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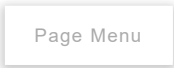
THE FLOWER SHOW


COVID-19 UPDATE: As of May 21, the City of Philadelphia has updated its policy regarding mask wearing indoors and outdoors. The PHS Philadelphia Flower Show will be following these new guidelines. Therefore, fully vaccinated people are recommended but not required to wear masks outdoors and required to wear masks indoors. People who are not fully vaccinated are required to wear masks except when eating and drinking. We advise that you bring your own mask. Please check this site regularly before your entry date for the latest updates.



By Marion McParland

In this season that celebrates giving, the Kennett Area Community Service (KACS) in Kennett Square, PA, led by Leah Reynolds, Executive Director, exemplifies the best of what happens when a community comes together to support one another. Understaffed





but overly determined, the Food Cupboard at KACS quickly rose to the task of mobilizing its small staff when they heard they were going to be the recipients of thousands of pounds of produce grown for PHS's Harvest 2020 collective food-growing initiative by nearby Longwood Gardens and Kennett Middle School's Giving Garden.

On Her Own

"On March 13 when everything shut down nationally, I had to suspend all of my remaining volunteers," she says. Reynolds took matters into her own hands. She set about closing buildings and modifying operations with no volunteers able to help. "That first weekend I pre-packed 80 boxes of food – no one knew what was going to happen," she says. Ninety percent of the items the Food Cupboard gave away had always come from local grocery stores, but there was nothing being donated, and the trucks were coming back empty each week from the store rounds. Reynolds began reaching out to meat markets, butchers, and dairy farms to purchase meat, bread, milk, and eggs directly for the best price for the families.

With more than 25 years of experience leading both small and complex nonprofit organizations, Reynolds has devoted her life to helping people, but she had never experienced anything like the COVID-19 pandemic. By mid-March, several hundred people were coming each week to request food. Reynolds' tiny staff went out to the street, wearing masks, to give masks to those coming for food. "We weren't able to hand out food unless they were wearing masks," she says.

Thankful for Harvest 2020 Donations

"The donations of fresh fruits and vegetables that started coming in through Harvest 2020 have been an important part of food distribution to families," says Reynolds.

"These donations have allowed us to spend money in other areas of need." In total, they received 3,219 pounds of produce from Longwood Gardens and 1,615 pounds from the Kennett Middle School Giving Garden.

"Without these donations through Harvest 2020, families would not have received the fresh, good quality food they were given," says Reynolds. "This is important work – it's about helping people at a time when most of the world is pretty unfriendly. It's collective impact at its best – it takes all of us. Harvest 2020 has harvested more than just produce – it has been a harvest of collaboration, goodwill, friendships, and connections."

Serving through Rain, Snow, Pandemic, and Heat Wave

Between October 1, 2019 and September 30, 2020, KACS had 16,447 visits to the Food Cupboard, which included 1,011 seniors and 6,051 children. "We've never had numbers this large," says Reynolds. Families can pick up food once a month, on a Wednesday or a Friday. In addition, KACS delivers food boxes to 115 households for seniors and disabled residents monthly.

Locally Grown, Fresh, and Organic

"The quality and quantity of the locally grown food we've received has been amazing –



especially the leafy greens, peppers, and tomatoes,” says Britton Elwood, Operations Coordinator at KACS. Recipients are surprised, and thankful, when they receive their boxes and cannot believe it is all just for them. Many of the gardens involved in Harvest 2020 went out of their way to grow unique produce to suit the tastes of their local neighbors. “Kennett Middle School grew produce that they thought people would like, including papalo, an herb used in Hispanic cooking, as well as nopales, an edible type of cactus,” said Elwood.

The Little Engine That Could

Pre-COVID, Reynolds had seven full-time and two part-time staff, along with 75 volunteers. The pandemic affected headcount at KACS but since March 2020, her team has grown to nine full-time and three part-time employees, along with one part-time intern and just a few volunteers. “We’re going to give until we have nothing left to give,” says Reynolds. In addition to providing food, KACS also pays rent, mortgage, hotels, utilities, and medical expenses to those in need, which totaled \$63,000 alone this September. Reynolds and her team work tirelessly to ensure that families in Kennett, Unionville, and Avon Grove School Districts have food on their plates and roofs over their heads.

Collective Impact at Its Best

Through Harvest 2020, introductions and connections between gardeners and the receiving-end food banks blossomed. Everyone involved — receiving families, food pantries, and gardeners — has shared gratitude and thanks for the connections that Harvest 2020 has fostered. Partnerships that had not existed prior to the pandemic were cultivated, and the collective power of many regional food banks, growers, and volunteers came together to accomplish an unimaginable goal — the growing, harvesting, donating, and distribution of more than 31,000 pounds of fresh produce to our neighbors in the Greater Philadelphia region.

Pictured above, from left to right: Nancy Tapia, KACS Participate Advocate; Carol Vidal, KACS Community Coordinator; Meg McCown, KACS Operations Director, and Leah Mulcahey, volunteer, working inside the Food Cupboard garage.

Learn more about PHS's Community Garden Program

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