“We value the capacity for growth and renewal in all people” — Homeless Garden Project Value Statement

At the farm, harvest time is rich with emotions, often contradictory emotions. We celebrate the abundance, and we sense the shortening days, the farm’s move into its winter quiet season of rest. The dying of plant life is part of the great cycle of life, to be followed by renewal in spring.

At Homeless Garden Project, I have seen— never quite matched in any other setting— the incredible resilience that humans possess. It instills in me humility, awareness of profound mystery and appreciation for the community that creates and sustains our healing organic farm. We struggle. We commit to change, and struggle to carry it out. We triumph, we fail. We’re afraid or ambivalent. As witness to our trainees’ struggle, words like “mental health,” “PTSD,” “addiction,” seem woefully inadequate, impersonal, and oversimplified. These struggles are fought and won every day, sometimes every minute. When I hear a trainee announce at circle, “I have 8 months sobriety,” I am now aware of the hard work that has taken.

“We value the capacity for growth and renewal in all people” is a deeply held value across our organization. We witness growth and renewal at the farm and in our community. I recently visited the hospital room of a trainee. I had celebrated his resilience in the past month (how he’d gotten himself back on track is a story for another time), but walking into his hospital room, I was overcome with how fragile life is. We die. Likely, you are similar to me and think far more about life— the soaring to the mundane— than about death. Among the many mixed emotions and impressions I experienced in that hospital room, was the crystal clear realization of how valuable every life is, how valuable and precious every minute I am given.

I am moved by the hard work and courage of the people who participate in our programs. Remembering that we don't have forever, I want to fill our program to the brim, giving anyone who is ready a second chance, because life is fragile and we are resilient.

I hope you’ll join with us to build this farm and garden where people find the tools to build a home in the world.

—Darrie Ganzhorn, Executive Director

Views from a Volunteer

Nature pauses. Or it seems like it does in these glorious days between summer’s bounty and winter. The ground at the farm shoots out the last bit of crop and color. The beds are turned waiting for rain, mulch, and next year’s seeds. The farm is quieter now as the last CSA’s go out and the flowers and plants are harvested on their way to becoming wreathes, sachets and other creative products sold at the downtown Homeless Garden Project gift store. This is a time of both great promise and valuable reflection.

So many volunteers are integral to this transformation and it is lovely to behold. Side by side with many people in the community— partnering with staff and skilled trainees— seedlings become produce, flowers become bouquets, and people become friends. Growth is inevitable. It’s a gift to be part of all of this... to be a part of this annual, rich cycle.

I love the word ‘volunteer’ as it relates to the Homeless Garden Project; it suggests being connected to something meaningful done with a willing spirit. Volunteering is the perfect vantage point and function to take in the work of the Project and participate in something extraordinary and yes, even a little magical. In fact, describing all that goes on at the Homeless Garden Project is a little difficult as it deserves to be experienced. Volunteering provides perfect opportunities for that whether on the farm, in the store, at events or providing services!

I started volunteering with the Homeless Garden Project several years ago during a Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service. I’m no green thumb but even through turning mulch or sifting compost, it was clear that this was a special place where lives and the earth flourish. Everyone pitches in sharing the tasks but, in truth, ends up building a nurturing community— for everyone. Take part; it won’t let you go.

— Ginny Aragon is joyfully retired after 30+ years in the field of education. She is still learning.
Creating Opportunities for Myself:

I grew up in the Projects West Los Angeles, with dysfunctional parents who were both mentally ill in their own unique way. Mom collected SSI and was on antipsychotic meds; I will never know what her diagnosis actually was. Dad was sexually abusive. I also had four siblings. We always had food, clothing and shelter; but not always the emotional safety to appreciate those things. Being hippies, mom and dad gave me the spiritual tools to survive the things they did to me, but enough damage was done that there was plenty to survive.

Mom had a lot of other physical health issues. Mom had a lot of other physical health issues as well as the mental health issues. She weighed nearly 300 lbs around the time I was born. She was diagnosed with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities. We moved to Humboldt when I was nine to get out of the pollution and smog. Mom started exploring the world of gardening and created gardens, one was behind a church that grew vegetables for the poor and homeless that the church’s soup kitchen served. But being a teenager I didn’t want to get my hands dirty, so I never got into the gardening with her. As a young adult my first experiences with being homeless were here in Santa Cruz. Ironically when the earthquake hit I was already living in a tent in the backyard of a La Selva Beach policeman. His wife was a close friend and they took me in for the summer. I got one of my first live-in caregiving jobs. I did homecare quite often after that in order to have a place to live and a job at the same time.

Having been diagnosed with Environmental Illness myself when I was twelve, I never had the stamina to go to college and work at the same time. So I went back to work as a caregiver. As time went by my health got worse and my options for work became very limited. In 2008, I finally burned out on caregiving so badly, that it now sets off PTSD episodes for me just to think about it. If you don’t know what a PTSD episode feels like, then think back to the last time you had something traumatic happen to you, someone died or you were in a car accident. Now imagine having that sort of thing happen to you weekly or even daily for decades at a time. Then you have a rough idea of what people who suffer from PTSD go through.

At Homeless Garden Project, I am carrying on the family tradition of growing good organic food and may even have something to teach my own granddaughter someday. I’m planning to move back to Oregon next year to be closer to her, but I’m taking with me all that I have learned. I have honed old skills that I learned in my 20s working in flower shops and at the Renaissance Faire like: making fresh flower bouquets, dried flower decorations on all sorts of things, event preparations, maintaining a retail flower or gift shop and many others. The day I taught my first arts and crafts class on candle making to my peers in the training program was a momentous day for me. I have dreams of going on to become a Somatic Experiencing Practitioner (this helps people with PTSD to cope with their trauma), I already have plans in the works to teach classes on surviving trauma that incorporate my skills as a massage therapist and a lot of the theatre skills I learned growing up.

I can’t really say how much it means to me to have the opportunity to not only learn skills that utilize my naturally creative talents, but actually get to practice teaching as well. This opportunity is a joy and an honor that I can’t put a value on. I have also added at least a dozen new skills to my resume, including: Candle making; planting, growing, harvesting and drying herbs; not to mention vegetables; and greenhouse work; and commercial display work in the gift shop. I think I can now get a job in any sort of retail gift shop, nursery, or floral shop that I choose. I’m proud of what my resume looks like these days and I want to shout to the world about the virtues of organic flowers!

— Raven Playfaire will graduate in February.

After a couple of abusive relationships and about ten years in recovery programs for non-drug related addictions, I turned to medical marijuana in my early 30s just to kill the pain. I spent the next 15 years stoned and watched my dreams go up in a puff of smoke. I suffered and struggled with PTSD and suicidal depression. I knew I needed to get clean to make my life work. I smoked long after the drug stopped working for me as a way to feel happy. I felt like I had fake smile plastered to my face that was no longer me.

Mom passed away in 2013. I miss the opportunity to talk about gardening and herbs with her. I thought about applying with the Homeless Garden Project three times before I finally did. I wasn’t sure that the Project could accommodate all of my hidden disabilities. But on the contrary they have been quite accommodating and it has given me the courage to speak up about what my needs are.

This opportunity is a joy and an honor that I can’t put a value on.

Thanks to Jon Kersey, Allison Garcia, Angie Smith, Paul Schraub, Christiana Paoletti, Darrie Ganzhorn for photos used in this newsletter.
In the last five years, Jimmy attended a sobriety program, and moved into the Rebele Family Shelter. Soon Child Protective Services directed that he and his daughter’s mother separate. The court recognized Jimmy’s hard work and commitment to his daughter, and awarded him full custody. They moved into an apartment, and Jimmy has been working to rebuild his life since then as a single father.

“Yeah,” says Jimmy, “I’ve been through a lot in the last five years.” A plain-talking, roll-with-the-punches kind of guy, Jimmy says, “I see a lot of grim, gnarly things every day. I see a lot of positive every day, too. There is hope. I’m so grateful to have what I have. I love my daughter.”

Getting his life in order, Jimmy signed up for CalWorks benefits and started attending school part time. When his rent was raised, it was impossible to make ends meet. “I had no money for toiletries, clothing, gas money; having a job—even part-time—makes life more affordable.” Jimmy had always been a hard-working guy, and he applied to over twenty jobs. But with a history of self employment, he was without references, and in a tough job market, he never got any responses.

Then Jimmy came out to the Homeless Garden Project. He started as a volunteer, completing our Century Certificate program of 100 hours of volunteer service. The Project’s staff was impressed with Jimmy’s hard work and positive attitude. He was accepted into the trainee program providing transitional employment, social work support, and training in organic farming. “The farm is helping me to extend into new horizons—different every day—and apply it in my new life as a single dad.”

Like all the trainees at the farm, Jimmy attends sharing time at the weekly “Circle” meetings, meets with his social worker weekly, and shares in the daily lunch for trainees and volunteers at the farm. He also attends recovery meetings and is considering becoming a social work counselor to help others in recovery. He describes it this way, “The Homeless Garden Project gives people something to look forward to—a good meal, somebody good to talk to. And helps people focus on moving forward. It’s a good place for people to have a second chance. And in the end, somebody’s eating some good food.”

— James Teeple started in the one year program in June, and will be graduating in June 2015.
Voices from the Fields...

Volunteer Profile: Meg Vollema

How did you begin volunteering with Homeless Garden Project: My first experience with the HGP was about 5 months ago. I had returned to the Central Coast just 2 years before after being gone for 18 years. It was simple. I was looking for a place to volunteer my time and energy—to give back. The name Homeless Garden Project kept coming up so I thought I'd investigate. My first exposure was in the garden. I read that the Homeless Garden Project was looking for help with the lavender. With my twin 12-year-old daughters in tow, we decided we wanted to give it a try. The experience was amazing. The people we met quickly felt like friends, and my daughters and I enjoyed a very unique bonding experience. I found them later (and often) asking when we could do that again. We have been back a few times as a threesome to weed, and I have also gone alone.

Do you have a favorite memory? One afternoon while weeding with my twin daughters, a gentleman came up to us. He had set down the flowers he had cut and was getting frustrated because he couldn't find them. My shyest child made it her mission to find them for him. She searched the garden over even after the rest of us had pretty much given up. The pride in her face when she found them and was able to return them to him was beautiful. In this unique process my children have found joy in giving and learned how chipping in to help gives back to us in unexpected ways.

The experience was amazing. The people we met quickly felt like friends, and my daughters and I enjoyed a very unique bonding experience.

Why do you volunteer at Homeless Garden Project? As an interior plantscaper by trade and passion, I am a complete believer in the healing power of plants and working with them. Recently I have started taking online classes in horticulture, horticultural therapy, and living walls/green roofs, etc. Time in the garden will give me hands-on experience for my assignments. I can't think of a better place to ask questions, get opinions and observe than the Homeless Garden Project.

What projects are you working on now as a volunteer? I haven't been able to get enough. I have found myself volunteering at First Fridays and with the events planning committee to help with the SUSTAIN Farm Suppers (where I tried my hand as a food server). Watching people come together at the suppers for a common cause is rather magical. I walked through the doors of the Homeless Garden Project looking for a place to give but instead found myself a part of a wonderfully talented, kind, and caring family who have fed the needs I have, even those I wasn't even aware of at first.

Meg Vollema—Volunteer

Feed Two Birds

Together we donated 4,132 pounds of organic food to low income residents who can especially benefit from fresh organic food. Feed Two Birds is a partnership with—

- Monarch Services
- Hospice of Santa Cruz
- Transition Age Youth
- Davenport Resource Service Center
- Gemma
- Santa Cruz AIDS Project
- 180/180 Santa Cruz
- River Street Shelter

Here's our wonderful group of social work interns for the 2014/2015 school year. Social work interns work one on one with trainees to support trainees' own development of goals and accomplishing those goals.

They're also developing our program to support trainees getting into housing, employment and wellbeing/recovery.

Pictured from left to right: Megan, volunteer; Hannah, volunteer; Kristian, SJSU; Rosalie, volunteer; Shawna, SJSU; Kylie, CSUMB; and Francis Krebs, our Social Work Intern Supervisor, LCSW. Not pictured: Sunita, HSU
Make a Tribute Gift!
Honor someone special with a tribute gift to the Homeless Garden Project.

We'll acknowledge your gift by mailing a beautiful tribute card to the individual, family or organization you are honoring or remembering. Please include their address!

For gifts of $100 or more, we’ll also send your tribute person a pair of 10” handmade beeswax candles created in our workshop.

The gift amount is not included with the card or candle.

You'll receive our grateful confirmation of your gift including a tax receipt. Tribute gifts are entirely tax deductible. You will have an immediate and significant impact on the lives of those building a path out of homelessness.

Recent tribute gifts made to the Homeless Garden Project.

In Honor: Celebrate the birth of a child, special milestones, marriages, and anniversaries with an honorary tribute gift.
- Rosalie Evans — Amy Evans
- Jim and Becky Lang — Lisa Rose
- Jacqueline Emmer-Shams — Robert Stanley
- Arnold R. Bruhn — Alexis Morgan

In memory: Memorialize a loved one or express your sympathy with a tribute gift.
- Susan Lentz and Ken Gray — Joan and David Hentges
- Muriel Salmonson — Raven Jones
- Del Harrington — Jan and Olafur Olafsson, Craig's Auto Upholstery, Craig and Janet Neu, Gary and Sheryl Peters

Your donation will be matched by our friends at the Monterey Peninsula Foundation
Nov 3, 2014 - Feb 27, 2015

Homeless Garden Project will receive 120% of your donation!

To take advantage of this wonderful opportunity, please choose one:
- Donate online: montereypeninsulafoundation.org/what-we-do/charity-match
- Mail a check made out to “Monterey Peninsula Foundation” and send to PO Box 617, Santa Cruz, CA 95061. Please note “Homeless Garden Project” in the memo line.

Thank you for considering this special offer!

Join us for a special Holiday Celebration on FIRST FRIDAY

Friday, December 5
5:30 pm — 8:00 pm

Special presentation 6:00 pm

Downtown Holiday Store
110 Cooper St, Suite 100G

Food, Drink & Song! Traditional holiday goodies.

First Friday Artists

Come celebrate all that’s been accomplished at Homeless Garden Project this year!

Check our website for information about book signings and other special events at our Holiday Store.

homelessgardenproject.org
The Homeless Garden Project
P.O. Box 617 • Santa Cruz, California • 95061

See our Web Site: www.homelessgardenproject.org
or call us at: (831) 426-3609

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