legislation on the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, specifically, term limitations on the food stamp program.
- Local composting ordinances (Section 8.577 of Chapter 140 of the Grand Rapid City Code).
- The 2012 Farm Bill.
- The Food Safety Modernization Act that was signed into law January 2011, which criminalizes seed-saving.

New policies = increased food insecurity

Recent policy changes in Michigan have resulted in the termination of cash assistance for families that have benefited from the program for a cumulative 48 months. An additional ruling demands means-testing for food stamp eligibility. And, the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program may be cut.

These policy changes, and proposed changes, illustrate the vulnerability of the families served by OKT—families who are likely to become even more food insecure and more likely to suffer from hunger and malnutrition.

The loss of these programs weakens an already insufficient food system and demonstrates the importance of OKT's mission to integrate public policy and advocacy into our food growing work.

Lead poisoning: inside and out

By providing soil testing, OKT educates community members about remediation strategies and the practice

of composting food waste to improve soil quality and yield more nutritious produce. These educational strategies also provide opportunities to discuss how public funding geared toward environmental remediation has traditionally supported remediation activities *inside* the home (*e.g.* lead poisoning remediation).

OKT has encouraged land use research to determine whether residents' yards are at high risk for lead or arsenic contamination. The absence of lead-based paint on the current building site is not in itself evidence that the soil is free of lead contamination; the house may have been remediated for lead, but not the surrounding soil. In addition, soil may have been contaminated by a source that is no longer on the property (*e.g.* an old building that was demolished).

Research may reveal that the soil has also been contaminated with arsenic used as a pesticide, as many of the project's target neighborhoods are in areas that were once farm orchards. Any case of contaminated soil provides the opportunity to teach residents how compost and native plants can sequester lead and arsenic to minimize risk of exposure.

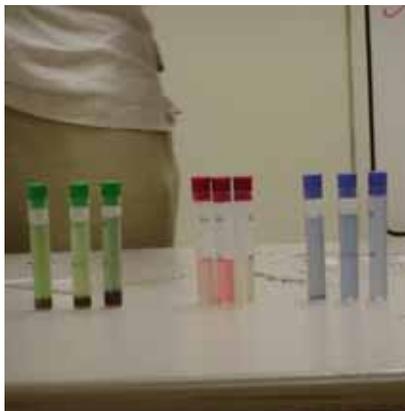
This places the environmental health story into a whole-systems approach to food, health and well-being. The combination of the land use research and the soil testing data will allow the community residents/urban gardeners to speak authoritatively on the issue of lead and arsenic contamination, thereby strengthening their ability to advocate for stronger environmental health remediation strategies and policy initiatives.

Building capacity

- OKT interacted with more than 1,000 community residents, providing at least introductory information about urban food growing/food self-reliance, food security, healthy and nutritional neighborhood food systems, and environmental contaminants in food gardens.
- Collaborative partners facilitated training sessions on food and the environment, infrastructure- and team-building, health maintenance and environmental health disparities, training fourteen community members.
- Formal training sessions related to organic farming, food banks systems, the food stamp program, farmers' market management, food garden tour/ reality tour and community organizing were provided to community women by state and national organizations.
- Peer educators facilitated training sessions related to selecting and ordering food seeds, greenhouse growing, food garden coaching, food garden design, urban foraging and outdoor food gardening.
- OKT hosted a Community Food Garden Tour of nearly a dozen food gardens. During the tour, community members learned about the

neighborhood food system, food self-reliance, food security, legacy issues associated with environmental contamination.

- OKT hosted a community-based educational forum in March 2011 featuring the Beehive Collective to discuss the neighborhood food system in the targeted neighborhoods.
- OKT held a Volunteer Orientation event in April 2011 to familiarize interested parties with OKT's mission and values of social justice.





Southeast Area Farmers' Market

OKT managed the Southeast Area Farmers' Market for the first time in 2011. After moving the market site to Garfield Park (a public park in the targeted Garfield Park neighborhood), a satellite site was added at Gerald R. Ford Middle School, in the SECA neighborhood. Grand Rapids Food Systems Council and the Kent County Health Department were partners in the market.

Both market locations participated with Bridge Card/ EBT, Project Fresh coupons, Kent County Health Department Coupons and Double Up Food Bucks programs, making fresh produce available to even more people in the community.

- 1,400+ community residents patronized the two market sites.
- 700+ received education about access to healthy food within the current neighborhood food system.
- Peer-led workshops on urban foraging, food growing, food self-reliance, food security, health management and healthy nutrition took place regularly.
- Dance exercise was a regular feature of the markets.
- The markets were open from May through November.
- Community Cook-in & Potluck events extended the market season past the official closing date.
- The markets were featured in local media several times.
- The Greens Cook-off & Green Tomato Festival brought in many new faces and media attention.
- Both market locations became spaces where community developed and gathered.

Our regular vendors included Robert Tolbert, who grows with his family in Hillcrest Community Garden; Yvonne Woodard, who grows in her Grand Rapids yard; Bob and Margaret Kass, who grow on their land in Sparta; and Vandalia Farms in Cassopolis. These vendors provided a wide variety of fresh, chemical-free produce in season.

On-site cooking demos with Chef Nancy Rutledge, Grand Rapids Community College Dining Services and staff from the Kent County Health Department showed patrons how to cook traditional favorites like collards and summer squash with a healthier twist.

Community Impact

The Southeast Area Farmers' Market is about more than doing business.

While it is important that our local farmers and growers go home with money in their pockets, it's even more important that the community comes out and grows their own food power.



Dissemination

OKT has created interest in the professional communities and will continue to present information in public forums, locally as well as nationally.

March and July, 2011 Lisa Oliver-King and Dr. Clinton Boyd spoke about urban sustainability and food justice at Calvin College. She also addressed Project Green middle school campers about environmental justice and urban gardening at Gerald R. Ford Middle School.

OKT's peer educators hosted an OKT booth at Allstate's diversity initiative, a Blue Cross/Blue Shield-sponsored health fair, the Eastown Street Fair and other neighborhood events.

Other opportunities included:

- **Lansing, June 2011** *Community Engagement for Food Justice. Designing Healthy, Livable Communities Conference*, panelist Lisa Oliver-King.
- **Detroit, August 2011** *Healthy Soil, Healthy Bodies: Environmental Justice and Sustainable Gardening in Western Michigan. 2011 Environmental Justice Conference: One Community - One Environment*, poster presentation by Lisa Oliver-King, Clinton Boyd, and Inez Adams.
- **Detroit, October 2011** *Give a Man a Tomato and He'll Eat Until the Grant Runs Out; Teach a Man to Grow and He'll Eat Forever: Sustainable Gardening in Western Michigan*, presenters Lisa Oliver-King and Inez Adams, Great Lakes Bioneers Conference.
- **Grand Rapids, October 2011** *Dive! addressing Hunger and Food Waste in West Michigan*, panelists Lisa Oliver-King and Inez Adams, Grand Valley State University.*
- **Detroit, November 2011** *Addressing Food System Inclusion in Detroit and Other Michigan Locales. 2011 Community School Gardener Networking Meeting*, presenter Lisa Oliver-King.*
- **Detroit, MI November 2011** *Food Matters: Pilot Trainings: Clinical Education and Advocacy and Program*. Hosted by Spectrum Health. Presenter Lisa Oliver-King.*
- **Montreal, November 2011** *Planting in Deserts: Social Justice and Gardening in Grand Rapids, Michigan*. Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, presenters Inez Adams, Lisa Oliver-King, Christina Mello, and Our Kitchen Table Leadership Circle.*
- **Boston, December 2011** *Achieving the Promise of Community-Engaged Health Disparities Research: A National Community Partner Forum*, selected candidate, Lisa Oliver-King.*

OKT has been featured in several of Grand Rapids newsletters and newspapers, including *The Grand Rapids Press*, *Women's Lifestyle*, *Rapid Growth*, *Revue West Michigan*, *Food for Thought*, *The Review and Lifestyles* and in an ongoing weekly column for *The Grand Rapids Times*.

*These events took place during the first quarter of Grant Year 02.





Challenges and opportunities at the next level

The 2011 goal was to have 30 food gardens planted. However, more energy was involved in peer education and infrastructure building than was anticipated. OKT quickly discovered that more garden coaches would be needed to handle the planning and maintenance of a larger number of food gardens.

Community response to home growing was initially low. Team members believe that this is because many people new to gardening think of it as a spring and summer activity. Now that OKT has a stronger presence in the community, we aim to keep people engaged throughout the fall and winter via community food garden tours focused on fruit and nut trees, educational sessions, instruction on the planting and maintenance of herb gardens, a composting series, and seasonal activities.

The OKT team is now more aware of what types of activities underserved community members will attend and at what venues. In 2012, OKT will focus on creating materials and organizing events that are more language friendly and easier to perceive.

OKT believes it has name recognition among other organizations—government and non-government—that focus on urban agriculture, or offer food programs and community residents at large. To our knowledge, OKT is the only Grand Rapids area organization doing this type of work through a social justice lens. The farmers' markets, at-home visits from garden coaches and educational workshops provide opportunities for OKT to engage residents and continue to build trust.

OKT established a Community Leadership Circle made up of six women from the community. Having faced challenges themselves, these women are aware of the problems that are present in the target areas.

In addition, about half of them had leadership roles in other areas of their lives, for example, one woman was a union steward. Their role in OKT is to help the organization establish a stronger infrastructure and a cohort of peer educators.

OKT still hopes to meet the goal of planting and maintaining 100 neighborhood-based food gardens by the end of 2013.

Community Impact

*“How do people define hunger?
Much emphasis is put on feeding bellies
rather than preventing malnutrition through
providing people nutritious foods.”*

Lisa Oliver-King



Block print by Alynn Guerra



Our Kitchen Table
Food Diversity Project
Project Year 01
October 2010 – September 2011

Total Kellogg award		\$109,313.00
Personnel		
Executive Director	Total	\$ 31,250.00
Contractual; Peer Educators (Community Women, External Consultants)	Total	\$ 68,237.00
Supplies		
Green House/Yard Garden Supplies, Farmer's Market Supplies, Neighborhood Incentives, Soil Amenities	Total	\$ 4,827.98
Other Items		
Peer Education Trainings, Travel, Soil Testing, Environmental Testing , Presentation Materials, Community Workshops, Training Materials	Total	\$ 4,998.02
Total Expenses		\$109,313.00

Eastern Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC) serves as OKT's fiduciary.

www.emeac.org



2012 plans

- Exploring ways to recruit more home growers such as revisiting the role of the farmers' market being a recruitment strategy. The team will explore the possibility of the farmers' market playing a much larger role in the project than originally anticipated. The food provision portion of this grant focuses on home growing.
- It is also possible that the farmers' market will be a central location for hosting food, environmental and public policy workshops.
- Securing a few additional farmers' market vendors specifically for the purpose of increasing the diversification of the foods available at the markets.
- Conducting interviews with home growers to collect data on: 1) perceived benefits to having a home garden, including how having a garden impacted their health; 2) perceived barriers to maintaining a home garden; and 3) their overall opinions of the project.
- Developing volunteer opportunities.
- Applying for additional financial support.
- Exploring relationships with community-based health clinics and community centers.
- Maintaining additional demonstration food garden sites for the purpose of creating environmental learning labs.



Sustainability

OKT is committed to transitioning the project to the community at the end of 2013. The key will be to grow infrastructure. The project's key players (e.g., farmers' market vendors, garden coaches, community liaison) are actively engaged in OKT activities. Additionally, at least 80% of the home growers seem committed to the process and are likely to continue growing. OKT will also focus on increasing involvement and community leadership to ensure that the project has enough human capital to be sustainable.

As OKT learned in its Team Building training with Lila Cabbil, many of the community members have leadership or management skills that they have developed through their life experiences. They are non-traditional leaders and managers who do not fit the mainstream model of leadership; therefore, it is OKT's challenge to learn from them so that the organization can tap into the assets they bring to the table for the benefit of the whole community.

Potential for Replication

OKT is designing a food justice model that can be replicated in other areas with similar demographic profiles. The primary resources necessary to run such a project are available anywhere in the country. This is a social justice project as much as it is an urban gardening project. The greatest challenge to replicating the project will be finding the right team.

The Garden Posse is effective because they have rapport with the residents based on mutual respect. Because this is an underserved community, challenges arise that hinder optimal gardening conditions and practices; however, since this project is also about social justice, OKT members are available to assist community members with some of their challenges, such as, understanding historical land use, water quality and air quality.

The 2011 Team

Lisa Oliver-King,
Executive Director

Sheri Munsell,
Peer Educator

Stelle Sloomaker,
Communications

Roni VanBuren,
Community Liaison

Beverly Weathersby,
Garden Coach

Yvonne Woodard,
Market Manager

Collaborative Partners

Inez Adams PhD,
Evaluator

Clinton Boyd, PhD
Sustainable Research
Group

Lila Cabbil, Rosa Parks
Institute, President Emeritus

Linda Campbell, MPH
Building Movement Project

Leslie Huffman &
Cornelius Williams,
Vandalia Gardens
Urban Farm

Cheryl Macon, RN

Jill Meyer,
Kent County Health Dept.

Cynthia Price,
Greater Grand Rapids
Food Systems Council

Jeff Smith,
Grand Rapids Institute for
Information Democracy

Community Advisory Circle

Roberta Bufkins

Regina Davis

Tamika Foster

Darlene Gibbons

Kelsey Hakeem

Leslie Powers

Community Peer Educators

Laura Cassaletto

Josh McBryde

Rachel McKay

Roberta Rossi

Taylor Voss

Supporters

Baxter Community Ctr.

Eastown Neighborhood
Association

Supporters *cont.*

Levi Gardner, Grand
Valley State University

Garfield Park
Neighborhood Assn.

Gerald R Ford Middle
School

Grand Rapids African
American Health Institute

City of Grand Rapids
Parks & Rec Department
Grand Rapids
Project Green

The Grand Rapids Times

Alynn Guerra, artist

Christina Mello M.A.

Molesta Greenhouses

Chef Nancy Rutledge

SECA

Justin & Cherry
Stotlenber





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