



## MWCA Best Practices

### SUBMISSION FORM

WIB Name/WSA : **Workforce Service Area 10**

Submitted by: **Deb Bahr-Helgen**

**Attach a description (no more than two pages) describing the innovative best practice.**

**Please address the following:**

- Overview describing the innovative best practice
- Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)
- Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)
- Identification of those involved, including collaborators
- Leveraging/alignment of outside resources
- Ideas for replication/lessons learned

Information can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to:

Anne Olson

Director, MWCA

125 Charles Avenue

Saint Paul, Minnesota 55103

Fax: (651) 224-6540

E-mail: [aolson@mncounties.org](mailto:aolson@mncounties.org)

***DUE DATE: FRIDAY, JULY 24, 2009***

## **City of Minneapolis Homegrown-Upper Garden Pilot Project**

### **Overview and Collaboration**

Like many parts of the country, the City of Minneapolis has been investing a significant amount of time and effort into the idea of healthy eating and sustainable urban agriculture. This spring, an effort called Homegrown Minneapolis was started to support the idea of getting more locally grown foods into the hands of low-income neighborhoods and communities. Understanding that fresh produce and healthy food choices can not only be hard to find, but also expensive in the inner city where corner markets have replaced grocery stores, the effort focused on finding ways to make locally grown produce cheaper and easier to access. In concert with this, Homegrown also focused on getting the community, including young people, to understand the value of healthy and locally grown food.

The Upper Garden Pilot is just one product of the Homegrown initiative. The idea was to bring together a community organization with land available to plant on, a program that might have youth available to work the land, local experts that could teach the youth how to plant and harvest food, and funding that could pay wages to the young people. Early on, a group consisting of the following partners was convened to discuss the idea:

- David Denham, local professional with an interest in starting an urban farm project. He put together the original idea for the Upper Garden Pilot.
- Megan O'Hara, co-chair of the Homegrown initiative for the City of Minneapolis.
- Mike Wynne, executive director of EMERGE, a Minneapolis nonprofit that operates youth and adult employment programs.
- Cara Letofsky, City of Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak's policy aide.
- Gunnar Liden, executive director of the Youth Farm and Market, a local nonprofit that has been running an urban farm program for several years in Minneapolis.
- Tammy Dickinson, director of the City of Minneapolis STEP-UP youth program.

This group worked very quickly and was able to identify land currently held by EMERGE that would be suitable for farming and could be used at no cost. EMERGE also had youth available through their employment programs that would benefit from a training experience and learning about urban farming. Gunnar Liden, with his experience in youth farming, provided realistic advice of the costs associated with the effort and the plan for the garden. The City of Minneapolis Employment and Training Program was identified as having a current request for proposals out for projects that were focused on youth employment and/or green initiatives. A proposal was developed and submitted that would employ 12 youth ages 14-21 in the Upper Garden Pilot. The plan had

the youth working 30 hours per week to build raised garden beds, bring in soil, plant the seeds, tend the garden and harvest the produce. Initially, the youth were also going to build a stand that would sell the harvested produce, but later it was decided that the produce would be given to the families of EMERGE participants to promote the idea of eating healthy, locally grown food.

### **Job Seeker and Community Impact**

While working in the Upper Garden, the youth received training on tool safety, gardening techniques, and plant identification. In addition, the youth also participated in classroom training that focused on nutrition, financial literacy, time management, work readiness, and college options. The goal of this additional training was to help youth understand the importance of work, healthy eating, and being involved in the community.

The community will continue to benefit from this project. Youth have been trained and exposed to urban agriculture and healthy eating. It has been shown time and again that youth are often the catalyst for change. Once they gain an understanding of the impact they can have and their ability to influence change, they are often empowered to convince their families and the larger community to generate change. It is our hope that the youth in the Upper Garden project will influence the way their families shop for food, the food choices they make, and possibly even use their newly gained knowledge of farming to plant their own gardens.

### **Replication**

This is a project that could be replicated, and likely will be in Minneapolis. With its robust nonprofit community and strong employment and training programs, there will likely be many opportunities to build on the Upper Garden pilot model. Other assets include a strong commitment by the City of Minneapolis to support youth employment and urban agriculture. Other communities could certainly use the framework of this Homegrown project to develop an urban farming initiative.