

Sojourner House is getting a garden soon! Sandra "Sanz" Lashley, Night Shelter Manager, began the project with the help of volunteers in July. The garden has raised planting beds, with a seaweed and soil base that is being prepared for planting vegetables and herbs. Read more from Sanz about the garden project below:

## WCSC's Sojourner House Shelter Garden Project

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How did the idea come about? Why a garden? Why now?

I grew up with parents who gardened and, while they loved all sorts of plants, they especially loved growing edible plants. As a child, some of the most relaxing interactions I had with my parents involved gardening. I recently read a quote from Audrey Hepburn, which lead me to think about gardening as a sign of hope: "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."

*Gardening is an act of hope. We plant seeds and trust that they will grow. Tending to a garden is a way of stepping outside of ourselves and it helps to put things in perspective. Nurturing something outside of ourselves shifts the focus away from self and this can be valuable in times of anxiety and stress.<sup>1</sup>*

Who was involved in the planning? When did it start?

I started doing research about gardening in September of 2014. At first, I considered starting a small herb garden in my apartment; however, after talking to a former Shelter resident about how much she missed her garden, I thought that having a garden at the Shelter could be beneficial. When asked, various residents at the Shelter expressed a desire to have a garden.

After months of research, I approached the Shelter Manager about having the visiting students from Winona assist me in starting the garden. We discussed it in a staff meeting and everyone agreed that we would ask Winona to help us create a raised bed garden. The instructor from Winona consulted with a staff member from The Nature Conservancy who agreed to build the wooden frames for three raised planting beds. The Winona students delivered the beds at the end of their visit.

After further research, I spoke to the shelter residents about what we might grow in the garden. At one of the Shelter's weekly house meetings, the residents and I came up with a list of possible plants. We agreed to try to create three distinct gardens: an herb garden for seasonings and bush tea, a greens garden, and a salsa garden.

Why is the garden especially for the aforementioned women? *[Editor's note: Ms. Lashley mentioned specific names in a social media post about the garden]*

During my research, I discovered that there had been initiatives in California, Kentucky, Hawaii, England, and many other places to use horticultural therapy to treat PTSD, depression, and anxiety. The programs in California and Kentucky were expressly designed for survivors of domestic violence.

In 1999, Blue Shield of California released a press release about their community garden initiative which said in part:

*"For victims of domestic violence, gardening in a safe environment helps heal emotional disturbances and poor self-esteem," said Marianne Balin, coordinator of the initiative. "It improves the mental and physical health of the participants." "Horticultural therapy heals because it engages the whole*

*person," said Kathony Jerauld, a health program specialist with the State Department. "It helps the shelter residents-including the children, who usually outnumber the adults, to reconnect to key elements of self that may have been broken by the violence." The shelters will also benefit from the availability of fresh produce.<sup>2</sup>*

One of the survivors who participated in the Greenhouse17 project in Kentucky said, in part:

*My experience in the garden was very peaceful, relaxing and joyful. The garden is a wonderful place to be...When I was in the garden it was a great escape from my worries. How could I feel stress when I was standing in what is considered to be a healing garden?<sup>3</sup>*

Gardening has been shown to promote mindfulness, to foster creativity, to assist participants in reconnecting with nature, and to create a sense of accomplishment.

Who will maintain it, staff and residents?

The garden will be maintained primarily by the residents and myself.

Are there any volunteers/additional persons the Shelter staff would like to thank?

I would like to thank the following people:

- Clema Lewis for enthusiastically endorsing the concept of the garden
- Riggerle Finch Ponteen for giving the initial approval of the project.
- Charlene and the Winona [State University] students for their oversight of the creation and delivery of the raised garden beds.
- Sarah Dessel and Ferdi Abraham of Ferdi's Forest for providing potting soil and expertise.
- Carolyn Forno for approving the purchase of gardening supplies.
- Sue Diverio for providing the paint for the raised bed frames.
- Betty Nielsen for her donation of tomato cages and planting stakes.
- G. L. and V. S. for their invaluable assistance in setting up the garden.

Sources:

1. <http://awomanshealth.com/garden-away-your-stress/>
2. <https://www.blueshieldca.com/bzca/about-blue-shield/newsroom/therapeutic-gardens.sp>
3. <https://growappalachia.berea.edu/2014/08/14/look-around-see-peace/>

Please visit our website, [wcstx.org](http://wcstx.org), for more information about Sojourner House, WCSC's emergency shelter for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking and their children. We'll keep you posted with pictures and updates on the Shelter Garden Project on our website and on our [Facebook page](#). Stay tuned!

