

The Role of the Farmacy Garden as a Site for Transformative Learning for Sustainability

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Life Sciences

In

Agricultural and Extension Education

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May 11th, 2020

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: community gardens, community food security, transformative learning,  
sustainability, narrative inquiry, critical consciousness, praxis

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

The neoliberal political economy guiding our present food system has contributed to our present unsustainable situation, characterized by wicked problems such as environmental degradation, food insecurity and diet-related illness. Our current condition demands a new conception of sustainability to guide creative and counter-hegemonic interventions that can supplant the dominant oppressive structures and processes presently characterizing development efforts. While community gardens have been recognized as common grounds for food systems transformation, research has largely missed this opportunity for exploration.

Drawing from the planetary and emancipatory frameworks of transformative learning, and a conception of sustainability rooted in life values, counter-hegemony, and social justice, this case study explores how a collective community garden is a critical pedagogy space for stakeholders to change their own reality within their food system. Using narrative inquiry as a methodology, I conducted semi-structured interviews with garden stakeholders (n=12). The lived experiences of study participants revealed the transformative potential of the Farmacy Garden rooted in the community food security movement. As a space that inspires critical consciousness for humanization, study participants deepened their awareness of new choices and possibilities in their food system rooted in life values. As a space that inspires social action for community economies, the Farmacy Garden promoted transactions rooted in reciprocity and gift-based exchange. Through critical hope and creative imagination for integral development, study participants are envisioning and exploring alternatives that can guide us in the challenging and contradictory work of “making new worlds” (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 628).

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The Farmacy Garden (FG) is a collective community garden built on public land in a small town in rural, southwest Virginia, with a mission to promote health, increase food security, and build community capacity among low-income residents in the region. As an educational garden funded within a public health context, the FG programs and evaluation parameters have prioritized health outcomes over other potential benefits of the site. This study embraces a whole-systems perspective, providing an opportunity to cultivate a richer understanding of the role the FG plays as a critical pedagogy space for sustainability and food systems transformation. Drawing on the planetary and emancipatory conceptions of transformative learning, and narrative inquiry as a methodology, this case study explores the perceptions and experiences of FG participants and practitioners (n=12) through story and critical reflection using semi-structured, narrative interviews. The lived experiences of these stakeholders reveals the FG's role as an educational site that enables participants and practitioners to cultivate new understandings of themselves, invigorate new forms of social action, and nurture new imaginaries that provoke possibilities beyond the current condition.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this research to all of the people that have brought the Farmacy Garden to life. I have come to see your efforts as the material of making new worlds, and an enduring source of inspiration and hope that carries me forward. Thank you!

## **Acknowledgements**

These past two years of graduate school have been deeply enriching, challenging, and dare I say *transformative!* I feel beyond grateful for the community that has supported me through this process--intellectually, emotionally, materially, spiritually, I know I could not have done this without you.

First and foremost, thank you Dr. Kim Niewolny, my advisor and friend. This work would not have been possible without your strategic mentorship. What a gift it has been to have your guidance and support these past two years. Thank you for caring beyond the call of duty, challenging me to do my best work, and never giving me the answer, but rather pushing me to trust my instincts. Our weekly discussions have opened my mind to considerations and possibilities beyond what I could have ever imagined, and will undoubtedly inform my praxis for years to come. My deepest appreciation to my committee as well, Dr. Jennifer Culhane and Terry Clements, LA. Your care, guidance, and support has taken this research to the next level. It has been such an honor and joy to learn from you.

To Dr. Lori Blanc, my assistantship advisor and friend. I am so grateful for our journey together these past two years--learning, creating, problem-solving, re-creating....Your boundless enthusiasm, creativity, work ethic, passion, and pedagogy has been a source of inspiration for me. I look forward to seeing where life takes you next.

To my ALCE colleagues, especially Garland M., Carmen Y., Nicole N., Lia K., and Roberto F. Thanks for learning and laughing with me these past two years!

To my wolves--Caro, Jo, and Liza. I cherish all of our wild, wonderful, and heart-warming times together. How lucky I am to have found such a beautiful and supportive crew. Caro, your zest for life, deep intuition, and enduring support has been such a gift to me. Thanks for always keepin' it classy :). Jo, it's been an honor to be in grad school solidarity! I've so appreciated getting to know you these past few years. Your silliness and tenacity is something I aspire to! Liza, one million thank yous. I couldn't have survived these past two years without you. Thanks for being my best friend, and always keeping me honest. Your determination and altruism inspire me every day. I love you.

To Will. I'm so glad we found each other! Our walks and talks have been a source of respite and joy amidst grad school chaos this past year. I love exploring the world with you, and am excited to be friends forever. I can't thank you enough for being my thesis soundboard, always ready with a keen ear, patiently listening and letting me ramble on for hours trying to make sense of things.

To Zoe, my beloved pup. Thank you for greeting me bed side every morning with an unfaltering exuberance for the day. Our daily walks and snuggles have been an ongoing source of strength and sanity. You know, better than anyone, how to get me off my laptop and out into the woods. Thank you for teaching me about the important things in life--joy, fun, and unconditional love.

To my family--Mom, Dad, Kerry, Grady, Collin, Patty, Ella, Aedan. Thank you for the love and unending support. Thank you for believing in me. I love you all.

To my Blacksburg homies. Jess S., Leah S., Caleb F., Rebecca J., Laura S., Liz H., Sydney D., David J., Shu G., Anna P., & Thea V. Thank you!

To my dear friends far away. Rena A., Natalie C., Caitlin F., Gina A., Cobra Chris, Chanel J., Alex K., Lyndsay M., Chris P., & Kristin S.

To the Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners. You all have been an enduring source of inspiration for this study, and inspiration for my life. Thank you.

And, to these mountains that I've called home for the past 13 years, land of the Tutelo/Monacan people. Thank you for holding me, enlivening me with your beauty, and nourishing my mind, body, and spirit.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background

The present terminal state of the agro-industrial food system has been guided by a neoliberal political economy and Western ideology that has established measures of developmental success in terms of “economic growth and rising consumption” (McMichael, 2017, p. 4) through the creation of standardized concepts such as gross national product (GNP), and gross domestic product (GDP). This development trend is increasingly problematic, as economic growth does not equate to economic equality, reflected in growing wealth disparities across geographic, class, racial and gender lines. Further, focus on increased consumption has led to social and environmental crises, as the global food regime has largely ignored the externalized costs of production (McMichael, 2017).

In response to these compounding crises, the concept of ‘sustainability’ has gained momentum and widespread popularity as an alternative paradigm. Unfortunately, the prevalence and legitimation of the term has led to “conceptual vagueness, fluidity, and co-option” (Sumner, 2005, p. 304), leaving it vulnerable to reinforcing the neoliberal agenda by conceptualizing it in economic terms. To halt the momentum of this co-option, it is imperative that we recognize that “sustainability is at root as radical an idea you’re likely to come across. It opens a deep fissure in the bedrock of conventional economic thinking” (Ellwood, 2000, p. 11). With this recognition, we can begin to see sustainability as a counter-hegemonic paradigm that directly rejects the values that buttress neoliberalism (monetary), while offering a new set of values that align with the preservation and continuation of life itself (Sumner, 2005). This is accomplished by creating and preserving the civil commons, which is “the vast social fabric of unpriced goods, protecting and enabling life in a wide and deep seamless web of historical evolution that sustains society

and civilization” (McMurtry, 1998, p.25). In this conceptualization, sustainability is understood from a life values perspective as “involving a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons” (Sumner, 2005, p. 308). When coupled with a social justice orientation to sustainability that unites the environmental justice movement with environmentalism (Agyeman, et al., 2003), a broader and more unified movement for sustainability is born.

As mechanisms to support the sustainability of our food system, food movements have emerged as alternatives to the corporate food regime, building the civil commons, while resisting the hegemony of the current system. Working within four broad areas: environmental sustainability of food production; quality of life for farmers and agrarian communities; food quality, access and human health; and the liberating potential for socially just food systems (Constance et. al, 2014; Slocum, 2006), alternative food movements advocate for more “ecologically sound and socially just farming methods, food marketing and distribution, and healthier food options across the US” (Slocum, 2006, p. 522).

As a holistic frame to understand alternative food movements, community food security is a “condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision-making” (Hamm & Bellows, 2003, p. 37). Sensitive to the inherent complexity and intersecting dimensions of the food system, community food security ensures that issues within the food system be understood within the context of the larger social, political and economic landscape (Hamm & Bellows, 2003), priming alternative food movement practitioners to seek multi-dimensional solutions that work to address root causes.

Community gardens have sprouted up as one type of intervention working to support community food security. Community gardens have the potential to offer partial solutions

towards combating some of the most wicked social problems present in the U.S. such as chronic disease, food insecurity, socioeconomic inequality, and shrinking social connection (Porter, 2018). This becomes all the more likely when social opportunity available within community gardens is harnessed by participants to address larger issues of social justice, leveraging their smaller network in partnership with nongovernmental organizations, and state agencies (Wekerle, 2004). Beyond the obvious educational opportunities for food production and preparation, community gardens also have the potential for collective learning in issues such as “food security, environmental sustainability, community resilience, social justice and cultural identity” (Walter, 2013, p. 531). While community gardens can serve as a space to cultivate awareness of issues associated with food justice “the people who engage and practice growing in these spaces do not always perceive themselves as political actors with a coherent ‘transformational’ agenda” (Kneafsey et al., 2017, p. 623). Rather, participants in community gardens often nurture important facets of food justice such as networks of knowledge exchange, community cohesion, citizen empowerment and capacity building without overt political aim (Kneafsey et al., 2017).

Regardless, the mere act of gardening has the potential to foster “prefigurative social change...[that] open[s] up new possibilities for being, seeing and doing” (Guerlain & Campbell, 2016, p. 220). Recognized as “sites of creative resistance” (Walter, 2013, p. 523), community gardens provide a space for transformative learning through food pedagogy and critical food pedagogy to occur through the construction of new and aspirational ways of knowing the world (Sumner, 2016, p. xxix). This includes sustainable learning, reconceptualized by Sumner (2003) from a definition originally posed by Isagani Serrano:

“Learning sustainability is based on a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons. It is a participatory, transformative process that involves learning through

social action, developing critical consciousness and encouraging dialogical engagement, all within a life-values perspective. Sustainable learning is a process of building the capacity and power of people to recognise, name and confront the impacts of corporate globalisation and to change the present unsustainable situation. It should enable people on both sides of the North-South divide to make sense of the complex local-global dynamics in order to create solidarity around a common sustainable vision of individual and community well-being based in building the civil commons” (p. 28).

## **Problem Statement**

Despite the potential of learning sustainability in community gardens, research has largely missed this opportunity for study. It has instead adopted a narrowed perspective framed by empirical approaches and organizational agendas. As a response to this gap in the literature, this study offers insight into the transformative potential of the Farmacy Garden through the perspectives of garden participants and practitioners.

The Farmacy Garden is a collective community garden in Montgomery County, Virginia developed in 2014 through a collaboration between the New River Health District (NRHD), Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), and the Family Nutrition Program (FNP). Built with the mission to promote health, increase food security and build community among low-income residents of Montgomery County, Virginia, the Farmacy Garden has become a multifaceted program that uses the 34-raised bed shared community garden space, and neighboring perennial fruit crop edible landscape as a living laboratory to implement horticulture and integrative garden-based nutrition education programming.

As a living example of the inherent tensions present in creating alternatives within the existing structures of neoliberal political economy, this case study of the Farmacy Garden aims to explore the interstitial spaces where openings into new ways of seeing, doing, and being may live. Expanding the scope of study beyond pounds of produce, and empirical health outcomes, this research aims to capture the less tangible, but just as valuable benefits to engagement.

Providing an opportunity to explore, with more latitude, what *else* gardens grow, this study examines the transformative role the Farmacy Garden plays in the lives of those that tend it. As so eloquently stated by Ott (2018), “if we only measure the health of communities...by their high rates of illness and their nutritional shortcomings, then we pathologize the people who live there, [and]...fail to see the centers of cultural vibrancy within these places” (p. 25).

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

I propose a research study centered around one main question and three operational questions: How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of transformative learning for sustainability in participants’ and practitioners’ lives?

- How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for critical consciousness?
- How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for social action?
- How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for creativity and vision?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Within the context of this research, I will draw upon aspects of the planetary and emancipatory conceptions of transformative learning. According to O’Sullivan, Morrell, & O’Connor (2002), transformative learning

“involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy” (p. xvii).

In a planetary conception of transformative learning, a holistic understanding of transformation is conceived, moving beyond the individual level to address and reconfigure the entire system.



By touching the realms of education, society, politics, industry and the environment, this approach works to develop a new discourse that emphasizes ecological and planetary interconnectedness (O’Sullivan, 1999). The planetary conception of transformative learning recognizes the terminal state of our present rational-industrial mode of operation and demands a coming transformation that will “transcend the forces of modernism and include them at the same time” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 1), transcending the dominating power differentials at play, while including the benign, beneficial and essential aspects to modernism (Wilber, 1996). This new path forward moves beyond the dominant neoliberal framework that often tarnishes well-intended social democratic programming by over-emphasizing values of market individualism, and shifts the focus toward a “politics of hope and meaning” (Lerner, 1996), where the fundamental needs of both humans and the larger earth community are central. Moving beyond reformative notions of change, planetary transformative learning harnesses a framework encompassing three main realms of learning, including: an education for survival, an education for critical understanding, and an education for integral creativity (O’Sullivan, 2002).

**Education for survival.** In this context, survival refers to “creating conditions for the continuance of living” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 4). An education for survival involves reckoning with the terminal state of our world, a situation that has been perpetuated by a dominant Western ideology that elevates humans over nature and “fragments existence” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 4). Deeply embedded within the present market economy, this ideology has fueled larger social, economic and political systems on a global scale, contributing to the entwined social and environmental issues present today. According to O’Sullivan (2002), “Understanding these complex issues as an intricate part of the current ecological crisis is the survival task of

transformative learning” (p. 5). Essential to this understanding is learning the dynamics of denial, despair, and grief (O’Sullivan, 2002).

**Education for critical understanding.** Reckoning with the terminal state of the world requires a process of critical reflection that leads us to “examine the factors and conditions that have brought us to this devastating historical moment” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 5). This involves a deep examination of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that drive the Western paradigm; our present state as an “unconscious civilization” (Ralston, 1997); and the societal power dynamics that fuel structures of imperialism. This research will draw on the work of Friere (1970), and his conceptions of *conscientization* and *praxis* as theoretical underpinnings for a critical resistance education. Conscientization refers to “the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality” (Friere, 1970a, p. 27). Conscientization is founded on praxis, a dialogic and reflexive learning process resulting in the union of theory, reflection and action for transformation (Freire, 1970b).

**Education for integral creativity.** Education for integral creativity involves envisioning possibilities that extend beyond the Western ideological frame, encouraging a reimagining of our world through the process of learning for planetary consciousness, integral development, quality of life, and the sacred (O’Sullivan, 2002). Education for planetary consciousness involves reexamining our position in the world, shifting our lens from being located within the market economy to being part of the broader cosmological context. Education for integral development involves a reconceptualization of development from its Western context to link “the creative evolutionary processes of the universe, the planet, the earth community, the human community, and the personal world” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 8). Education for quality of life problematizes the

modern paradigm of equating life quality with material consumption. This learning process involves reconceptualizing quality of life in the broader scope of human needs including aspects such as community, sense of place, diversity and inclusion, civic culture, and respect for all living things. Finally, education and the sacred involves recognizing education as a spiritual undertaking, and an integral part of transformative learning.

## **Methodology**

This study uses a case study and narrative inquiry design as a way to explore the posed research questions. A case study refers to research that chooses to explore one entity, tending to the epistemological question: “What can be learned about the single case?” (Stake, 2005, p. 443). Within the context of this study I employed an *intrinsic* case study. Intrinsic case studies are distinguished by research intent, where a study is pursued because of an intrinsic desire to better understand a particular case.

Narrative inquiry is considered both a methodology and pedagogical orientation for teaching and learning (Kim, 2008) that is well suited to capture experiences of transformative learning. Defined as a process of meaning-making through stories lived and told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), narrative inquiry is a subjective and dialogic endeavor that occurs at three overlapping levels:

“stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant’s and investigator’s narrative.” (Riessman, 2008, p. 6)

Characterized by temporality, relationality between researcher and participant, and the “construction and presentation of self through language” (Foste, 2018, p. 11), narrative inquiry is an active process, and a performative experience that enables participants to portray themselves in a way they find meaningful and in the way they want to be known (Foste, 2018, p. 12). In this

study research participants have engaged in the active process of narrative inquiry to make meaning of their perspectives of, experiences with, and aspirations for the Farmacy Garden Program.

### **Significance**

This study has methodological, theoretical, and practical significance. Using narrative inquiry as a methodology, and the planetary and emancipatory transformative learning frameworks, this study aims to demonstrate how, if at all, the Farmacy Garden is a critical pedagogy space that enables people to change their own reality within their food system. With relevance and implications for future research and praxis, the approach and findings of this study supports the advancement of narrative inquiry as a methodology, and contributes to the growing body of literature on the transformative potential of community gardens.

This study contributes to the methodological advancement of narrative inquiry. As a methodology with the latitude to capture multiple and nuanced perspectives, narrative inquiry allows for a holistic exploration of a topic. This makes it a relevant approach to examine community food security initiatives and complexity in transformative learning theory. Proper exploration into the comprehensive and complex nature of community food security initiatives demands a holistic methodology like narrative inquiry. The findings of this study showcase the benefits of using this methodology in community food security research, with data that honors multiple perspectives, demonstrates holism, and reveals the complexity in this type of work. Further, the latitude of narrative inquiry is also well-situated to capture and examine the complexity of transformative learning. Research has discussed the inherent complexity of transformative learning experiences (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012), and suggested that story-based methodologies are effective ways to study transformative learning in practice (Kroth & Cranton,

2014). This study provides further insight into the applicability of narrative inquiry as a methodology to better capture and understand the intricacies of transformative learning theory and practice.

Contributing to the growing body of literature on community gardens as sites for food systems transformation, this study also has theoretical significance, despite being a case study particular to the Farmacy Garden, and not intended to be generalizable. From an ontological perspective, this study demonstrates how community gardens can be reimagined as sites for learning sustainability, serving as important grounds for people to engage in the challenging and contradictory work of creating new realities outside the current unsustainable condition. With this lens, I invite academics to consider this insight for future research. Further, the findings from this study also demonstrate how garden stakeholders are working within the community food security and food sovereignty movements to create new realities for themselves and their communities. Through this research I suggest that community gardens may serve as sites of convergence, where distinct movements can come together, and be reimagined for new possibilities.

Finally, this research has significance for practice, both within the Farmacy Garden and beyond. Narrative interviews with garden stakeholders disclosed perspectives, experiences, and visions about the Farmacy Garden, providing relevant information that could be applied to future practice in the space. Across narratives, participants and practitioners offered suggestions for program improvement and expansion that could support future planning efforts. Further, beyond the Farmacy Garden, this study serves as an example for how practitioners in community gardens may begin to reimagine impacts beyond pounds of produce, and number of participants. By expanding the scope of what practitioners see and value as ‘outcomes’ in community

gardens, they may begin to find creative ways to capture and leverage these new potentials in practice.

### **Definition of Terms**

There are numerous key terms that underpin this research. To establish a cohesive understanding of these concepts, I will use this section to discuss how I interpret and apply these terms within the context of this thesis. Please consider these definitions as you review this document.

The concept of **sustainability** serves as an overarching frame for this research. As a co-opted term that has largely lost its meaning, I attempt to reinstill significance into the concept by foregrounding the work of Sumner (2005), and Agyeman, et al. (2003). In these contexts, sustainability becomes a radical resistance and reframing of the dominant Western ideology and market-based system. Grounded in life values, the preservation and construction of the civil commons, and reoriented toward social justice, the concept of sustainability invites us to radically reimagine our world. Aligning with this understanding of sustainability, **learning sustainability** is understood as “Learning sustainability is based on a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons. It is a participatory, transformative process that involves learning through social action, developing critical consciousness and encouraging dialogical engagement, all within a life-values perspective. Sustainable learning is a process of building the capacity and power of people to recognise, name and confront the impacts of corporate globalisation and to change the present unsustainable situation. It should enable people on both sides of the North-South divide to make sense of the complex local-global dynamics in order to create solidarity around a common sustainable vision of individual and community well-being based in building the civil commons” (Sumner, 2003, p. 28).

The landscape of **alternative food movements** reveals how the food sector is working toward the sustainability of our world. Operating within four broad areas: environmental sustainability of food production; quality of life for farmers and agrarian communities; food quality, access and human health; and the liberating potential for socially just food systems (Constance et. al, 2014; Slocum, 2006), the landscape of alternative food movements has a latitude of intersecting approaches to foster a just and sustainable food system.

As one framework to consider the multi-dimensional landscape of alternative food movements, **community food security** examines the phenomenon of food security holistically and from a community level. Conceptualized by Hamm and Bellows (2003), community food security is a “condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision-making” (p. 37).

Operating in support of community food security, **food justice, food democracy, and food sovereignty** are social justice movements concerned with ending oppression and breaking down uneven power dynamics within the food system (Reynolds, Block, & Bradley, 2018). **Food justice** operates within three key arenas for action: (i) seeking to challenge and restructure the dominant food system; (ii) providing a core focus on equity and disparities and the struggles by those who are most vulnerable; and (iii) establishing linkages and common goals with other forms of social justice activism and advocacy (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). **Food democracy** is conceptualized as “the right of all to an essential of life—safe, nutritious food. It also suggests fair access to land to grow food and fair return for those who labor to produce it” (Lappé & Lappé, 2018). Finally, **food sovereignty** is the right of persons to “healthy and culturally

appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (La Via Campesina, 2009).

Learning is an essential aspect to the realization of social justice within food systems. As a larger body of work, **food systems pedagogy** recognizes that “food is not only an object *of* learning but also a vehicle *for* learning” (Flowers & Swan, 2012, p. 423), and includes “congeries of education, teaching and learning about how to grow, shop for, prepare, cook, display, taste, eat and dispose of food by a range of agencies, actors and media; and aimed at a spectrum of “learners” including middle class women, migrants, children, parents, shoppers, and racially minoritised and working class mothers.” (Flowers and Swan, 2012, p. 425).

As the theoretical framework undergirding this study, I draw from O’Sullivan, Morrell, & O’Connor (2002) conception of planetary **transformative learning**, which they understand to be a deep shift in consciousness that permanently alters the way we perceive and move through the world. This transformation occurs on many levels--with ourselves, with others and the natural world, with our understanding of larger systems and structures of power, with our body-awarenesses, and with our sense of possibility for envisioning a better future. This transformative learning experience occurs within three main realms of learning, including: an education for survival, an education for critical understanding, and an education for integral creativity three main educational components. Within the framework for an education for critical understanding I harness the emancipatory approach to transformative learning through Freire’s (1970b) conception of **conscientization** and **praxis**. Conscientization refers to “the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality” (Freire,



1970c, p. 27). Praxis is a dialogic and reflexive learning process resulting in the union of theory, reflection and action for transformation.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The development of this study was largely informed and guided by an exploration of the relevant scholarly literature across topics such as neoliberalism, sustainability, alternative food movements, community food security, community gardens, and food systems pedagogy. The theoretical framework that undergirds this study evolved from a scholarly investigation into conceptions of transformative learning theory and critical pedagogy. It is through this extensive review of the literature that the research questions that drive this study were born.

### **Neoliberalism and Reconceptualizing Sustainability**

The present terminal state of the agro-industrial food system has been guided by a Western ideology that has established measures of developmental success in terms of “economic growth and rising consumption” (McMichael, 2017, p. 4) through the creation of standardized concepts such as gross national product (GNP), and gross domestic product (GDP). This trend toward neoliberalization through measures of GNP and GDP are increasingly problematic, as economic growth does not equate to economic equality, reflected in growing wealth disparities across geographic, class, racial and gender lines. Further, focus on increased consumption has led to social and environmental crises, as the global food regime has ignored the externalized costs of production (McMichael, 2017).

The political and economic theory of neoliberalism has been a pervasive force in compounding this wealth and income disparity through free markets, free trade, and ‘trickle down’ economics (Harvey, 2005). Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as “a political economic philosophy that asserts the primacy of the market in attending to human needs and wellbeing, and re-orientes the state towards the facilitation of market mechanisms” ( p. 2). Characterized by

processes of deregulation, trade liberalization, asset privatization through enclosure, state devolution, and a guiding ethic of competition, neoliberalism has asserted market influence over many aspects of social life (Harvey, 2005). This includes subjectivities, or modes of self-identification that are inevitably shaped by larger structural forces. Neoliberal subjectivities refer to notions of self that are informed by market logic. With a consumerist mentality, neoliberal subjects embrace the devolution of the welfare state for ideals anchored in individual responsibility, choice, and entrepreneurship (Guthman, 2008, Alkon & Mares, 2013, Barron, 2017).

In response to the compounding crises exacerbated by neoliberalism, the concept of ‘sustainability’ has gained momentum and widespread popularity as an alternative paradigm. Unfortunately, the prevalence and legitimation of the term has led to “conceptual vagueness, fluidity, and co-option” (Sumner, 2005, p. 304), leaving it vulnerable to reinforcing the neoliberal agenda by conceptualizing it in economic terms. To halt the momentum of this co-option, it is imperative that we recognize that “sustainability is at root as radical an idea you’re likely to come across. It opens a deep fissure in the bedrock of conventional economic thinking” (Ellwood, 2000, p. 11). With this recognition, we can begin to see sustainability as a paradigm that directly rejects the values that buttress neoliberalism (monetary), while offering a new set of values that align with the preservation and continuation of life itself (Sumner, 2005). Sumner (2003) posits that sustainability must be a dynamic concept that has the capacity to adjust to multiple scales, addressing both the broad scope of global issues, and the narrow scope of local concerns. This is achieved by conceptually anchoring sustainability in terms of dialogue, counter-hegemony, and life values (Sumner, 2003).

Dialogue is conceptualized by critical theorists Jürgen Habermas (1984), and Paulo Freire (1970). According to Habermas (1984), dialogue is based in communicative action, which is a process of verbal or extraverbal interaction between two or more people that strengthens relationships, fosters shared understandings, and helps to coordinate a common plan of action. According to Freire (1970), dialogue is a process comprised of two inseparable elements-- reflection and action. These two aspects necessitate one another, as dialogue without action becomes *verbalism*, and dialogue without reflection becomes *activism* (Freire, 1970). As individuals engage in dialogue (both reflection and action), they attain importance and meaning as human beings (Freire, 1970) through the creative act of “naming the world [to] transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 88). Dialogue operates outside the hostility of the oppressive historical and systemic structures that privilege the ‘truth’ of some over others, operating within a horizontal relationship between subjects. Dialogue necessitates a “profound love for the world and for people” (Freire, 1970, p. 89), “humility” (Freire, 1970, p. 90) “an intense faith in humankind” (Freire, 1970, p. 90), “hope” (Freire, 1970, p. 91) and “critical thinking” (Freire, 1970, p. 92). It is through the reflection and action of dialogue that individuals, together, transform their perceptions, and thereby transcend their historical limitations as new possibilities emerge through humanization.

Hegemony refers to “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). Deeply embedded and reified by culture, hegemony maintains the status quo and secures the interests of those in power. In opposition, counter-hegemony is the resistance to and withdrawal from automatically consenting to the direction commanded by the group in power (Sumner, 2003).

Sustainability is a paradigm that directly rejects the values that buttress neoliberalism, instead offering a new set of values that align with the preservation and continuation of life itself (Sumner, 2003; Sumner, 2005). Within this value system, money is in service to the creation and preservation of life, thereby promoting a markedly distinct set of decisions and actions than those guided by the market-based system (Sumner, 2003).

It is with a conception of sustainability founded on dialogue, counter-hegemony and life values that sustainability can be enacted through “a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons” (Sumner, 2003, p. 24; Sumner, 2005, p. 308). The civil commons is understood as “the vast social fabric of unpriced goods, protecting and enabling life in a wide and deep seamless web of historical evolution that sustains society and civilization” (McMurtry, 1998, p. 25). The civil commons can be biophysical, cultural, social or knowledge-based, and may manifest in the form of soil, community parks and gardens, language, public education, or indigenous ecological knowledge (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013). While it is intended to foster social welfare and ensure public access to life resources (Sumner, 2003), in the era of globalization and capitalism the civil commons have continued to face threats driven by the privatization of public lands, goods and services.

Private ownership has been framed as “one of the founding pillars of modern democracies...[and] modern economies” (Gibson-Graham, et al., 2013, p. 126). Ideas of private property have been glorified through discourse that touts visions of independence and freedom for the individual, paired with claims that land is best cared for, most productive, and most efficient when privately owned. This argument is perpetuated by references to the ‘tragedy of the commons’, or the idea that public property too easily becomes exploited by improper management (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). Consequently, private ownership has proliferated “at

the very time that our global circumstances demand not just collective thinking and acting but a move away from the boundary making that separates mine from yours and you from me”

(Gibson-Graham et al., p. 127).

Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) call for us to re-examine the prerogative of private property, challenging the notion of the ‘tragedy of the commons’ by maintaining that when properly managed by communities with stake, the commons have proliferated successfully for thousands of years. With regulations, protocols for use and access, strengthened by values and principles of stewardship, the commons have been and can be responsibly maintained and nourished (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). This is aligned with Sumner’s (2003 & 2005) notion that enacting sustainability demands that the *structures* and *processes* that build the civil commons continue to be strengthened. These structures and processes are manifold, and may take the forms of social movements, governmental bodies, legislation, universities, research endeavors, teaching, and learning.

In order for this conception of sustainability to be enacted, it is essential that we begin to challenge the boundaries between issues of social justice and environmental sustainability. An emerging conception of sustainability within the environmental justice movement (EJM) provides a relevant framework that bridges this historical divide (Agyeman et al., 2016). Sustainability has largely been linked to the environmental movement, which has been critiqued for being exclusionary, demarcating what is considered ‘the environment’, and thereby narrowing the scope of potential allies in the cause (Di Chiro, 2008). Consequently, people of color and low-income people have been largely absent from the mainstream environmental movement, as issues of race, class, and gender have not been considered relevant. In response, the environmental justice frame challenges the Westernized notion that social and environmental

issues are distinct--a consequence of a dominant ideology that views humans as separate from the natural world (Di Chiro, 2008). Harnessing the collective power of multi-sector coalitions, the EJM is pluralist and non-hierarchical in its issues of focus, and approach to action (Agyeman et al., 2016), operating on a range of scales to address the unique challenges to distributive, procedural, and recognition-based justice (Walker, 2009). Historically intersecting with existing political movements such as the civil rights movement; the occupational health and safety movement; the indigenous land rights movement; the public health and safety movement; the solidarity movement for human rights and self-determination of developing world peoples; and the social/economic justice movement for oppressed communities of color and low-income communities (Farber & McCarthy, 2003), the EJM has developed the capacity to adapt and respond to emergent social and environmental issues. It is with “this internal epistemic, theoretical, and methodological pluralism” (Agyeman et al., 2016, p. 327) that the EJM can help reimagine and reinvigorate the environmental movement in new terms.

Just sustainabilities is one framework within the EJM which challenges dominant notions of environmentalism by recognizing that “A truly sustainable society is one where wider questions of social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed on supporting ecosystems” (Agyeman, et al., 2003, p. 2). This emergent discourse invites us to reimagine a fundamental paradigmatic assumption that guides Western ideology--the belief that humans are distinct from their environment (Di Chiro, 2008). A just sustainability discourse invites us to situate “‘nature’ and the ‘environment’ in the geographies of everyday life: the places in which we ‘live, work, play, learn, and worship’...bring[ing] environmental issues *home*” (De Chiro, 2008, p. 286).

Unfortunately, reimagining sustainability in these ways cannot be fully realized without addressing the economic system that undergirds our present form of unsustainable development. As an alternative approach, Gibson-Graham, Hill, and Law (2016) call for an economy that operates within ecological systems, and leverages the concept of social-ecological resilience to propose the development of “a non-capitalocentric vision of the diverse economy in which ethical practices of habitat maintenance might be actively pursued to build the resilience of the more than human community economies” (p. 704). Challenging the realist epistemology that regards capitalism as an inevitable trajectory, Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) invite us to consider an alternative view that situates the capitalist framework as a performative human construction, rather than a “force of nature” (p. 706). From this vantage point, an alternative vision is possible, one that transcends the monetary code of value (McMurtry, 1998), and recognizes the inherent merit of the environment beyond the scope of utilitarian human consumption (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Enacting this vision requires operating within a systems approach that recognizes the inherent interdependence between ecological, economic, and social systems. Applying the concept of social-ecological resilience within economic systems provides a framework from which to reintegrate these interconnected domains. Conceding to the fact that the human economy is deeply embedded within the multitude of economies used by non-human communities of flora and fauna disrupts the dominant economic discourse that places human livelihood independent of non-human livelihood. Harnessing this new vision of “community economies” (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016 p. 708) reinstills social and environmental ethics into the economic domain and reconceptualizes the economy as part and parcel of the larger earth community. One approach to realizing this vision is by applying the processes and principles of natural ecosystems to the human economy. Systems of habitat maintenance, diversity and



redundancy, circulation and capture of energy and matter, and complex interdependence of developments and co-developments can be viewed as guiding mechanisms to inform economy (Jacobs, 2000). While theoretically rich, the practical application of this vision is a tremendous undertaking that demands exploration, experimentation, and profound paradigmatic transformations as “this reconfigured ‘we’ negotiates questions of needs and survival, surplus generation and distribution, transactions and encounters, consumption, commons sharing and investment in futures” (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016, p. 708).

**Sustainable learning.** Fostering the epistemological and ontological shifts necessary to develop and enact this conception of sustainability demands a critical pedagogy that transcends a content-based approach for one that strengthens democracy and justice as a means for social transformation (Serrano, 2000). This type of education needs to provide opportunities for a deep examination, questioning and problematization of the dominant assumptions, values, philosophies, practices, power dynamics, and institutions that perpetuate modernism. Sumner (2003) builds on Isagani Serrano’s (2000) definition of learning for sustainability, reimagining this process in her chosen terms of ‘sustainable learning’. This conceptualization embodies a praxis that “will help us to learn our way *out* of the problems posed by corporate globalisation and to learn our way *in* to more sustainable ways of life” (Sumner, 2003, p. 22):

“Learning sustainability is based on a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons. It is a participatory, transformative process that involves learning through social action, developing critical consciousness and encouraging dialogical engagement, all within a life-values perspective. Sustainable learning is a process of building the capacity and power of people to recognise, name and confront the impacts of corporate globalisation and to change the present unsustainable situation. It should enable people on both sides of the North-South divide to make sense of the complex local-global dynamics in order to create solidarity around a common sustainable vision of individual and community well-being based in building the civil commons” (Sumner, 2003, p. 28).

## **The Landscape of Alternative Food Movements**

Alternative food practices work to change the eating, farming and purchasing practices of people while fostering well-being, social justice and economy of place. Working within the food system to promote the sustainability of our world, alternative food practices “advocate more ecologically sound and socially just farming methods, food marketing and distribution, and healthier food options across the US” (Slocum, 2006, p. 522). These practices can be categorized into four broad areas: environmental sustainability of food production; quality of life for farmers and agrarian communities; food quality, access and human health; and the liberating potential for socially just food systems (Constance et. al, 2014; Slocum, 2006). These realms of alternative food system efforts have emerged in response to the problems created by the industrial food system that prioritize and subsidize corporate agriculture (Slocum, 2006).

The environmental impacts of industrial agriculture have become increasingly concerning for the long-term sustainability of food production. Industrial agriculture privileges “short-term profit over long-term sustainability, which externalizes the negative ecological, economic, and social costs” (Magdoff et. al., 2000). These externalized costs have created environmental crises such as species endangerment and extinction, contamination of surface and groundwater by fertilizers and pesticides, aquatic hypoxia, soil erosion and degradation, depleted aquifers, collapsed fisheries, along with the myriad of impacts of industrial-scale confined animal feeding operations. These impacts are ultimately threatening global food security and contributing to climate change (McMichael, 2008, 2009b, 2014). In response, organic, small-scale, sustainable and local food production has emerged as a response to the devastating environmental consequences of the industrial food system (Belasco, 1989). This movement was fostered by the back-to-the-land movement, environmentalism, pure food campaigns, and appropriate

production technology (Guthman, 2004), and calls for “organic, free range, hormone and antibiotic free meat and open space...[as well as the] protect[ion of] heirloom seed stock, native plants, and soil fertility...in-season-eating and the promotion of groups’ food heritage” (Slocum, 2007, p. 522) Unfortunately, as organics specifically have spread to a globalized scale, and agribusiness has joined the market to capitalize on the higher price point for produce, the organic label has become coopted, differing only from conventional agriculture by its use of organic inputs, and stifling its transformative potential for the food system (Goodman, 1999). Despite this, organics should still be recognized as a positive development towards environmental sustainability, but not the only solution.

Beyond the environmental implications, the industrial food system has also negatively impacted the quality of life for local farmers and agrarian communities. As agribusiness became more prominent, gaining more power and control within the USDA and land-grant universities in the 1980s, and as globalized food markets took hold, small family-farms struggled to compete (Hightower, 1973). As the reality of this impact on producers, farm workers, and rural communities began to be recognized, local food systems emerged as a solution for revitalization (Halweil, 2004). Efforts to support local farmers through farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture, local sourcing in regional business, buy local campaigns, and work on the policy level became counter strategies to strengthen the local food systems (Slocum, 2006). These strategies help to challenge the economic and political power of the industrial food system and reestablish agriculture in the local community and culture. This strengthens the resilience of farmers and their communities by providing social and economic benefits (Hendrickson & Heffernan, 2002).

“Reflexive localism focused on emancipatory agendas and progressive ideals such as an ethical and just agrifood system builds trust and community, which allows rural peoples

to better resist the globalization project and chart their own futures” (Constance et al., 2014, p. 21).

Food quality is also negatively impacted by the industrial food system. Food produced within the conventional agrifood system negatively impacts the health of everyone involved, including consumers, farmers, and food animals, resulting in critical issues such as poor nutrition, obesity, food safety, animal welfare, food and farm worker marginalization, food deserts, and food insecurity (Constance et al., 2014). In response, nonprofits and governmental programs have sprouted up to meet the need for nutrition education, cooking demonstrations and obesity prevention (Slocum, 2006). Attention to quality in food, work, health, and life for both humans and animals reflects a dimension of alternative food work that strives to create a food system that is characterized by “quality conventions embed[ded] in trust and tradition within a moral economy of place and provenance” (Constance et al., 2014, p. 22; Goodman, 2003; Morgan et al., 2006).

In addition to the degradation of quality, the conventional agrifood system prioritizes economic gain over civil society, which leads to social injustice and the undermining of the civil rights of people nationally and globally (Gertel & Sippel, 2014). The politics of the globalized food economy continues to privilege the global North at the expense of the global South, necessitating unified political action to challenge the hegemony of this system (Constance et al., 2014, p. 27). This global and domestic inequality is prominent amongst groups such as producers, farm workers, and low-income, food insecure communities, resulting in organizations that advocate for social justice on behalf and within these oppressed groups. Examples of social justice strategies include urban gardens for neighborhood revitalization, youth development, and financial support within specific communities (Slocum, 2006).

**Addressing neoliberalism in alternative food movements.** While appearing to create solutions that counter the industrial food system, scholars have critiqued alternative agrifood movements for their absence of a politicizing approach that actually confronts the ways neoliberalism is reproduced in the food system more broadly, and the ways it manifests in stakeholder subjectivities (Guthman, 2008a). Scholars suggest that without this politicized approach, alternative agrifood movements will not have the capacity to disrupt and transform the corporate food regime (Alkon & Guthman, 2017). With a central focus on the creation of alternatives, many alternative agrifood movements prioritize efforts toward food localization and ecologically sustainable production methods. These movements suggest that the best route to creating a sustainable food system is by becoming a producer or consumer of local food through efforts such as urban agriculture, community supported agriculture, and farmers markets (Guthman, 2008a). Unfortunately, this “vote with your fork” (Pollan, 2006) approach to food systems transformation obscures the importance of social justice strategies that demand state protections and corporate accountability in lieu of consumer choice and entrepreneurship (Alkon & Guthman, 2017; Lavin, 2009). Further, through “roll-out neoliberalism” (Peck & Tickell, 2002), state provisions, regulatory functions, and responsibilities are diminished, with private sector organizations sprouting up as an alternative social safety net, often operating with less funding than the state would have, and a greater dependency on volunteerism. While these alternative agrifood projects have been lauded as ways to empower citizens in their food system, this approach still reinforces the idea that it is the responsibility of the individual or community to find solutions to problems created by the industrial food system (Alkon & Guthman, 2017). This market orientation to alternative agrifood movements ends up reifying neoliberal

configurations of governance instead of challenging state and corporate authority in the food system (Guthman, 2008a) hindering “the politics of the possible” (Guthman, 2008b).

Counter-critiques to the reification of neoliberalism in alternative agrifood movements, are also prevalent across the literature. Scholars such as Castree (2008) have argued that the latitude of meaning espoused in the term neoliberalism has expanded to the point of losing its meaning. Further, Gibson-Graham (2008) argues that excessive critique of neoliberalism may dissuade the creation of alternatives, stifle the imaginary, and promote a “disabling discourse” (Hart, 2002). As a middle ground approach, Alkon & Guthman (2017) recognize the value of the neoliberal critique, and suggest that activists “identify the threads of neoliberalism that inform their own discourses and, even more so, their practices, working within them when appropriate and abandoning them when it serves their larger strategic aims” (p. 17)

**Community food security framework.** This landscape of alternative food movements intersects considerably with the framework of community food security (CFS). CFS has emerged as an alternative to the concept of food security, considering the “broader context of household food security by examining it in relation to factors such as food, environment and poverty” (Palmer et al., 2015, p. 136). The notion of CFS has evolved from the multitude of prior conceptions of food security. Food security has been a persistent issue in the United States, with efforts to end domestic hunger emerging in the 1960s through the war on poverty and the emergence of social programs like food stamps, school lunches and supplemental food for women, infants and children (WIC) (Allen, 2004). Despite the support these programs provided for low-income people, the economic and political conditions in the 1980s led more people into poverty, and subsequently food insecurity. This was exacerbated as policymakers simultaneously began cutting governmental food assistance programs, necessitating that private sector

emergency food programs emerge to accommodate for rising food needs (Allen, 2004). The effects of this have been lasting, as 14% of American households experienced food insecurity as of 2014 (Coleman-Jensen, 2015). Coupled with the loss of farmland, declining numbers of farms (American Farmland Trust, 2018), increasing dispute over natural resources (Milloy, 2001), global population growth (Prosekov & Ivanova, 2016) and increasing issues of domestic security (Mann, 2010), food insecurity in the United States is a pressing concern that is likely to compound as these related issues become increasingly problematic.

Since the 1970s, the definition of food security has had many iterations, reflecting the changing conceptualizations of the notion of food security. Smith et. al., have sited 200 different definitions that were published between 1975 and 1996 reflecting the paradigmatic shifts in how people have thought about food security over time. While the earliest paradigm of food security prioritized aggregate food supply (Anderson & Cook, 1998), the changing dimensions of this concept are reflected in three other major shifts in the food security agenda cited by Maxwell (1996). The first arose in the 1980s, evolving the food supply focus to include issues of food access. This then led to another shift in emphasis from a “food first” approach, prioritizing short-term nutritional intake, to a “livelihood” emphasis, a long-term approach that views food security as directly embedded in a person's ability to reliably provide for themselves. The third shift broadened the lens for measuring food security to include subjective measures that emphasized food quality and people’s state of being in relation to food availability. Maxwell suggests that these three paradigm shifts have dramatically impacted the food security agenda, leading to a more comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing food security.

Hamm & Bellows believe that food insecurity “is experienced most poignantly and addressed most innovatively at the community level” (2003, p. 37). They define community food security as:

“a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision-making” (Hamm & Bellows, 2003, p. 37).

Hamm & Bellows answer the call for a refined theoretical framework for CFS proposed by Anderson & Cook (1999). They offer a framework that is inclusive to the inherent complexity, and multitude of contributing factors and intersecting dimensions of the food system, while ensuring that issues be understood holistically, within the context of the larger social, political and economic landscape (Hamm & Bellows, 2003). Activists and scholars within the fields of community nutrition, sustainable food systems, and anti-hunger and community development have greatly contributed to the conceptualization of CFS (Anderson and Cook, 1999; Hamm & Bellows, 2003). As a social movement, advocacy, policy and programming efforts on behalf of CFS have been initiated by largely grassroots activities and partnerships (Anderson & Cook, 1999; Fisher & Gottlieb, 1995), prioritizing the food security needs of low-income people through local and regional food systems (Allen, 1999) by ensuring availability, stability and access to food at the community level (Gottlieb and Fisher, 1996; Anderson and Cook, 1999; Hamm & Bellows, 2003). CFS frameworks consider the intersection of “issues of hunger, health, and sustainability as well as the social significance of food in daily life” (Kortright & Wakefield, 2011, p. 39) and can be categorized into seven areas: (i) community food planning; (ii) direct marketing; (iii) community gardening and urban food production; (iv) strengthening food assistance; (v) farmland protection; (vi) food retail strategies; (vii) and community and economic development (Fisher and Gottlieb, 1995). These practices are guided



by the six basic principles of community food security as defined by the Community Food Security Coalition: (i) meeting the food needs of low-income people; (ii) addressing a wide range of food system issues; (iii) community focus; (iv) self-reliance and empowerment; (v) prioritizing local food systems; and (vi) CFS as systems-oriented and interdisciplinary (1994).

In *Whole Measures for Community Food Systems: Values-Based Planning and Evaluation*, Abi-Nadar et al. (2009) expands on a conception of community food security, describing it as focused on:

“making nutritious and culturally appropriate food accessible, not just any food; supporting local, regional, family-scale, and sustainable food production building and revitalizing local communities and economies; providing fair wages and decent working conditions for farmers and food system workers; promoting social justice and more equitable access to resources; and empowering diverse people to work together to create positive changes in the food system and their communities” (p. 6).

*Whole Measures for Community Food Systems (CFS)* is a holistic, values-based approach to assessing and imagining healthy communities through the lens of community food systems (Abi-Nadar, et al., 2009). Guided by six primary fields of practice, *Whole Measures for CFS* prioritizes the following domains as indicators of whole communities: Justice and Fairness; Strong Communities; Vibrant Farms; Healthy People; Sustainable Ecosystems; and Thriving Local Economies (Abi-Nadar, et al., 2009). According to *Whole Measures for CFS*, each field of practice consists of “four values-based practices that express this vision in action” (Abi-Nadar, 2009, p. 8) as outlined in the following table:

<b>Justice and Fairness</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides food for all</li> <li>● Reveals, challenges and dismantles injustice in the food system</li> <li>● Creates just food system structures and cares for food system workers</li> <li>● Ensures that public institutions and local businesses support a just community food system</li> </ul>

<b>Healthy People</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides healthy food for all</li> <li>● Ensures the health and well-being of all people, inclusive of race and class</li> <li>● Connects people and the food system, from field to fork</li> <li>● Connects people and land to promote health and wellness</li> </ul>
<b>Strong Communities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improves equity and responds to community food needs</li> <li>● Contributes to healthy neighborhoods</li> <li>● Builds diverse and collaborative relationships, trust, and reciprocity</li> <li>● Supports civic participation, political empowerment, and local leadership</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainable Ecosystems</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sustains and grows a healthy environment</li> <li>● Promotes an ecological ethic</li> <li>● Enhances biodiversity</li> <li>● Promotes agricultural and food distribution practices that mitigate climate change</li> </ul>
<b>Vibrant Farms</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Supports local, sustainable family farms to thrive and be economically viable</li> <li>● Protects and cares for farmers and farm-workers</li> <li>● Honors stories of food and farm legacy through community voices</li> <li>● Respects farm animals</li> </ul>
<b>Thriving Local Economies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creates local jobs and builds long-term economic vitality within the food system</li> <li>● Builds local wealth</li> <li>● Promotes sustainable development while strengthening local food systems</li> <li>● Includes infrastructure that supports community and environmental health</li> </ul>

As a planning and evaluation tool, the Whole Measures for CFS framework can be applied over the course of a program to promote dialogue, learning, and a scope of assessment that appropriately captures the holism of healthy community food systems.

Integral to the CFS framework is the food environment, including “all aspects of our surroundings that may influence our diets, including physical locations” (Truant and Neff, 2015,

p. 426) as well as marketing, media, and social experiences. The geographical or spatial access to healthy food (Guthman, 2011) is a particularly important facet of CFS, and includes proximity to grocery stores and access to transportation. Deficiencies in these areas contribute to “low food access,” defined by the USDA Food Access Research Atlas as an area where a significant number (at least 500 persons and/or at least 33% of the census tract population) is greater than 1.0 mile from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store for an urban area or greater than 10 miles for a rural area.

With growing concerns for the rise of obesity in the United States (Ogden et al., 2012), environmental factors contributing to this problem have been referred to in the academic literature as the “obesogenic environment” (Swinburn, Egger, & Raza, 1999; Hill & Peters, 1998), where the “environment is characterized by an essentially unlimited supply of convenient, relatively inexpensive, highly palatable, energy-dense foods, coupled with a lifestyle requiring only low levels of physical activity for subsistence” (Hill & Peters, 1998, p. 1371). While this framework deemphasizes the prominent problematization of the obesity epidemic from an issue of individual behavior and singular personal responsibility to the broader picture of how the built environment, food industry, and regional planning shapes health, Guthman (2011) argues that this approach is negligent to the “salience of race and class in explaining spatial patterning of obesity and defining what constitutes a healthy environment” (p. 67).

***Social Justice Strategies within Community Food Security.*** Therefore, integral to CFS is food justice, food sovereignty, and food democracy, as CFS cannot be adequately addressed without challenging the politics of the food system. Without such a focus, CFS practitioners run the risk of remaining “passive recipients of a dominant corporate food regime, under which lasting CFS remains elusive” (Chen, Clayton & Palmer 2015, p. 13). Despite its efforts to be

anchored in aims of local control and social justice, the community food security framework has been criticized for replicating neoliberalism by “placing the economic needs of producers above provisioning, for turning to market mechanisms to increase food access rather than demanding it of the state, and for promoting an ideology in which low-income people who cannot provide for their own food needs are viewed as less-than or in need of transformation” (Alkon & Mares, 2012, p. 350). With intersecting political agendas and goals with the food justice and food sovereignty movements, CFS advocates have been encouraged to further align their efforts within these frameworks to better confront the politics of the food system, directly challenge neoliberalism (Alkon & Mares, 2012), and thereby address the underlying causes of community food insecurity (Heynen et al., 2012). While the conceptions of food justice, democracy and sovereignty do not provide a clear direction forward, they do provide “a language and vision to open up pathways for action and advocacy” (Niewolny, & D’Adamo-Damery, 2016, p.117; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010).

Both activism and scholarship conceptualized around food justice have become more prominent in the past 20 years (Reynolds, Block & Bradley, 2018). While the food justice framework has become increasingly popular the concept is limited, developing and difficult to put into practice (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010). Fundamentally, the food justice movement is focused on social justice (Bradley & Herrera, 2015). Activists and scholars associated with this movement are concerned with ending oppression and breaking down uneven power dynamics within the food system (Reynolds, Block, & Bradley, 2018) through three key arenas for action: (i) seeking to challenge and restructure the dominant food system; (ii) providing a core focus on equity and disparities and the struggles by those who are most vulnerable; and (iii) establishing linkages and common goals with other forms of social justice activism and advocacy, (Gottlieb

and Joshi 2010) such as a focus on the intersection of environmental justice and community food security (Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996) and the health ramifications of consuming industrial food (Bradley & Herrera, 2015).

Food activists working from food justice perspectives consider the ways that institutionalized racial and socioeconomic inequalities impact the many facets of the food system, such as an individual's ability to access healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food (Alkon and Mares, 2012), the impacts of exploitative labor practices, as well as environmental degradation resulting from industrial agriculture, and environmental racism (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Harnessing the broader goal of “restoring self-determination, control and autonomy to eaters and growers alike” (Mares & Pena, 2011, p. 204) these community activists are challenging the industrial food system by harnessing alternative approaches for local food access through the creation of farmers markets, CSA programs, urban farms and cooperatively owned grocery stores in low-income communities of color, and prioritizing community leadership and autonomy within these projects (Alkon and Mares, 2012; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010).

While there are and have historically been food justice activists within affected communities that have challenged the hegemonic system and built alternatives (Reynolds, Block, & Bradley, 2018), there have been many critiques of the movement as being dominated by white people and white organizations (Slocum, 2006; Guthman, 2011), and supporting a re-inscription of “white, patriarchal systems of power and privilege” (Bradley & Herrera, 2015, p. 97). Leadership within food justice initiatives and programs has been dominated by well-educated white people, despite the fact that these initiatives were intended to serve people of color. While their intentions are largely integrous, “the collective impacts of their whiteness in positions of

power undermine the principle of food justice” (Bradley & Herrera, 2015, p. 102) and the broader goal of bringing movement organizations together with communities and community-based organizations that have felt undermined by the white-dominated leadership and approach to food justice work (Morales, 2011).

This reflects the importance of engaging in scholarship that prioritizes the experiences, needs and voices of the individuals experiencing food insecurity (Pine, & de Souza, 2013, p. 71). Historically, people experiencing food insecurity have been distorted through pitiable images that misportray the experience of hunger and disempower the individual having the experience (DeLind, 1994; Retzinger, 2012). They have also been silenced, as “material disenfranchisement is intrinsically linked to communicative disenfranchisement” (Pine & de Souza, 2013, P. 72). In research, these individuals have been often overlooked as mere subjects to be studied, excluding the possibility that they could be community change agents with the capacity to mobilize their communities for social and environmental betterment (Pine & de Souza, 2013). In support of the reclamation and empowerment of individuals living with food insecurity, researchers have a moral obligation to “subvert the existing portrayal of those experiencing food insecurity” (Pine & de Souza, 2013, p. 72) and challenge the dominant discourses by creating spaces and opportunities for these silenced voices to be heard, to define their own experience, and to determine their own future. Fox & Turner (2016), acknowledge that public engagement requires that

“institutions recognize the need to partially surrender, if not relinquish outright, the locus of power to marginalized communities so that the impacted community can frame—or reframe—the public discourse in a way that is more socially and culturally relevant and meaningful to that community” (p. 1512).

The food sovereignty framework has been lauded for its defiance toward neoliberalism and efforts to reimagine the corporate food regime (Alkon & Mares, 2012). Established by the

international peasant movement in the global south, La Via Campesina, food sovereignty is a call for building local and community food systems that support economic, social, and cultural rights. Defined as the right of persons to “healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (La Via Campesina, 2009), the food sovereignty movement is guided by six main pillars: focuses on food for people; values food providers; localizes food systems; puts control locally; builds knowledge and skills; and works with nature (Nyéléni Forum in Mali, 2007). This movement has also called attention to how processes of agricultural consolidation and globalization have eroded the capacity of agrarian communities to have agency in their food system (Alkon & Mares, 2012), and “proposes to heal the metabolic rift through a repossession and regionalization of the agrifood system” (Constance et al., 2014, p. 29). As a struggle operating at a global scale, the food sovereignty movement calls for food systems transformation through transnational efforts to address “issues of social justice and equity that once again link the production and distribution of food at scales involving, but extending beyond the local” (Chappell & La Valle, 2011, p. 16). Examples of food sovereignty in action include national boycotts and labor justice coalitions and policy reform within the Farm Bill (Holt-Gimenez and Wang, 2011). Raj Patel, author of *Stuffed and Starved* argues the importance of food sovereignty because:

“it has been authored by those most directly hurt by the way contemporary agriculture is set up, but also because it offers a profound agenda for change for everyone aim[ing] to redress the abuse of the powerless by the powerful, wherever in the food system that abuse may happen” (Patel, 2007, p. 302).

According to Alkon & Mares (2012), positioning the CFS movement in alliance with the goals of food sovereignty would enable CFS advocates to recognize that the roots of injustice are situated in the globalized industrial food system, and its policy on local, national and global

scales. They posit that it is this understanding that could initiate a solidary approach to a “food politics capable of limiting the power of the corporate food regime, eventually transforming the food system into one built on foundations of ecological production, community control, and the multiple meanings of justice” (Alkon & Mares, 2012, p. 358).

Food democracy has also been suggested as a broader movement that could help enable citizens to effectively resist the dominant corporate food regime. In the face of growing ecological, social, and economic issues within the conventional food system, an informed and politically engaged food citizenry is becoming ever more essential. Central to this conception is a rights discourse, as Frances Moore Lappé and Anna Lappé explain that: “Food democracy means the right of all to an essential of life—safe, nutritious food. It also suggests fair access to land to grow food and fair return for those who labor to produce it” (Lappé & Lappé, 2018). Food democracy emphasizes the “importance of processes for making choices when values come into conflict and when the consequences of decisions are uncertain” (Hassanein, 2008, p. 289), and prioritizes citizen participation that is meaningful and supports food system governance while fostering deeper relationships between citizens and their food system. To elaborate on the concept of food democracy, Hassanein puts forth a theoretical and practical framework which outlines the key dimensions of food democracy: collaborating toward food system sustainability; becoming knowledgeable about food and the food system; sharing ideas about the food system with others; developing efficacy with respect to food and the food system; and acquiring an orientation toward community good (2008, p. 290-291).

**Community gardens: spaces of tension in food systems transformation.** One way that communities have promoted learning for food justice, food sovereignty, and food democracy is through the establishment of community gardens. Conceptualized by Barron (2017) as involving



“non-commercial food production in an established common space that is controlled (more or less) by organised groups of citizens for collective benefit” (p. 1147), community gardens serve as one approach to addressing some of the biggest challenges of our time, including diet-related illnesses, food insecurity, socioeconomic inequity, and diminishing social ties (Porter, 2018). By harnessing the social and cultural opportunities (Porter, 2018) offered within community gardens, and leveraging this to address larger issues of social justice, communities can begin to advocate for change. Food justice organizers and organizations have harnessed community gardening as a social justice strategy for creating equity and food sovereignty (Broad, 2016). Further, the mere act of gardening has the potential to foster “prefigurative social change...[that] open[s] up new possibilities for being, seeing and doing” (Guerlain & Campbell, 2016, p. 220). Through the practice of “political gardening”, citizens have the opportunity to cultivate new knowledge in growing, preparing and enjoying food, while fostering critical awareness and capacity to strategically address issues of food injustice (Kneafsey et al., 2017). It is with this intentionality that Barron (2017) suggests community gardens have the potential to contest neoliberalism through alternative subjectivities that positions community gardeners as *producers* with agency in their food system, as *citizens* belonging to a larger whole, and as *activists* for social and environmental issues such as food justice and food sovereignty.

In some cases, the transformative potential of community gardens is readily apparent to the participants, as is reflected in a research study on community-based organizations that support home and community gardens in Laramie, Wyoming. One participant in this study “marveled at the power he had to physically change his community after being part of transforming a corner lot from an eyesore into a beautiful and productive garden” (Porter, 2018), while another gardener “went to his first city council meeting to support providing public land

for a proposed FLV community farm” (Porter, 2018). In other cases, the politicized and transformative role of community gardens is less apparent. While community gardens can serve as a space to cultivate awareness of issues associated with food justice “the people who engage and practice growing in these spaces do not always perceive themselves as political actors with a coherent ‘transformational’ agenda” (Kneafsey et al., 2017, p. 623). Rather, participants in community gardens often nurture important facets of food justice such as networks of knowledge exchange, community cohesion, citizen empowerment and capacity building without overt political aim (Kneafsey et al., 2017).

While the literature suggests that community gardens have the potential to both challenge neoliberal subjectivities, and be solidary spaces for the food justice and food sovereignty movements, “the ability of community gardens to contribute to broader political goals of restructuring food systems into more socially just and environmentally sustainable forms has [also] been questioned” (Kneafsey et al., 2017, p. 622). From a historical perspective, the first two waves of gardens that sprouted up as a wartime effort were used as ways to “reinforce dominant ideologies” (Walter, 2013, p. 524), perpetuating “a hegemonic public pedagogy of order, industry and patriotism” (Walter, 2013, p. 525). Similarly, in modern times, community gardens have been critiqued for perpetuating neoliberalist subjectivities through the advancement of capitalist ideals in the form of entrepreneurship (Guthman, 2008a), by locating food systems change in spaces of economy rather than politics, creating a consumer subjectivity (Guthman, 2008a), and by devolving state responsibility through volunteerism (Pudup, 2008).

The concurrence of these potential outcomes suggests that community gardens are “both a form of actually existing neoliberalism *and* a simultaneous radical counter-movement arising in dialectical tension” (McClintock, 2014, p. 148). McClintock (2014) continues by stating the

importance of transcending this neoliberal/anti-neoliberal “dualism” (p. 165). He suggests that existing neoliberal critiques of urban agriculture projects (or community gardens) can be counterproductive, failing to provide suggestions for resolving contradictions, while missing the significance these projects play in meeting acute community needs. Recognizing that food systems transformation is a project operating on many scales and through many avenues, McClintock (2014) advises that we view spaces of community food production “as simply one of many means to an end, one of many tools working in concert towards a unified vision of food justice, and of just sustainability, more broadly” (p. 166). This tension is a space of ripe possibility if community gardeners harness the opportunity to critically and reflexively examine how they socially construct these spaces, either in resistance to or in alignment with neoliberal ideals. By harnessing critical food pedagogies and sustainable learning values, practices, and processes within community gardens, stakeholders can begin to deconstruct dominant ideologies and reconstruct new and aspirational ways of knowing the world (Sumner, 2016).

**Food systems pedagogy.** Food systems pedagogy is one way of learning sustainability, as “food is not only an object *of* learning but also a vehicle *for* learning” (p. xix; Flowers & Swan, 2012). As a connecting force between the natural world, human livelihood, culture, and health, food holds a lot of tangible and figurative power in people’s lives (McMichael, 2000). As the consolidation of control over the global food system by the corporate food regime has shifted the narrative of food from being a basic human right to becoming a powerful market commodity that is leveraged by corporations as a source of money and power, food systems pedagogy has become an increasingly salient form of resistance (Sumner, 2016). According to Flowers and Swan (2012), food pedagogies include:

“Congeries of education, teaching and learning about how to grow, shop for, prepare, cook, display, taste, eat and dispose of food by a range of agencies, actors and media; and

aimed at a spectrum of “learners” including middle class women, migrants, children, parents, shoppers, and racially minoritised and working class mothers.” (p. 425).

Food pedagogies can support change in a myriad of ways including behavioral, habitual, emotional, cognitive, or through knowledge, particularly when a critical lens is applied with the intention to explicitly address power dynamics and injustice (Sumner, 2016).

Food literacy is one scope of food pedagogy that has the potential to advance food systems sustainability. Most conceptions of food literacy education models are depoliticized, narrow-minded, and individualistic, defined by “the degree to which people are able to obtain, process, and understand basic information about food in order to make appropriate health decisions” (Wiser Earth, 2007, n.p.). These prescriptive approaches to food literacy have been designed around content-based learning, and have focused on delivering information and training to encourage individuals to make healthy choices, but have failed to consider the ways broader systemic factors inhibit the possibility of choice for those individuals (Kimura, 2011). By integrating a broader scope of learning directed at issues of policy, distribution of resources, socioeconomic status, and food justice, food literacy can be reimagined as a mechanism for learning sustainability.

Sumner (2013) proposes a food literacy education that takes a broader scope by harnessing Habermas’ (1978) three knowledge domains. Comprised of empirical/analytical knowledge, historical-hermeneutic knowledge, and critical-emancipatory knowledge, developing a food literacy education that operates within all three domains will help enable the depth of transformation needed to enact food systems change. Within the scope of food literacy, empirical/analytic knowledge refers to the conventional content and skills-based education that promotes a curriculum for learning the tenets of ‘good’ nutrition, and healthy food shopping and preparation. Historical-hermeneutic knowledge refers to a way of understanding through the

examination of meanings (Morrow & Torres, 1995). A food literacy education based on historical-hermeneutic knowledge could examine food marketing, culture, history, and emotional appeal (Sumner, 2013). The critical-emancipatory domain refers to knowledge that fosters critical consciousness with the aim to transform reality (Morrow & Torres, 1995). Associated with “transformative learning, critical reflection, and liberatory praxis” (Sumner, 2013, p. 85), this knowledge domain could be associated with the broader movements of food justice, food sovereignty and food democracy. Applying this epistemological latitude will enable food literacy education to be more aligned and in solidarity with the social and environmental change efforts happening within the food system.

This type of epistemological latitude within the realm of food systems pedagogy is being performed through the cultural work of narrative as a methodological and pedagogical tool for “engendering political praxis and new possibilities” (Niewolny & D’Adamo-Damery, 2016, p. 114). Through the process of story-sharing, stakeholders in the food system have the opportunity to capture, critically reflect upon, and make meaning of their experiences and perceptions. Edging the pervasive complexities and tensions present within the dominant food system narrative, personal story-sharing can give stakeholders an opportunity to radically assess the assumptions, beliefs, and values that inform the way they know and act within the world, while “creating new possibilities in [their] everyday work of resistance and learning” (Niewolny & D’Adamo-Damery, 2016, p. 115).

This methodological and pedagogical approach is a particularly potent opportunity when applied to the task of rewriting deeply ingrained colonial narratives that buttress the story of modernism. The First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), located on Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory is an Indigenous institution that is leveraging their own approach to transformative

learning to “challenge implicit colonial narratives as a part of the process of decolonization” (Williams & Brant, 2019, p. 1) through the creation of an Indigenous food systems undergraduate degree program. This transformative food systems pedagogy is aligned with the traditional teachings, principles, and practices of Indigenous ways of life, and is designed with the aim to elevate and esteem these historically marginalized ways of knowing (Williams & Brant, 2019). Part of this process involves the deconstruction of colonial epistemologies that parasitize indigenous minds in the form of internalized inferiority (Williams & Brant, 2019; Sheridan & Longboat, 2006). Foregrounding indigenous knowledge, culture, and identity, while restoring and fortifying indigenous food systems, offers an opportunity “to address the layered and intersectional barriers faced by Indigenous communities in pursuit of an equitable and sustainable food system” (Williams & Brant, 2019, p. 2). Moving the project of food systems transformation forward necessitates creative interventions such as this one that will counter the dominant narratives driving and justifying the industrial food system.

*Learning sustainability in community gardens.* Beyond the obvious content-based educational opportunities for food production and preparation, community gardens also have the potential for collective learning in issues such as “food security, environmental sustainability, community resilience, social justice and cultural identity” (Walter, 2013, p. 531). Community gardens serve as sites to “educat[e] for a sense of place” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 9) by fostering loyalty and commitment to locality through deeper connections to the immediate community, and the natural world. Lefebvre (1991) contends that common space is essential for addressing community needs and establishing a shared humanity. Through stronger community ties, opportunities for “communicative interaction (informal communication and democratic deliberation)” (Walter, 2013, p. 528) arise, replete with possibilities for transformative learning

through dialectical knowledge creation, collective confrontation of the dominant hegemonic systems of industrial food, private property, and real estate development, and the proposal of alternatives (Walter, 2013; Welton, 2002).

For instance, community gardens can inspire “alternatives to the market” (Barron, 2017, p. 1144), challenging the capitalist frame with alternative social, political, and economic systems aligned with principles of solidarity and egalitarianism, as is the case with the way that community gardens promote the decommodification of food (Barron, 2017). Further, community gardens serve as enduring commons in a time of vast privatization of formerly public resources (Tornaghi, 2014). Neither completely private nor completely public, community gardens are “managed commons” (Barron, 2017, p. 1149), or accessible to the delineated community that sustains them. Providing access to “green space, neighbourhood safety, healthy food, and a shared outdoor space for recreation and socialising” (Barron, 2017, p. 1149), community gardens enable more democratic and socially just access to life resources, demanding community involvement while simultaneously initiating it. As “non-commodified...[and] locally and communally managed spaces” (Barron, 2017, p. 1150), community gardens are commons that transcend the consumptive tendency of capitalism for creativity and relational features that foster cooperation, strengthening community through shared management of the space (Hardt & Negri, 2004). With that said, these spaces are only characterized as commons if members of the community serve as the principal overseers of the space, giving rise to another tension surrounding the leadership and power structures associated with community garden management.

***Fruit and vegetable prescription programs.*** In addition to community gardens, fruit and vegetable prescription programs offer learning opportunities for program participants by

integrating primary care, nutrition education, and food access (Downer et al., 2015), and local food systems. Participating physicians write prescriptions for fresh fruits and vegetables, which target low-income individuals with diet-related health conditions. Fruit and vegetable prescription programs have been largely understudied, with only a few programs evaluated in the literature, many of which focusing on measuring health impacts (Ridberg et al., 2018). Outcomes of these programs that have been evaluated have shown these programs contribute to increased fresh produce consumption in low-income individuals (Abusabha et al., 2011; Anderson et al., 2001), as well as positive health outcomes, decreasing hemoglobin A1c levels and body mass index in program participants (Ridberg et al., 2018). One study also reflects the potential for fruit and vegetable prescription programs to support patient food security (Ridberg et al., 2018). Numerous fruit and vegetable prescription programs have been implemented across the United States, and many different program models have emerged to adapt to specific communities and available resources.

The Wholesome Wave Foundation has been a pioneering organization for fruit and vegetable prescription programs, launching their first one in 2010. Within their programs doctors identify patients to enroll for four to five months at a time—focusing on patients experiencing or at risk of diet-related disease and food insecurity. The prescription provides \$1/day for each member of the household for fresh produce, redeemable at participating farmers markets or grocery stores, along with consultation sessions with a doctor or nutritionist to set health-related goals (Produce Prescriptions, 2017). As a national organization, Wholesome Wave has since initiated fruit and vegetable prescription programs in California, Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, Texas, the District of Columbia and the Navajo Nation (Kagan et. al., 2017). They have also established a strong



partnership with Target, who offered 1.5 million dollars to support programs in Los Angeles, Miami and Houston in 2017, with these produce prescriptions redeemable at Target and qualifying farmers markets (Kagan et. al., 2017). Wholesome Wave has been a leader in this movement and in an effort to support program replication they offer consultation services to assist partner organizations nationwide in program replication and implementation (Produce Prescriptions, 2017).

One evaluation of Wholesome Wave's pediatric fruit and vegetable prescription program conducted by Ridberg et al. (2018) measured program impact on household food security. Over a two year period nine different clinical sites enrolled pediatric patients and their families in the program. Harnessing an adapted version of the USDA's Household Food Security Survey, five household-level measures determined program impact through patient interviews. Results from this assessment indicated that more than 72% of participants increased their summative food security score over the course of the study, reflecting broader implications for fruit and vegetable prescription programs in clinical settings to positively impact food security (Ridberg et al., 2018).

Other models for fruit and vegetable prescription programs have emerged that harness different strategies and community resources. One such program is called the Sayre Good Food Bags (GFB) Program in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This program is a partnership between the Sayre High School garden tended by youth interns and a local health center. Health care providers "prescribe" patients to participate in the Sayre High School garden GFB program. This program harnesses a community-supported agriculture model where youth leaders grow and allocate produce to community shareholders who pay for a weekly bag of garden-fresh fruits and vegetables. Low-cost shares are available for senior participants, SNAP recipients, WIC

recipients, or members that have received a health prescription from the associated clinic (Blickenderfer, 2016).

***The Farmacy Garden.*** The Farmacy Garden is a collective community garden in Montgomery County, Virginia developed in 2014 through a collaboration between the New River Health District (NRHD), Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), and the Family Nutrition Program (FNP). Built with the mission to promote health, increase food security and build community among low-income residents of Montgomery County, Virginia, the Farmacy Garden has become a multifaceted program that uses the 34-raised bed shared community garden space, and neighboring perennial fruit crop edible landscape as a living laboratory to implement horticulture and integrative garden-based nutrition education programming. With an innovative approach to fruit and vegetable prescription programming, the Farmacy Garden formalizes a physician referral process connecting patients from two clinics in Christiansburg, Virginia to the Farmacy Garden and nutrition education classes offered by a Program Assistant from the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

Beyond the garden prescription program, the Farmacy Garden is also utilized as a hands-on educational space for implementing mandatory nutrition education classes for participants enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The Farmacy Garden also provides a youth gardening, nutrition, and entrepreneurship program called Market Kids every summer for 20 kids, many of which are from WIC-enrolled families. Beyond these formalized programs, The Farmacy Garden is open for weekly garden hours led by agency staff as an opportunity for the Montgomery County community to come help in the garden in exchange for a share of the harvest. These garden hours are promoted widely through a

network of poverty alleviation programs, though garden participation is not contingent on being low-income.

The Farmacy Garden is a particularly interesting and relevant case for this study given its unique position as a community-oriented project funded and operated by governmental agencies. With a program model and funding structure that largely disrupts the neoliberal processes of privatization, and devolution, the Farmacy Garden has the potential to be a “[site] of creative resistance” (Walter, 2013, p. 523). Developed on public land, and accessible to anyone in the community during regularly scheduled garden hours, the Farmacy Garden is a prime example of a managed commons, with the potential to challenge dominant notions of private property. It is also a model for community garden programming in resistance to roll-back neoliberalism as it is a state-funded initiative with a sustainable funding stream. With that said, the Farmacy Garden model also poses issues that may dampen the transformative potential of the space. Initially built from the top-down without significant community buy-in, nor day-to-day decision-making structures that are intentionally inclusive of community input and leadership, the Farmacy Garden model as it stands may diminish a sense of collective ownership over the space, and dampen community leadership. As one potential cause of the fairly low annual participation rates at the garden, this state paternalism may leave garden participants feeling more like clients of a program than activists supporting their community.

This study offers insight into the transformative potential of the Farmacy Garden through perspectives of garden stakeholders. As a living example of the inherent tensions present in creating alternatives within the existing structures of neoliberal political economy, this case study of the Farmacy Garden aims to explore the interstitial spaces where openings into new ways of seeing, doing, and being may live. Expanding the scope of study beyond pounds of

produce, and empirical health outcomes, this research aims to capture the less tangible, but just as valuable benefits to engagement. Providing an opportunity to explore, with more latitude, what *else* gardens grow, this study examines the transformative role the Farmacy Garden plays in the lives of those that tend it. As so eloquently stated by Ott (2018), “if we only measure the health of communities...by their high rates of illness and their nutritional shortcomings, then we pathologize the people who live there, [and]...fail to see the centers of cultural vibrancy within these places” (p. 25).

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Transformative learning.** Harnessing the potential of transformative learning as a theoretical framework provides a unique lens to explore the pedagogical dimensions of the Farmacy Garden. Broadly conceptualized, the process of transformative learning is often triggered by a “disorienting dilemma”, a life event, whether tragic or ordinary, where an individual becomes aware of their limited or distorted worldview (Cranton, 2002). Through critical reflection, engaged discourse, and social action (Mezirow, 1997) the process of transformative learning can occur, resulting in epistemological and ontological shifts.

Looking beyond the attainment of functional skills or knowledge to support individual behavior change, transformative learning reorients the learner in a new frame of reference where broader change can occur (Goldstein, 2016). Frames of reference are “structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual’s tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions” (Taylor, 2008, p. 5). Within formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings (Sumner, 2016) transformative learning invites us to “negotiate and act upon our own purposes, values, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others” (Mezirow and Associates, 2000, p. 8). These processes support a transformational reform to our

frame of reference, opening our view to a paradigm that is more “(a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163).

Critical reflection is a “conscious and explicit reassessment of the consequence and origin of our meaning structures” (Taylor, 2008). Operating in conjunction with engaged discourse and social action, this “transformative criticism” (O’Sullivan, 2002) ignites a process of change that allows for visions, possibilities, and pathways for new ways of knowing and being in the world to emerge (O’Sullivan 2002). Serving as the “creative function of cognitive crisis” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 4), the lens of transformative learning approaches our current state of crises in the world as both a “terminal state” and a “moment of grace” where the challenge is the solution, and where we can find the path to journey into a new grand narrative (Gare, 1995) that will orient, guide and educate us as we embark into new and healing territory. By supporting a community of learners in the process of “locat[ing] understanding within themselves, within each other, within the world” (Maxwell, 2002, p. 15), transformative education fosters the capacity to move beyond the hegemony of dominant forces such as capitalism, the patriarchy, and white supremacy to tap into the politics of the possible.

Developed in 1978 by Jack Mezirow, transformative learning theory was conceived through a psychocritical lens, a theoretical conception that focused on how we can change our belief systems through reflection of prior interpretations and construct new frameworks to help guide future action (Casebeer & Mann, 2017). Since then, numerous other interpretations of the theory have emerged, developed by scholars to address the critiques of Mezirow’s original conception. Critiqued as being overly rational and neglecting other ways of knowing and learning, and being too focused on the individual, missing the role of power and social change

(Taylor, 1997; Tisdell, 2012), transformative learning theory has opened into psychoanalytic, psychodevelopmental, neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, social emancipatory, and planetary realms. This diverse array of conceptualizations have emerged with exciting implications for practice (Taylor, 2008).

According to Cranton and Taylor (2012), the boundaries between these conceptualizations of transformative learning theory are nuanced and fragile, and may only be differentiated by how scholars have honed in on distinct facets of the same theory. Regardless, a major fracture between them is their unit of analysis (Taylor, 2008), whether their emphasis is on individualized change or societal change (Casebeer & Mann, 2017). The psychocritical, psychoanalytic, psychodevelopmental, and neurobiological perspectives are focused on individual transformation in the form of self-actualization with little emphasis on context. Adhering to a constructivist and humanist perspective (Cranton & Taylor, 2012), these conceptualizations focus on “subjective reframing,” or perspective shifts related to the self (Mezirow, 2000), or individual transformation. In contrast, the social emancipatory, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary views, are grounded in social change, linking the individual and society for the broader goal of emancipatory transformation (Casebeer & Mann, 2017). Drawing from the critical social perspective, the “unit of analysis” (Taylor, 2008) within these conceptualizations is societal (Cranton & Taylor, 2012), and the focus is on an “objective reframing,” of the external world and the individuals’ position within it (Mezirow, 2000) whereby people “transform society and their own reality” (Taylor, 2009, p. 5).

As mentioned previously, Jack Mezirow founded transformative learning theory from a *psychocritical* perspective in 1978, drawing insight from a study on factors that hinder or support women’s re-entry programs at community colleges (1978). Since then, Mezirow’s approach to

transformative learning theory has been developed, revised, and refined many times in response to both philosophical insights from thought leaders such as Freire, Kuhn, Fingarette, and Habermas, as well as criticism from peers within the field of adult education pushing him to address the gaps and limitations of his conception (Baumgartner, 2012). Broadly defined, Mezirow framed perspective transformation as “the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these understandings” (Mezirow, 1981, p. 6). Pulling from psychology and critical pedagogy, Mezirow’s rational approach to transformative learning integrated learning processes such as: adopting the perspective of others, developing a “critical appraisal of assumptions underlying our roles, priorities, and beliefs” (Mezirow, 1978b, p. 105), and determining whether taking action on the new understanding is desired.

A *psychoanalytic* view of transformative learning theory (Dirkx, 2006; Taylor, 2008) is viewed as a process of self-understanding through individuation. Through a process of exploration within the psychic structures of the self (the ego, persona, shadow, collective unconscious, etc.) individuals can discover new talents, confidence, deeper connection to self, and a broader sense of responsibility (Boyd & Meyers, 1988). Conceptualized as a “fundamental change in one's personality involving the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration” (Boyd, 1989, p. 459), psychoanalytic transformative learning is rooted in the field of depth psychology, and highlights the importance of the unconscious in the formation of our daily thoughts, feelings, and actions (Dirkx, 2000). Through processes of discernment and self-dialogue between ego-consciousness and the

unconscious, psychoanalytic transformative learning can occur, resulting in a reconception of life vision and meaning (Dirkx, 2000; Boyd, 1989).

A *psychodevelopmental* view of transformative learning theory is a progressive process over the lifespan. Psychodevelopmental transformative learning is signified by *transformations of consciousness* (Kegan, 1994), or lifespan development characterized by increasing epistemological shifts and complexity (change in processes of meaning-making) as well as behavior change. Emphasizing the importance of personal contextual factors, relationships, and holistic measures (Daloz, 1986), the psychodevelopmental approach emphasizes holistic ways of knowing, and “the complex and progressive nature of personal growth” (Casebeer & Mann, 2017, p. 234).

The *neurobiological* conception of transformative learning theory was developed by taking medical images of the brain in the recovery process from psychological trauma. This exploration led to the discovery that the structure of the brain actually transforms during the learning process (Taylor, 2008). Framing learning as “volitional, curiosity-based, discovery-driven, and mentor-assisted” (Janik, 2005, p. 144), the neurobiological approach provides a theoretical conception that accounts for the scientific, physically grounded pathways to transformation. For instance, Daniel Siegel’s (2010) work in neuroscience showcases the potential of cultivating what he calls *mindsight*, defined as “a kind of focused attention that allows us to be aware of our mental processes rather than being swept away by them” (p. xi). Practicing *mindsight* enables the practitioner the possibility to reorganize patterns of neurological connection at the cellular level, creating biological changes that translate into transformative experiences for the whole person. Other researchers, such as neuroscientists Newberg and



Waldman (2009) use neuroimaging to capture brain pattern changes as a result of transformative practices such as meditation.

A *cultural-spiritual* view of transformative learning explores the intersections between people and social structures through narrative. Storytelling and group inquiry provide a means for the construction of new narratives that are grounded in spiritual growth and cross-cultural understanding (Taylor, 2008). By engaging the “rational, affective, spiritual, imaginative, somatic, and sociocultural domains” (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006, p. 38) of being, this holistic form of transformative learning harnesses these multiple dimensions of self to help fully construct, embody, and integrate new knowledge. David Abalos (1998) conceptualizes this view of social transformation as the reclamation of personal, political, historical, and sacred domains of being, particularly in context to culturally marginalized communities. Sacred practices and traditions grounded in cultural communities are essential to the transformative process, re-enlivening the spiritual dimension of the individual and community to inspire action and change (Alabos, 1998).

The *race-centric* view of transformative learning supplants eurocentric conceptions of the theory by upholding the experiences of non-europeans instead of posing them as the cultural other (Williams, 2003). This conception is sensitive to the social and political aspects of learning, putting race as the central dimension of analysis, with black women of African descent as the primary subjects of transformation (Williams, 2003; Taylor, 2008). By reconnecting to existing traditions of transformative education historically rooted in Africa, such as rituals and rites of passage, this conception of transformative learning is “culturally bounded, oppositional, and nonindividualistic” (Taylor, 2008, p. 9). Fostering inclusion, empowerment, and cross-

cultural competency, race-centric transformative learning rejects essentialist epistemologies and foregrounds the lived experiences of black learners (Taylor, 2008).

The *social emancipatory* perspective to transformative learning shifts the unit of analysis from the individual to the “role of context and social change in the transformative experience” (Taylor, 2008, p. 7). Acknowledging that learners are participating in both individual and social transformations, emancipatory transformative learning takes a more unified approach to the theory (Fleming, 2014). Calling for self-understanding through intersubjectivity, emancipatory transformative learning aligns with aspects of Habermas’ (1992) conceptualization of intersubjectivity:

“Individuation is pictured not as self-realization of the independently acting subject carried out in isolation and freedom but in a linguistically mediated process of socialization and the simultaneous constitution of life-history that is conscious of itself...Individuality forms itself in relations of intersubjective acknowledgement and intersubjectively mediated self-understanding” (pp. 152-153).

Further grounded in the work of Freire (1984), the goal of social emancipatory transformative learning is the development of a critical consciousness amongst oppressed peoples, *conscientization*. Through “ontological vocation” (Freire, 1984, p. 12), a theory of existence calling for “humanization”, people are reframed as subjects (not objects), and self-aware agents responding to the transformation of our world with the broader goal of social justice. According to Friere and Macedo (1995), fostering emancipatory transformative learning requires critical reflection, a dialogical methodology, and a horizontal student-teacher relationship. Fleming (2016) takes this a step further, integrating Honneth’s (1995) theory of recognition into a social emancipatory perspective to transformative learning. By citing the struggle for recognition as both the ‘disorienting dilemma’ and a motivation for social action and change, a link between individual and social transformation is forged:

“It is by the way of the morally motivated struggles of social group, their collective attempt to establish, institutionally and culturally, expanded forms of recognition--that the normatively directional change of societies proceeds” (Honneth, 1995, p. 92).

Linking the personal and the political, an individual’s struggle for recognition serves as a social praxis to help initiate broader emancipatory movements (Fleming, 2016).

Finally, in a *planetary* conception of transformative learning, a holistic understanding of transformation is conceived, moving beyond the individual level to address and reconfigure the entire system. By touching the realms of education, society, politics, industry and the environment, this approach works to develop a new discourse that emphasizes ecological and planetary interconnectedness (O’Sullivan, 1999). According to Susan Griffin (1995):

“The awareness grows that something is terribly wrong with the practices of European culture that have led both to human suffering and environmental disaster. Patterns of destruction which are neither random or accidental have arisen from a consciousness that fragments existence. The problem is philosophical. Not the dry, seemingly irrelevant, obscure or academic subject known by the name of philosophy. But philosophy as a structure of the mind that shapes all our days, all our perceptions” (p. 29).

The planetary conception of transformative learning recognizes the terminal state of our present rational-industrial mode of operation and demands a coming transformation that will “transcend the forces of modernism and include them at the same time” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 1), transcending the dominating power differentials at play, while including the benign, beneficial and essential aspects to modernism (Wilber, 1996). Moving beyond reformatory notions of change, planetary transformative learning harnesses the radical process of ‘transformative criticism,’ which suggests a “radical restructuring of the dominant culture and a fundamental rupture with the past” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 5). This is possible through the simultaneous process of the criticism itself, the vision of what alternatives are possible, and the development of a concrete path forward toward a new and more ‘functionally appropriate’ cultural form

(O’Sullivan, 1999). This new path forward moves beyond the dominant neoliberal framework that often tarnishes well-intended social democratic programming by over-emphasizing values of market individualism, and shifts the focus toward a “politics of hope and meaning” (Lerner, 1996), where the fundamental needs of both humans and the larger earth community are central.

Despite the differences present across the conceptualizations of transformative learning theory, and particularly the divide on whether the focus is on individual or societal transformation, Cranton & Taylor (2012) believe “transformative learning theory need not be about individual transformation or social change; it is about both” (p. 10). Calling for a more unified theory, Cranton & Taylor (2012) propose moving beyond the fractured duality of individual versus social conceptualizations, and instead recognize the ways both perspectives complement one another.

*Planetary and emancipatory transformative learning theory.* Within the context of this research, I will draw upon aspects of the planetary and emancipatory conceptions of transformative learning. Drawing on the definition posed by O’Sullivan, Morrell, & O’Connor (2002), transformative learning:

“involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy” (p. xvii).

Moving beyond reformatory notions of change, planetary transformative learning harnesses a framework encompassing three main realms of learning, including: an education for survival, an education for critical understanding, and an education for integral creativity (O’Sullivan, 2002).

*Education for survival.* In this context, survival refers to “creating conditions for the continuance of living” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 4). An education for survival involves reckoning with the terminal state of our world, a situation that has been perpetuated by a dominant Western ideology that elevates humans over nature and “fragments existence” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 4). Deeply embedded within the present market economy, this ideology has fueled larger social, economic and political systems on a global scale, contributing to the entwined social and environmental issues present today. According to O’Sullivan (2002), “Understanding these complex issues as an intricate part of the current ecological crisis is the survival task of transformative learning” (p. 5). Essential to this understanding is learning the dynamics of denial, despair, and grief (O’Sullivan, 2002).

*Education for critical understanding: conscientization and praxis.* Reckoning with the terminal state of the world requires a process of critical reflection that leads us to “examine the factors and conditions that have brought us to this devastating historical moment” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 5). This involves a deep examination of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that drive the Western paradigm; our present state as an “unconscious civilization” (Ralston, 1997); and the societal power dynamics that fuel structures of imperialism. This research will integrate facets of the emancipatory conception of transformative learning by drawing on the work of Friere (1970), and his conceptions of *conscientization* and *praxis* as theoretical underpinnings for a critical resistance education.

Drawing from Freire (1970b), and his pedagogical tradition of popular education (also known as critical pedagogy), *conscientization* (conscientização) and *praxis* are linked concepts that comprise the first stage of this liberatory education model, wherein the oppressed develop the capacity to “unveil the world of oppression” (Freire, 1970b, p. 54) and thereby transform

their reality through reflective action. Conscientization refers to “the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality” (Freire, 1970c, p. 27). As an integral part of Friere’s problem-posing model of education, conscientization moves beyond mere realization, to the critical dimension of consciousness where human beings deepen their awareness of their situated, historical realities as a means to transcend “false consciousness” (Freire, 1985, p. 85). Comprised of three stages, the process of conscientization commences with “magical awareness” where individuals describe the factors that shape their lives as outside the scope of their control. The second stage is “naïve awareness” where individuals are neither fully cognizant, nor fully resigned to their life situation, but ultimately still accept the values and social structures imposed on them (Freire, 1970c). These stages of false, or ingenuous consciousness are elementary, with perceptive capacity, but without the ability to distance itself from the environment and phenomena it is submerged within in order to take a critical stance (Jenlink, 2017). On the other hand, critical consciousness, the third stage, involves an “epistemological curiosity” (Jenlink, 2017) and creativity where individuals locate themselves within their own spatial and temporal situationality through critical analysis, unearth the causes to their reality, and develop a commitment to take action to fight for their own liberation (Friere, 1970a). Part of this pedagogical process involves the oppressed reclaiming their humanity, recognizing themselves as subjects, not objects, “engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (Freire, 1970b, p. 66). The process of conscientization is not an intellectual nor individual endeavor, but a form of critical praxis that results in transformative action situated “within the context of the collective, in mutually supportive horizontal relationships” (Armitage, 2013, p. 4) through dialogue.

According to Freire (1970b), dialogue is a process comprised of two inseparable elements--reflection and action. These two aspects necessitate one another, as dialogue without action becomes *verbalism*, and dialogue without reflection becomes *activism* (Freire, 1970b). As individuals engage in dialogue (both reflection and action), they attain importance and meaning as human beings (Freire, 1970b) through the creative act of “naming the world [to] transform it” (Freire, 1970b, p. 88). Dialogue operates outside the hostility of the oppressive historical and systemic structures that privilege the ‘truth’ of some over others, operating within a horizontal relationship between subjects. Dialogue necessitates a “profound love for the world and for people” (Freire, 1970b, p. 89), “humility” (Freire, 1970b, p. 90) “an intense faith in humankind” (Freire, 1970b, p. 90), “hope” (Freire, 1970b, p. 91) and “critical thinking” (Freire, 1970b, p. 92). It is through the reflection and action of dialogue that individuals, together, transform their perceptions, and thereby transcend their historical limitations as new possibilities emerge through humanization. This process is known as praxis, and is the origin of knowledge and creation (Freire, 1970b).

As an integral part of this transformative process, Freire (1992) speaks of critical hope:

“Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings, and become a distortion of that ontological need. When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world. I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative. I do not mean that, because I am hopeful, I attribute to this hope of mine the power to transform reality all by itself, so that I set out for the fray without taking account of concrete, material data, declaring, 'My hope is enough!' No, my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water” (p. 8).

Freire (1992) considers the aspect of hope as equally essential to the processes of critique and active resistance for the transformation of our world. As a motivating source to initiate and

persevere in the struggle for liberation, critical hope enables us to see beyond our present reality, and refocus on aspects of promise and potential. Extending the focus of study beyond ‘radical pessimism’ (Brookfield, 2005) to questions such as ‘what is good here?’ (Peters et al., 2004) offers the opportunity to explore the terrain of creativity and action that lies beyond the dominant narrative.

*Education for integral creativity.* Education for integral creativity involves envisioning possibilities that extend beyond the Western ideological frame, encouraging a reimagining of our world through the process of learning for planetary consciousness, integral development, quality of life, and the sacred (O’Sullivan, 2002). *Education for planetary consciousness* involves reexamining our position in the world, shifting our lens from being located within the market economy to being part of the broader cosmological context, where we see ourselves as part of an “organic totality” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 8). This requires a “new grand narrative” (Gare, 1995, p. 140) that will help us to better understand our role in this larger context, while positioning us to effectively take action to address the complexity of the social and environmental crises at hand (Gare, 1995). *Education for integral development* involves a reconceptualization of development, transcending the dominant market-driven frame, for a holistic paradigm that links the “creative evolutionary processes of the universe, the planet, the earth community, the human community, and the personal world” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 8). *Education for quality of life* problematizes the modern paradigm of equating life quality with material consumption. Measures such as standard of living and gross national product are framed as quality of life indicators, but merely account for buying power within the consumer economy (O’Sullivan, 2002). Consequently, “our cultural values, fixated on the marketplace, have resulted in a profound cynicism that makes us question whether there is any deeper meaning and higher



purpose to life beyond material self-interest” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 9). Thereby, an education for quality of life is first a process of self-reflection that invites people living in the minority world to confront their privilege and take responsibility for the history of colonization and resource extraction in the majority world that has enabled their modern life of comfort and excess (O’Sullivan, 2002). With this comes a reconceptualization of quality of life to include a broader scope of human needs such as *community, sense of place, diversity and inclusion, civic culture, and respect for all living things*.

As a consequence of globalization, there is a tangible disconnect between people and the place where they live, the people in their surrounding community, and the natural world (O’Sullivan, 2002). Through bioregional studies, loyalty and commitment to place can be strengthened as people develop shared understandings of history, the land, the community, and visions for the future. An education for quality of life also requires diversity within and between communities. By recognizing the subjectivity of experience, and celebrating the creativity that comes with this diversity, communities can become more inclusive. An education for diversity and inclusion “allows a simultaneous articulation of both difference and the communal” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 10). The development of civic culture is also essential to an education for quality of life. Civic culture, or civic society refers to “the intermediary structures that link the local community to the larger global structures” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 10). The circumstances the globalized world is heading toward requires an active citizenry to hold politicians and corporations accountable to protecting human and environmental rights (O’Sullivan, 2002).

Finally, education and the sacred involves recognizing education as a spiritual undertaking. In today’s world, guided by market-based values, there is little space or place for nourishing the “hunger of the spirit” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 10). Moving beyond notions of

institutionalized religion, O'Sullivan, (2002) considers spirituality as an integral aspect to all stages of the transformative learning process.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

Guided by the planetary conception of transformative learning theory (O’Sullivan, 2002), and Freire’s (1970b) understanding of conscientization, praxis, and critical hope, I explored the ways the Farmacy Garden is a site of transformative learning for sustainability in garden participants’ and practitioners’ lives. All aspects of this study design were informed by my constructivist and critical ontological and epistemological positioning. Harnessing a case study design and the methodological and pedagogical process of narrative inquiry, I explored my posed research questions through semi-structured narrative interviews (see Appendix A and B). The credibility of this research is assessed through methodological and interpretive rigor, and criteria for validity as authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

### **Philosophical Stance**

The approach I have adopted for this study is founded on my philosophical stance as a researcher. This position is guided by my ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (the way knowledge is constructed), and methodological (the way we know the world) assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that implicate all aspects of the research process including the study design, interpretation of the results, and the approach used to assess validity. These underlying beliefs and assumptions also guide the way I see and take action within the world more broadly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Recognizing that philosophical perspectives on the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge are not exclusive or rigidly distinct from one another (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I draw from multiple worldviews, integrating aspects of critical theory and social constructivism into my broader paradigm, a “bricolage” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that comprises my philosophical stance.

Within this research I draw from the following ontological and epistemological assumptions of constructivism. Social constructivists believe that individuals develop their own understandings of the world around them by assessing their experiences and engaging in a process of subjective meaning-making. According to Creswell (2014), “these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. They are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (p. 8). Thereby, social constructivism is founded on a relativist ontology (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) grounded in the belief that reality is socially constructed, and there are multiple interpretations of reality (Creswell, 2014). Researchers operating within a constructivist paradigm subscribe to a subjectivist epistemology where the researcher and participant co-create understandings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). With this philosophical foundation, researchers work to interpret, co-generate, and reconstruct the multiple, varied, and complex views of their study participants by foregrounding participant perspectives on the topic of inquiry as much as possible (Creswell, 2014).

Within the context of this study, I have developed my philosophical stance by drawing on aspects of critical theory that both build upon and diverge from social constructivism. Critical theory aligns and expands upon many of the ontological and epistemological positions of social constructivism I subscribe to, assuming the stance of multiple socially constructed realities, and a transactional epistemology where the researcher is a subjective presence within the research, and study findings are filtered through and impacted by their positions (Bailey, 2018). With an ontology founded on historical realism, critical theorists believe that foundational truth and knowledge can be located “in specific historical, economic, racial and social infrastructures of oppression, injustice, and marginalization” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 204) that have been

solidified over time. Undergirding this belief are the understandings that certain groups of society are privileged over others, that all thought and action is negotiated by social and historical power relations, and that ‘facts’ and values are inextricably linked and largely inscribed by dominant ideologies (Kinchelow & McLaren, 2005). Operating within these beliefs, critical theorists see mainstream research as largely reproducing systems of oppression, and work to counter this by harnessing the research process as a place to confront and resist oppressive forces. Critical researchers see research as a form of social or cultural critique (Kinchelow & McLaren, 2005), and a mechanism to support liberation and social change. Thereby, “Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label “political” and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 305). These assumptions inform the approach they take, and the values they extract from their findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

### **Questions of Trustworthiness**

My epistemological and ontological positioning directly informs the way I assessed the trustworthiness of this study. The historical conceptions of reliability, validity, and generalizability that are often seen with post-positivism and quantitative research design are not relevant measures for the constructivist and critical assumptions that undergird this qualitative study. While I conducted my research with a methodological rigor informed by positivism, ensuring extended engagement and thorough observation throughout the study, these actions only represent part of what constitutes how I assess the validity and reliability of my study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The other criteria I accounted for is interpretive rigor (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This type of rigor asks the question “Can our co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205). In this study

I harnessed the language developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to describe measures of trustworthiness in terms of credibility (internal validity), dependability (reliability), and transferability (external validity) recognizing this language is more appropriate for and relevant to both qualitative inquiry and the paradigms I operate within.

Aligned with the constructivist assumptions that guide this study, I understand credibility (internal validity) to be a process “based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). I assessed credibility using two of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) recommended procedures including prolonged engagement in the research setting, vetting data and research findings with participants, and divulging data that counters my findings. I also adopted suggestions posed by Creswell (2014) to convey my findings using thick description, and to disclose my bias as a researcher through an extensive and ongoing reflexivity process.

I also measured the credibility of my study against two of Guba & Lincoln’s (1989) criteria for validity as authenticity, which includes fairness and ontological authenticity. These criteria are well-aligned with both the constructivist and critical paradigms I operate within, and will be cultivated by my use of narrative inquiry as a methodology. Fairness refers to balancing the textual representation of stakeholder perspectives, cultivating inclusion, and the intentional effort to thwart marginalization. Ontological authenticity refers to “rais[ing] consciousness, or to unite divided consciousness, likely via some dialectical process, so that a person or persons...can achieve a more sophisticated and enriched construction” (Guba & Lincoln, 1986, p. 22).

Dependability (reliability) refers to examining the “stability” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201), or consistency of a research approach. To assess the dependability of this study I have clearly documented every step of the procedures I use within this case study (Yin, 2009), I have ensured

the transcriptions I conduct accurately reflect the original audio recording, and I have maintained code cohesion by constantly comparing similarly coded data across transcripts to ensure the meaning of the codes remains consistent throughout the whole coding process (Gibbs, 2007).

Transferability refers to the applicability of research findings to other settings or groups (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Contrarily, the goal within qualitative inquiry is not the ability to generalize findings, but rather “the value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site” (Creswell, 2014, p. 203-204). Following the notion that particularity, not generalizability (Green & Caracelli, 1997) as the predominant indicator of a successful qualitative study, I am not concerned with generalizing findings beyond the scope of this study.

### **Narrative Beginnings as Researcher Reflexivity**

Reflexivity entails a researchers’ “awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it” (Davies, 1999, p. 7). Often, researchers are overly focused on studying participants, and fail to consider their own role and influence in the research context (Park, 2014). Through reflexivity the researcher can integrate a sustained process of self-conscious introspection into their larger research process. By examining how their own actions and perceptions are affected by the relationship and dialogue they have with others, researchers can cultivate an awareness of “reciprocal influence” (Anderson, 2006, p. 382), and account for the relational and cogenerative nature of research. In order to incorporate this central process into my own qualitative research study, I have engaged in a process of writing my narrative beginnings (Dubnewick et al., 2018) with the Farmacy Garden to make myself visible in my study by both situating my present and future research in the context of my former role as a practitioner, and in my prior relationships with program participants.

Prior to returning to graduate school I worked as the Farmacy Garden coordinator for four years. The impossibility of objectivity has become increasingly clear as I begin to unpack the ways that every facet of my research development process has been influenced by knowing garden participants as friends, hearing their stories, and recognizing my own emotional investment in their lives. This reflexive look at my research is further complicated when inquiring into some of the more uncomfortable facets of my structural relationship with participants. Hired by the Montgomery County Health Department, and working closely with the WIC Program and Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Farmacy Garden was designed as an alternative approach to supplemental food assistance, health promotion, and community building. Distinct, but not separate from the bureaucratic locus of control, the Farmacy Garden is a place for the community, but is not fully by the community. As the hired intermediary between the agencies and the community, it was my role to navigate the tensions of designing and implementing a community-based program from the top-down. Despite finding creative ways to foster aspects of a bottom-up approach, I ultimately made programmatic decisions in partnership with other agency representatives that maintained a power differential between garden participants and garden staff.

Further, recognizing the inherent power differential that comes with being a person of socio-economic and educational privilege working with predominantly low-income populations in rural Appalachia has been and continues to be a disconcerting reality. Stepping into my role as a researcher with structural power and established trust with participants is a delicate situation that leaves me cautious about misrepresenting participants or exploiting experiences for my own benefit. I am left feeling like the only ethical way to move forward is to first frame my research with my own self-disclosure, calling out my own bias in this work.



On the first Monday in May of 2014 the Farmacy Garden opened its gates for the second year. It was my first season serving as garden coordinator, and while I had spent the winter months mulling through seed catalogs and instructional gardening books, situating myself into the content of my role, I remained unsure of how this would play out in practice. Who was the community of this community garden? While I had lived in central Appalachia for seven years by that point in my life, my social circle had been largely oriented around Virginia Tech, rarely extending beyond Blacksburg's town limits.

When I look back on the opening day of that first garden season, I remember feeling a little nervous. At the time I don't think I fully understood why, but in retrospect I realize that my self-consciousness was rooted in my social identity. As a white female I am the cliché representation of the food system organizing world. With the privilege of a suburban middleclass upbringing, a bachelor's degree in environmental sustainability, and a work history at the community co-op and local farmers' market, I was and still am a representation of the "whiteness" that predominates the local food system. This "whiteness" in community food initiatives is outlined well by Rachel Slocum (2007):

"Community food thrives on a culture of food that has been made white. How this food is produced, packaged, promoted and sold--engages with a white middle class consumer base that tends to be interested in personal health and perhaps in environmental integrity. White, wealthier bodies tend to be the ones in Whole Foods, at co-ops..., the people attending CFSC conferences, those making certain purchases at the St. Paul Farmers' Market and the leaders of community food nonprofits. Here, whites come together, stick together and then become impenetrable to others despite their desire to be otherwise (p. 526).

Inevitably, the white, middle-class lens of community food was my frame of reference at the Farmacy Garden, though I knew there was a discrepancy. I remember back to that first season, calling former garden participants for the first time, and feeling my self-consciousness creep in as I heard a southern twang on the other line. I wanted to connect, and noticed my voice change

over the course of the conversation, a contrived attempt to match the culture I was stepping into. There were many other moments over the four seasons that I felt a friction--a racial, class, political, religious, or cultural disparity that made me more aware and self-conscious of my positionality. That time when a family of six asked to borrow five dollars because they didn't have enough gas money. That time a young woman told me she couldn't take the carrots because she didn't have the dental durability to eat them. That time a man disclosed that he tried to commit suicide by putting himself in front of a train. That time I talked on the phone with a former gardener whose chronic back pain kept her bed-bound for weeks. That time I planted beans with a woman and learned about her struggles as the primary caregiver for her wheelchair bound brother after his car accident. These are a few moments of many where I saw the failures of our systems in the lived experiences of others, and simultaneously saw the ways I had, and continue to benefit from these systems.

Though to frame the Farmacy Garden community with solely this lens is a misrepresentation. For me, the Farmacy Garden revealed the best of people, and brought together a group unique from me and from each other as the vegetable varieties we cultivated. Green zebras grew with Thai basil, purple beans and popcorn, rainbow chard and radish. Extending across race, class, gender, generation, culture, and life experience, I can only surmise that we grew from each other, but I know for a fact that I am better for knowing them.

As I reoriented into my new role as researcher on this project, I want to disclose that my process for developing this study was largely informed by my own personal experiences with Farmacy Garden. I have no doubts that both transformative learning theory and narrative inquiry aligned with my research interests because of the lasting impact the garden has had on my life. The cultivation, community, and healing that I both personally experienced, and was witness to

at the Farmacy Garden are stories I carry with me now as lasting reminders of the powerful role gardens can play in the lives of those that tend to them. I have attempted to frame this study in a way that honors the lived experiences of garden stakeholders by enabling them to share their stories in their own words. My hope is to do justice to their insights as I interpret their experiences through both my own personal lens and the broader scope of literature I have used to guide this study. For a more extensive exploration of my own experiences and perceptions of the Farmacy Garden, please refer to **Appendix S** where you will find my personal narrative.

### **Methodology and Study Design**

**Narrative inquiry.** Narrative inquiry is considered both a methodology and pedagogical orientation for teaching and learning (Kim, 2008) that is well suited to capture experiences of transformative learning. While the term narrative has taken on many different meanings within qualitative scholarship (Josselson, 2011), it will be interpreted within the context of my research in the following ways. Defined as a process of meaning-making through stories lived and told (Clandinin & Connolley, 2000), narrative inquiry is a subjective and dialogic endeavor that occurs at three overlapping levels:

“stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant’s and investigator’s narrative.” (Riessman, 2008, p. 6)

Characterized by temporality, relationality between researcher and participant, and the “construction and presentation of self through language” (Foste, 2018, p. 11), narrative inquiry is an active process, and a performative experience that enables participants to portray themselves in a way they find meaningful and in the way they want to be known (Foste, 2018, p. 12).

The process of narrative inquiry is temporal by nature, capturing an individual’s experiences “not as a thing happening at that moment but as an expression of something

happening over time. Any event, or thing, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29). As a result, the meaning drawn from narrative accounts is always contextually situated in past experiences, but rarely expressed by participants in a temporally linear fashion.

Therefore, it is the job of the researcher to develop a coherent narrative by linking stories and interpreting meaning (Foste, 2018). This process reveals just one facet of the intersubjective and dialogic relationship between the researcher and participant in the co-creation of narratives. Extending into all facets of the narrative inquiry process, researcher influence can impact which stories participants share based on what they consider important in context to their study (Foste, 2018). Further, because of the potentially intimate, dynamic, and engaged nature of story-sharing, participants can often attempt to bring the researcher into the narrative as they entertain, justify, and explain their experiences (Riessman, 2008; Foste 2018).

This relational interplay highlights the importance of researcher reflexivity. In order to illuminate the ways personal biases impact present research, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommend researchers engage in a process of composing narrative beginnings. Narrative beginnings are a form of autobiographical narrative inquiry that “keep[s] us each asking who we are in each research study” (Dubnewick et al., 2018, p. 413), fostering this discovery through a process of reflexive writing intended to help us navigate personal stories that are relevant to our research. Recognizing that reflexivity is a dynamic and ongoing process that adapts over time and through lived experience, narrative beginnings allow us to “awaken to how we position ourselves in relation to future participants and to how we frame our research puzzle” (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016, p. 26). Aligned with the relational ontology of the narrative inquiry methodology, writing our narrative beginnings enables us to be perceptive to the inherent

bias present in the way that we frame stories of ourselves, our research phenomena, and our research participants (Dubnewick, 2018). These past stories are not fixed entities, but rather continue to work on us as we bring our past experiences into our present and future ones.

According to Freeman (2007),

“Writing of the personal past . . . is instead a product of the present and the interests, needs, and wishes that attend it. This present, however—along with the self whose present it is—is itself transformed in and through the process. Indeed, in a distinct sense, a new self is fashioned . . . What this suggests is that there is a dialectical relationship not only between the past and present but between past, present, and future. Even in the midst of my present engagement with the past, I am moving into the future, giving form and meaning to the self-to-be” (pp. 137-138).

This process helps us as researchers foster a greater sense of relational accountability (Dubnewick, 2018), recognizing that knowing our own stories helps us cultivate a greater sense of legitimacy in representing the stories of others. This process helps showcase the transactional and dialogic nature of experience, while serving as a reminder “that at the deepest level narrative beginnings allow us to attend ethically to our participants and care for their stories, and ours, as our lives are in the making” (Dubnewick, 2018, p. 418).

Through the active process of narrative inquiry, research participants engaged in critical reflection as they made meaning of their perceptions of, experiences with, and aspirations for the Farmacy Garden program. While I did not assess for the impact of the narrative process itself, the process of foregrounding personal stories had the potential to be a transformative learning experience itself, as “Storytelling is a way to share examples of transformative learning and also a way to facilitate transformative learning” (Kroth & Cranton, 2014, p. 28). Transformative learning theory describes how individuals make meaning of their experiences and transform that meaning based on new experiences that challenge their former understanding (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Because storytelling is the way we make sense of our lives, it is a process that deeply

supports the transformative learning experience, particularly when stories create disorienting dilemmas (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). With the shared dimensions of “individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, a holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic practice” (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 462), storytelling is a relevant process to explore, enrich, and cultivate transformative learning experiences.

**Case study.** This study will use a case study design as a way to explore the posed research questions. A case study refers to both “a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (Stake, 2005, p. 444). While commonly used in qualitative inquiry, case studies can be applicable in a variety of research designs, and are relevant across diverse methodological contexts (Stake, 2005). A case study refers to research that chooses to explore one entity, tending to the epistemological question: “What can be learned about the single case?” (Stake, 2005, p. 443). Whether inquiring into something more simple, such as a person, or something more complex, such as an organization, the common thread across all case studies is the focus on the singular entity that operates within a “bounded system” (Fals Borda, 1998), with certain aspects considered to be essential to the case, and other aspects considered to be peripheral (Stake, 2005). Within the context of this study I engaged in an *intrinsic* case study. Intrinsic case studies are distinguished by research intent, where a study is pursued because of an intrinsic desire to better understand a particular case. Surrendering ambitions for generalizability, intrinsic case studies are valued for the rich and descriptive insight they provide about both the common and particular aspects of a specific case (Stake, 2005). Well-aligned with both the questions driving this research, and the site of interest, a case study design was used to “explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies” (Yin, 2003, p. 15).

The case of interest for this study is the programs, participants, and practitioners of the Farmacy Garden, a community garden in Christiansburg, Virginia founded by two governmental agencies in the region. This case was chosen based on its pertinence to my research interests, and on my prior relationship and first-hand experience with the garden, given my former role as garden coordinator.

**Research questions.** This research draws upon the planetary conception of transformative learning theory (O’Sullivan, 2002), and Freire’s (1970b) understanding of conscientization, praxis, and critical hope, to explore the following main research question and three operational questions:

1. How, if it all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of transformative learning for sustainability in participants’ and practitioners’ lives?
  - a. How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for critical consciousness?
  - b. How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for social action?
  - c. How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for creativity and vision?

Table 1: *A priori* propositions

Construct	Supporting Literature	Research Question(s)	Method
Planetary and Emancipatory Transformative Learning	O’Sullivan, E.V. (2002). <i>The Project and Vision of Transformative Education</i> in O’Sullivan, E.V., Morrell, A., & O’Connor, M. A., <i>Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning</i> , pp. 1-12. New York, NY: Palgrave.	How, if it all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of transformative learning for sustainability in participants’ and practitioners’ lives?	Participant and Practitioner Interviews  Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). <i>Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research</i> . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

	Freire, P. (1970). <i>Pedagogy of the oppressed</i> . New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing.		Riessman, C. K. (2008). <i>Narrative methods for the human sciences</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Critical Consciousness	Freire, P. (1970). <i>Pedagogy of the oppressed</i> . New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing.	How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for critical consciousness?	Participant and Practitioner Interviews  Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). <i>Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research</i> . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.  Riessman, C. K. (2008). <i>Narrative methods for the human sciences</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Social Action (Praxis)	Freire, P. (1970). <i>Pedagogy of the oppressed</i> . New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing.	How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for social action?	Participant and Practitioner Interviews  Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). <i>Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research</i> . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.  Riessman, C. K. (2008). <i>Narrative methods for the human sciences</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



Creativity and Vision	O'Sullivan, E.V. (2002). The Project and Vision of Transformative Education in O'Sullivan, E.V., Morrell, A., & O'Connor, M. A., <i>Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning</i> , pp. 1-12. New York, NY: Palgrave.	How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for creativity and vision?	Participant and Practitioner Interviews  Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). <i>Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research</i> . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.  Riessman, C. K. (2008). <i>Narrative methods for the human sciences</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
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**Organization description.** The Farmacy Garden is a 34-raised bed community garden site and edible landscape that was created in 2014 in a partnership between the New River Health District, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Family Nutrition Program as a way to promote health, increase food security and build community among low-income individuals in Montgomery County. The Farmacy Garden targets its outreach efforts to individuals enrolled in the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) Program by using the garden site to conduct mandatory WIC nutrition education classes. Physicians of the Community Health Center of the New River Valley and Continuity Clinic also write non-binding “prescriptions” for patients to participate in the garden as a way to improve health outcomes. The Farmacy Garden has also developed and implemented a children’s summer gardening, nutrition and entrepreneurship program intended to teach youth how to grow, prepare and sell fresh fruits and vegetables called Market Kids. The Farmacy Garden is also promoted less formally through Social Services, low-income housing communities, food pantries, poverty alleviation programs, and the community at large. Built on a foundation of collaboration between the New River Health District, Virginia Cooperative

Extension, and the Family Nutrition Program, the dedication of the multi-agency Farmacy Garden Task Team has provided a strong foundation for the garden to succeed on many levels.

It is important to note here that a large part of the garden's success has been attributed to the leadership of agency representatives that have enabled this elective program to thrive through creative programming and funding strategies in the normally rigid bureaucratic environment. The idea for community gardens as a public health initiative was born during a time when the medical director of the New River Health District was a person with creative vision and willingness to work through and around bureaucratic hurdles to ensure sustainable funding for the garden programs. Combined with the support of creative leaders in Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Family Nutrition Program, the Farmacy Garden was built on a strong foundation of collaboration where each partner was willing to work cooperatively, leveraging their organizational resources for this innovative initiative. Without this creative and collaborative leadership, the Farmacy Garden would not have been possible, nor sustainable.

*The New River Health District (NRHD)* is committed to taking innovative approaches to improve health outcomes through their growing population health program. As the main source of funding for the garden program, the NRHD created, hosts, and supervises the part-time Health Educator position to coordinate the garden and associated programming. The NRHD also provides funding for annual costs associated with the garden including seeds, soil, plant starts, and infrastructure.

*Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)* strives to translate university knowledge into community success stories. Extension agents are well-connected among area producers, emergency food procurement programs, and training and education initiatives. The Montgomery

County Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent supports the Farmacy Garden by providing horticultural consultation, educational workshops, and grant writing.

*The VCE Family Nutrition Program (FNP)* has a mission to teach limited resource families and youth how to improve their health. They aim to help individuals become better managers of available food resources within their community by educating consumers on basic nutrition and physical activity, safe food handling practices, and how to be a thrifty food shopper. The FNP has supported the Farmacy Garden by providing a paid summer intern to support garden operations and programming, assisting with program evaluation and research publications.

**Participant selection.** For this study I interviewed both Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners. *Farmacy Garden participants* are distinguished by their volitional engagement in the garden and its programs without the additional motives for involvement associated with being an employee, intern, or student getting degree credit. Farmacy Garden participants may have engaged in a variety of program offerings such as garden hours, WIC nutrition education classes, the garden prescription program, Market Kids, workshops and/or garden potlucks. Garden hours are weekly times when the garden is open to the public. During these times anyone in the community is welcome to come to the garden and engage in garden activities with the guidance and support of a garden staff member as needed. Garden activities include weeding, mulching, watering, planting, harvesting, weighing produce, and engaging in larger infrastructure projects. As a collective community garden, all participants share all of the garden space and work to collectively maintain it with oversight from the garden coordinator. Farmacy Garden participants have been selected for this study based on the following criteria:

- *Participation in garden hours:* All study participants are required to either have attended weekly garden hours a minimum of six times or been involved with the Farmacy Garden for a minimum of one growing season.
- *Age:* All study participants must be over the age of 18.

It is important to note that while Farmacy Garden participants were recruited based on the above criteria, only six of the twelve Farmacy Garden participants that I reached out to for an interview were willing to participate in the study. The participants that ended up being part of this study were also the ones that I have had the strongest personal relationship with, and that have been the most involved participants in the Farmacy Garden. Therefore, the sample for this study does not reflect the perspectives of participants that have had more sporadic participation in the garden.

*Farmacy Garden practitioners* are distinguished by their staff role within the garden. Their involvement is contingent on their status as an employee or intern of one of the partnering agencies (NRHD, VCE, FNP), or as a university student participating in the garden as part of a class service learning requirement. Farmacy Garden practitioners may serve a variety of roles including: overseeing weekly garden hours, program development, implementation and evaluation, planning and implementing infrastructure projects, purchasing supplies, marketing and outreach, grant writing, coordinating with community stakeholders, etc. Farmacy Garden practitioners have been selected for this study based on the following criteria:

- *On-site engagement:* All study participants must have experience working physically on-site at the Farmacy Garden with participants.
- *Temporal involvement in the garden:* All study participants must have worked a minimum of one growing season with the Farmacy Garden within the past three years.

All study participants have been purposefully selected based on the above criteria, by my pre-existing relationship with them, and by recommendations and support from the present garden coordinator. I recruited study participants through their preferred method of communication (email, phone, social media, etc.) using pre-developed recruitment scripts, one for email and social media contact, and one for phone contact. This script outlined important aspects of the study and expectations for involvement to help potential participants determine whether or not they would like to be part of the study. Prior to conducting interviews, all study participants signed an informed consent form.

**Data collection.** Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I aspired to a “methodological self-consciousness” (Charmaz, 2017), endeavoring to disclose my values, positionality, and role in co-generating this research, and recognizing the ways that my own reality impacts the way I give form, content, and meaning to the data (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019). Within this qualitative case study of the Farmacy Garden I conducted twelve semi-structured narrative interviews to investigate individuals’ perceptions of the Farmacy Garden as a site for transformative learning for sustainability in garden participants and practitioners' lives. I developed open-ended prompts to help guide and structure the interview process, aligning questions with the theoretical underpinnings of planetary and emancipatory conceptions of transformative learning theory (see Appendix A and B). The protocol was adapted from the *Soils, Place, and Conservation: Voices and Accents of Virginia’s Agricultural Community* interview script (Bendfeldt, E., Parrish, M., Niewolny, K., Thompson, W.). A section of the interview was designated for study participants to disclose a personal and relevant experience in the form of a story, aligning with the study methodology, narrative inquiry. Despite pre-

developing prompts to guide the interaction, the interview process was conversational by nature, maintaining a flexible structure that was co-directed by myself and the study participants.

After conducting the interviews, transcribed them verbatim into Google Docs, maintaining linguistic nuances unique to each participant. I lightly edited interviews into a narrative format, removing myself from the text, and adapting for readability. All finalized narratives were sent back to the research subject to vet for accuracy, and provide an opportunity to edit and offer feedback. Additionally, all participants were asked to identify meaningful themes from their own personal narrative that helped inform the codebook and data analysis process. I developed a couple of guiding questions to help participants reflect on which themes from their narrative they find meaningful for data analysis. This component to the research was optional and not all study participants ended up identifying themes.

**Data analysis.** Within this study, the data analysis process occurred simultaneously with the data collection process to account for the iterative, dynamic, and intuitive nature of qualitative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Flick (2014), the process of data analysis includes “the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (p. 5). Within this study loosely followed the procedure recommended by Creswell (2014), drawing on both deductive and inductive approaches. I generated my codes deductively by grounding my data in existing theory, and inductively by accounting for unanticipated but relevant themes as they arose.

After transcribing and editing interviews conducted with garden participants and practitioners, I began coding my transcripts. According to Corbin & Strauss (2008), coding is a process of “deriving and developing concepts from data” (p. 65). My code development process

involved thoroughly reading each individual transcript to get a general sense of its content, major themes, and underlying meanings as it relates to my *a priori* propositions, research questions, and content explored in my broader literature review. I took notes on my insights throughout this process, and compiled them into one document, organizing and grouping similar topics into categories (Tesch, 1990). I also include the meaningful themes identified by the interview participants in this list of topics. I then abbreviated my topics into codes, developed an initial codebook, and examined each transcript again, this time appropriately labeling pertinent segments of text with my various codes using ATLAS.ti coding software. Throughout this process, I continued to adapt my codebook as new and relevant codes arise, revisiting my transcripts with each iteration of my codebook (Creswell, 2014). Code constructs were also constantly compared across transcripts for continuity, and adapted as necessary (Charmaz, K., 1996). According to Creswell (2014), codes can be categorized in three ways: codes that are anticipated based on prior literature or common sense; codes that are unexpected; and codes that are “unusual, and...of conceptual interest to readers” (Creswell, 2014, p. 199). Within my data analysis process I included all three types of codes in my codebook.

After I coded all of my transcripts I analyzed the codes for larger thematic categories that have prevailing significance in describing the data (Charmaz, K., 1996). These categories informed the analytic direction of my research. As paraphrased by Charmaz (1996, p. 41), “As you raise the code to a category, you begin (1) to explicate its properties, (2) to specify conditions under which it arises, is maintained and changes, (3) to describe its consequences and (4) to show how this category relates to other categories” (cf. Charmaz, 1983, 1990; Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Comparing and interpreting the ways these themes showed up across both unique transcripts and within the broader literature helped me to appropriately and

systematically represent my research findings (Creswell, 2014) in the narrative comprising the discussion section of my thesis.

**Study limitations.** There are some limitations to this study that are important to disclose and consider. The main limitation is that I am the primary instrument from which the research will be conducted and analyzed, implicating the study and findings to my biases. While I have maintained an ongoing process of reflexivity, there is an inevitable limit to my own understanding of the ways that I impact the research process and outcomes. Another limitation that demands reflexivity is my pre-existing relationship with the case I am studying. As the former coordinator of the Farmacy Garden I have strong relationships with the people that I may be interviewing. These prior relationships may have impacted what information was disclosed by the study participants. Interviewees may not have felt fully comfortable divulging critiques or other important feedback about the program in my presence. Additionally, my preconceived notions and personal experiences with the program may have increased my bias and impacted what data I chose to focus on. Finally, I recognize that this study is not generalizable to other community gardens, though want to note here that it was never intended to be.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

In this study I conducted semi-structured narrative interviews with six garden participants and six garden practitioners as a way to better understand stakeholder perceptions and experiences of the Farmacy Garden. Below you will find excerpts of text pulled from full-length participant and practitioner narratives. These quotes have been threaded together to connect ideas across narratives into broader cohesive themes that comprise the findings of this study. Please refer to Appendices H-S to read the full-length narratives of study participants for a broader context to the following analysis.

Through this narrative inquiry I was able to gain insight on the research question, and operational questions that drive this study:

How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of transformative learning for sustainability in participants' and practitioners' lives?

- How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for critical consciousness?
- How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for social action?
- How, if at all, has the Farmacy Garden been a space of learning for creativity and vision?

In my data analysis, I draw on a conception of sustainability rooted in life values (Sumner, 2003), counter-hegemony (Sumner, 2003), and social justice (Agyeman, et al., 2003) that is performed through structures and processes that build the civil commons (Sumner, 2003). Drawing on the theoretical lens of emancipatory (Freire, 1970b) and planetary (O'Sullivan et al., 2002) transformative learning theory, my intent was to clearly illustrate and identify moments of critical consciousness, social action, and creativity and vision as they arose in participant and

practitioner narratives. While I had originally understood these domains as distinct moments in the larger process of transformation, as I engaged in the data analysis process it became apparent that in practice, transformative learning is complex. It is largely unique to the individual, may occur in a non-linear and iterative fashion, and manifest in a diversity of overlapping experiences. Consequently, in this data analysis I examine learning for critical consciousness, social action, and creativity and vision as overlapping, interconnected and mutually supportive dimensions across the spectrum of transformative learning experiences. A more delineated exploration into these three domains can be found in my summary of findings and discussion chapter.

The following commentary of study participants reveals what learning sustainability (Sumner, 2003) looks like in the Farmacy Garden. Manifest in the domains of *community solidarity, community engagement, self-reliance and empowerment, emotional well-being, and reimagining health*, study findings are largely rooted in the CFS movement. Drawing from the definition proposed by Hamm & Bellows (2003), and the values-based fields and practices outlined in the Whole Measures for Community Food Systems (Abi-Nadar et al., 2009), Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners supported dimensions of community food security with impacts that extend across individual, community, and institutional levels. This larger narrative of the Farmacy Garden reveals its role as a critical pedagogy space, a common ground for a small collective to explore, understand, resist, and rewrite the dominant narrative of neoliberalism through the community food security movement.

## Introduction to Study Participants

### Garden Participants

**James** has been a dedicated garden participant since the summer of 2018 after discovering the garden through his doctor at the Community Health Center. As an avid gardener over the course of his life, James was initially motivated to participate in the garden for the free vegetables, but later discovered the joys of socializing in the space with other participants and garden staff. James has been a big proponent of the Farmacy Garden, encouraging everyone he meets to join, as he sees the potential for decommodifying food, and taking food production into our own hands as a way to provide fresh, safe, organic food to all.

**Paul** is an activist that is motivated to help people living in poverty access life-preserving information. He joined the Farmacy Garden in the summer of 2016 with a desire to learn how to garden as a way to be self-sufficient, an interest in sharing that knowledge with others, and a drive to contribute to his community through this project. After three seasons working in the garden, Paul now feels confident in his ability to grow food independently, and reflects on the role the Farmacy Garden played in fostering that sense of empowerment.

**Anita** joined the Farmacy Garden in the summer of 2017 after moving to Blacksburg with her family and hoping to build connections in the community with like-minded individuals. Initially inspired to participate in the garden after learning about the role it plays in reimagining healthcare, Anita reflects on the deep and healing impact the Farmacy Garden played in her life, particularly in the wake of her father's stroke.

**Neel** joined the Farmacy Garden in the summer of 2017 after spotting the garden from the Community Health Center parking lot. After years of watching and helping his father grow a garden in his home country, Neel was excited about the Farmacy Garden as a way to help improve community health through access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Helping in the garden also gave him an opportunity to learn about organic food production, and expand his familiarity of different varieties of produce. With inspiration from the garden, he used his newly developed skills to grow food on his motel property, with the intention to share it with his extended family throughout Virginia and forge relationships with his motel guests.

**Sara** joined the Farmacy Garden in the summer of 2017. Sara was inspired to join the garden as a way to teach her son the life cycle of a plant, while instilling the importance of environmental stewardship and community spirit. Limited in her capacity to participate in the garden due to a lack of transportation along with the young age of her son, the Farmacy Garden showed Sara what could be in her own apartment community, a section 8 housing complex. Recognizing the potential of community gardens to captivate the minds and hearts of

kids, and fulfill apparent community needs, Sara has set out to explore the possibility of creating a community garden on land in her own apartment community.

**Lucy** joined the Farmacy Garden the year that it opened after learning about it through the WIC clinic. Growing up on a farm, Lucy learned the ins and outs of gardening by working in the family garden throughout her childhood, and was motivated to join the Farmacy Garden as a way by to pass this knowledge on to her kids. While Lucy has since moved to Blacksburg, she continues to be involved, and gifts the garden with her extensive knowledge and skills in both food production and construction.

### **Garden Staff**

**Marge** started working in the Farmacy Garden in 2018 as part of her position with the Family Nutrition Program, supporting the site by holding weekly garden hours and helping manage the garden after the garden coordinator transitioned out of their role. Before working with the Farmacy Garden, Marge had an existing passion for community food systems work that was cultivated in her former positions with AmeriCorps, and as a graduate student researching home food production. This former experience primed Marge to recognize the importance of the Farmacy Garden as a site that supports local control of food. By giving people choice in their food system by teaching them how to grow their own food, and supporting them with mentorship, land, and resources, Marge views the Farmacy Garden as one small example of how to reimagine a more equitable food system

**Charlotte** is a founding member of the Farmacy Garden who worked within her role at the Family Nutrition Program in collaboration with other agency partners to build the Farmacy Garden infrastructure and programming from the ground up in 2014. Drawing inspiration from her former work in parks advocacy and farmers markets, Charlotte was motivated to co-develop the Farmacy Garden as a site to reimagine healthcare through the garden prescription program. Charlotte could see the garden's impact beyond empirical measures, recognizing the role that gardening can play in both fostering a shared sense of humanity, and a deeper healing through connection to the community and the earth. While Charlotte now plays more of a backseat role with the Farmacy Garden, her vision and effort in the first four seasons of the site and programming have contributed greatly to its vision and sustainability.

**Evelyn** works for the Family Nutrition Program conducting nutrition education to low-income populations. Joining the Farmacy Garden staff in 2015, Evelyn held weekly garden hours where she worked with garden participants to manage the site day-to-day, while also offering her nutrition education services to participants enrolled in the garden prescription program. She also conducted nutrition education in the WIC clinic, at times leading her classes in the

garden itself. Recognizing the decline in small farms and gardens in the New River Valley, the region where she grew up, Evelyn was excited to be part of the Farmacy Garden staff in order to reconnect people to the joys and benefits of growing their own food.

**Sandra** worked with the Farmacy Garden during the 2017 season as her practicum for her graduate program. Her role within the garden was to help staff weekly garden hours, and also co-coordinate the Market Kids program, a children’s entrepreneurship, horticulture, and nutrition program. With a background in nutrition, and an interest in local food systems, Sandra was excited to merge her interests at the Farmacy Garden, and found the greatest meaning in the space by forging deeper relationships with community members, and seeing the way that gardening inspires people (both adults and children) to try new foods.

**June** is the current Farmacy Garden Coordinator, working for the New River Health District. June was inspired to step into this role after completing a Bachelor’s degree in Environmental Studies. June presently oversees all garden operations including site management, programming, and evaluation. With a deep interest in environmental stewardship and holistic health, June is excited to share gardening knowledge, recognizing the process of growing food as an empowering experience that gives people skills they can carry for the rest of their lives.

**Maureen** was the Farmacy Garden Coordinator with the New River Health District for four growing seasons before returning back to school to get her Master’s degree. As the primary staff member at the garden, Maureen worked closely with other staff and participants to plan, implement, and oversee garden activities, programming, and evaluation. As the Principal Investigator for this study, Maureen included her narrative as an autoethnographic component to her research, offering personal insight from her former role as garden coordinator, while also serving as a form of reflexivity. She has chosen to use her real name.

## **Community Solidarity**

The theme of community solidarity was particularly salient across many of the interviews with both garden participants and practitioners. Community solidarity is representative of the tenet of community food security calling for the “empower[ment of] diverse people to work together to create positive changes in the food system and their communities” (Abi-Nadar, 2009, p. 6). Across narratives community solidarity manifested in the garden by dismantling normative power hierarchies; promoting diversity and inclusion; reflecting community care and support;

and strengthening shared community values. Many of these aspects threaded into each other, revealing the way that these dimensions of community solidarity are mutually supporting.

**Dismantling normative power hierarchies.** It is clear from interviews with participants and practitioners that the Farmacy Garden acts as a neutralizing space that helps dismantle established power hierarchies. Both Marge and Charlotte, former and current employees of the Family Nutrition Program, reflect on this function of the garden from a state agency perspective. They note how dimensions of power are normatively performed in governmental poverty relief programs through patronage, and how the Farmacy Garden setting and activities challenge this power dynamic:

“I think there’s another really cool element of the garden that like takes the element of a hierarchical power structure out. When you go into an office and you’re talking to somebody who’s wearing a suit versus going to the garden and talking to somebody who’s wearing dirty pants and work boots and a t-shirt, and how that makes people feel towards you when you’re just doing manual labor in casual clothes versus asking people about their income, and making them prove if they deserve free government services, and you’re wearing a suit, and you clearly don’t qualify for those services, I guess I shouldn’t say clearly, but the idea behind that is that if you’re working there then you don’t qualify for those services, and these are the needy people that you’re helping. So I think that that’s another beautiful thing about the Farmacy Garden, that everyone is just working in the garden together versus some weird power dynamic. I think it’s a safe place, it’s a safer space than transferring knowledge between two people that are sitting in an airconditioned office space and have two different clothings and are on opposite sides of a desk and one person asking really invasive personal questions...” --Marge

“[The garden] helps us bridge all the divide of like provider to client, or immigrant to person who grew up here, or parent to child. It kind of helps you bridge any of those divides that might be experienced by the people that are there, and find something in common really quickly and easily, and I think that’s exciting.” --Charlotte

Marge and Charlotte’s claims are further supported by participants Paul and Anita, who reflect on their experiences in the Farmacy Garden, noting how the nature of the space and the shared activities of the garden dissolve hierarchies for the promotion of social equality:

“[The garden] is love, kindness, it’s nonjudgmental, welcoming, healing, freedom, you’re free to be, you’re not confined by the expectations of what people expect you to be or who they want you to be, you can just be you in the garden, cause everybody’s dirty, everybody’s nasty, everybody’s hot, everybody’s sweaty. There’s no hierarchy up in there, we’re all dirty. We all get dirty together. You can’t try to be cute up in there. You walk into that garden looking rough, and that’s ok, because you’re gonna look rough when you leave anyway.” --Anita

“Similarly, one thing that’s true is that when you’re in the Farmacy Garden, you’re not a doctor, you’re not a nurse, you’re not an academician, you’re not a factory worker, you’re not a disabled person, you’re someone working in the garden, and consequently, you’re equal to that person. And that’s what makes community so valuable, is that we’re all just here together, working in the garden weeding and watering, and putting phosphorus on plants, and that makes for great community.” --Paul

**Promoting diversity and inclusion.** These examples of counter-hegemonic disruptions to established power hierarchies created and perpetuated by neoliberalism offer garden participants with a new way of considering social positionality, speaking to a second dimension of community solidarity that trended across the interviews with garden participants and practitioners. As people engage in the Farmacy Garden and relate to each other from a place of social equality, ideals of diversity and inclusion are simultaneously nurtured. Neel, an immigrant from India, reflects on this phenomenon from his experiences in the garden:

“I worked there, I helped out, I cooperated with everyone, and they appreciate me and encourage me, there was no discrimination. I mean I am Indian, and they were American, and there was not discrimination. All together we were very honest, unconditionally, and innocent. But no discrimination, that’s the main part of that. So that also motivates me to help, to work with everyone at the garden.” --Neel

Similarly, Anita, a gardener of color spoke about the discrimination she has faced living in Southwest Virginia, and cited the garden as a safe place that both celebrated diversity, and created a shared sense of humanity amongst participants:

“So, that was a whole other thing, but anyway, that’s not a problem at the garden, cause we are every shade, we are all people, we do not care. We’re all weirdos together, and I

like that. So, I forgot to say that part--about the authenticity of humanity. We're all humans in that space. We are free to be human without worry of attack of judgement or being mistreated, that was never a worry. It was a worry when you leave the garden, cause the garden's like a bubble. A bubble, it's like a bubble of special space, and you walk out the bubble and get smacked in the face with reality, and mean people. You don't have that problem in the garden." --Anita

Neel and Anita's lived experiences of racial discrimination in life reflects a larger structural injustice that occurs across racial and cultural lines. Contrarily, their experiences with the Farmacy Garden reflects a disruption of this injustice, instead offering them the experiences of safety, and humanization (Freire, 1970) through inclusion. Other gardeners, such as Lucy, also highlighted the inclusive nature of the garden space, and it's role as an epicenter for positive interaction and collaboration between community members. To Lucy, it is both the welcoming culture of the garden, and the opportunities for learning and reciprocity in the space that strengthens this element of solidary inclusion:

"There was no 'oh you shouldn't be here,' none of that judgement. It was 'Oh, hey! Welcome!' And let me teach you something. Or let me show you something. Or let me offer you something. That's what it meant to me. It just showed that there was inclusion, and inclusion is important for any type of healing." --Lucy

**Reflecting community care and support.** Beyond this element of inclusion, the physical existence of the Farmacy Garden, the actors and intention behind its construction, and the food it continues to provide to community members reflects a broader sentiment of community solidarity that operates outside of the monetary code of value. Both Anita and Sara speak to a way the garden instead fosters life values of generosity and care:

"I think the garden stands there and says if you want it, you're welcome to come. It's there for you, and like I said, it's not pretentious...But, yeah, it stands there as a beacon of hope, because 'I'm here for you' kind of a thing. The garden is like, 'I'm here for you. If you want me, come in and partake.' Like the giving tree, but not as sad, but it gives. It grows to give."--Anita



“The thing that’s helpful is that I know someone thought to [build the garden]. That someone did that purposefully to bring joy, and to bring beauty, and to bring awareness.”  
--Sara

Evelyn further supports this claim by reflecting on the way the Farmacy Garden has changed the way she perceives community values:

“I think it does show me that there are people in the community that are concerned about the welfare of the residents, that they do want them to have access to better quality foods, and to be able to do, not just get them food there, but also realize that they can do that at home too.” --Evelyn

Anita, Sara, and Evelyn’s perspectives reveal how the Farmacy Garden is perceived as a form of community solidarity for those who engage with it, reflecting life values by materially representing community investment in community welfare, while endowing participants with a bounty of produce every growing season as an ongoing reminder. Evelyn’s perspective also reveals how this form of community solidarity extends beyond a charity framework, providing participants with skills and resources they can use to grow their own food, and reflecting a broader impact for positive changes in the food system.

**Strengthening shared community values.** This community solidarity around food systems change is further strengthened when combined with the ways that garden activities help create and reinforce a larger network of people in the community with shared values and interest and in local food production and consumption. According to Lucy:

“I really liked the garden, because it showed that we have a community of like-minded individuals. People would just stop by that didn’t know anything about it, the doctors were saying ‘we’re giving you a prescription to go to the Farmacy’, and we had all kinds of people walking there. And maybe it was just their one visit. Maybe they learned how to grow a tomato plant in their window, or even you could buy the herbs at the grocery store and have your little window plant. Even if they didn’t have any of that, they now know that this exists, that there’s a whole community that they could come to and they could play in the dirt, and make something that’s going to feed their body. So, it meant a lot that that was available.”--Lucy

Further, as Sara and Paul reinforce this insight, recognizing that food is a collaboration point that bridges across differences to forge strong community connections centered around shared values and concerns:

“The other thing I thought is that it’s very nice to see other people working together on a project..it’s nice to see sort of a microcosm of the world coming together and saying ‘this is something we need to do.’ It’s a collaboration point where other values may be completely different, and people may be very disagreed, like I’ve had the sense that there may be some gun-tottin farmers, people who are peacenik types who are probably like, you know, would much rather go trip in the forest, like a broad range of personalities and values can collaborate on this one project, this one issue that they think is important, and that’s very hopeful to me too.” --Sara

“I’ve learned a lot about being in community with lots of different kinds of people. Everybody’s there for the same purpose, which is to grow food, but we all have come from all different kinds of backgrounds, and we all wanna have fun, and we did. It was quite an experience. You know, you meet all different kinds of folks and we had fun.” -- Paul

For both Sara and Paul, the Farmacy Garden also revealed the capacity for diverse people to come together in solidarity around a common goal. For Sara this community solidarity is also a source of critical hope:

“I don’t know if the Farmacy Garden has shaped my values, but it is hopeful. Talking about this today has been particularly hopeful for me today to remember there are other people out there who are dedicated to trying to make things better. It reminds me to really keep trying, even when I don’t feel like it, because our health is at stake.”--Sara

For Sara, the Farmacy Garden evoked a sense of critical hope. Sara’s commentary reveals a sense of deep concern for the present state, a solidary vision for something different, and a responsibility and drive to take action toward that vision embodying Freire’s (1992) conception of critical hope.

The former commentary of garden stakeholders reveals the ways that community solidarity is bolstered by the Farmacy Garden. Participant narratives showcase how community

solidarity is manifested through the disruption of normative power hierarchies, the promotion of diversity and inclusion, the reflection of community support, and the fostering of shared values surrounding food production and consumption. These aspects of community solidarity help to foster life values, humanization and inspire critical hope, essential elements for the disruption of fatalism, and the creation of transformative alternatives through the community food security movement.

### **Learning for Community Engagement**

Sara's former quote also speaks to the way that the Farmacy Garden has served as a site for learning for community engagement. Some study participants cited their involvement with the Farmacy Garden itself as a form of community engagement, while others let their experiences in the garden inform and inspire new forms of community contribution. As I touched on in my interview, the Farmacy Garden offers possibilities for people to share their ideas, knowledge, skills, and labor in ways that extend beyond their own self benefit:

“they're not just engaging in the space for the vegetables, I mean even if they get the benefit of the fresh fruits and vegetables, almost everybody uses the space as an opportunity to give back because they care about the community that they live in. And they give back by gardening. By growing food for other people, by sharing their knowledge, their skills, by teaching people, by being part of it, through the prescription program, for their children.”--Maureen

For example, through community food production, James understood his participation with the Farmacy Garden as an expression of community contribution that supported healthy food access through the production and distribution of garden produce bestowed upon community members through the Health and Human Services building, and the Community Health Center of the New River Valley:

“One of the values that drives me to participate is that I'm helping people. I've always been a helper, so how am I helping people? I'm raising these beautiful organic vegetables which there's so many of them. There's more than one person could eat, I'll tell you that.

So, it gives me great satisfaction to know that I helped raise how many pounds of this or that that was given to those who were in need, and so that's basically what drives me to do that."--James

Similarly, Anita reflects on the way participating in the Farmacy Garden inspired her to share produce she grew with members of her broader community:

"I shared more vegetables with people because I had so many more to share. That is it. I didn't think about that. The peppers, loved the peppers, and I would make things, and I would share, like whatever recipes or whatever, so yes, I shared more stuff with my people. Wow! I didn't think about that. I shared more. With even people like, there was a little house behind us, I shared with them and I shared with little Maria, and now that I live in this house, I share with my neighbors to my right and to my left. So yeah."--Anita

Similarly, Neel recognized the way the Farmacy Garden had positively impacted his life, and was drawn to continue to engage with the garden not only for his own benefit, but for the benefit of the community at large:

"So also I'm telling them to just cooperate and help the community, that's when we become a strong community. If you cooperate, honestly, unconditionally, willingly, that's where we make a strong community. So that's the one reason to participate in gardening so you get a little produce, and work for your community. It makes some welfare activity for this to help our community also."--Neel

"When I saw this garden here it totally changed my lifestyle. I thought I had to help the community and work for that and myself, and for others benefit."--Neel

Neel recognizes the Farmacy Garden as a place that is mutually beneficial to self and others, directly experiencing personal benefit from working in the garden in the form of plentiful and fresh fruits and vegetables, while simultaneously seeing how his efforts extended into the community as well. He believes it is cooperative efforts like these that will ultimately help create a strong community. Similarly, Evelyn discusses the way the Farmacy Garden has bolstered her existing values surrounding community responsibility. The site reminded her that there is expressed community need surrounding food access, calling her to support the cause and be a part of the solution:

“I think that the Farmacy Garden being there is a blessing, not just to them, that I can take them to it, but to keep me aware that not all of us have things, and access to things. So I’m not sayin’ I had wonderful values, but I’m sayin’ my parents did give me those values growing up, and I think the Farmacy Garden just added to that, of, we’re not here to just take care of ourselves, we’re here to take care of other people in the community.”-- Evelyn

Comparably, working in the Farmacy Garden gave Anita the opportunity to reflect on her individual impact in the community, seeing her engagement with the garden as a community contribution, while considering how she can be of service more broadly:

“To me it’s not a lot, but it’s one person making a change, and now a whole family has made that change, and so the garden, and community, it made me think ‘what is my impact in this space?’ I didn’t think of my personal impact in a space before that. And it’s like, what am I giving to this space? Working in the garden was me giving to my community, and going to the farmers market is me shopping in my community, supporting small businesses. I mean, Amazon was like THE place. Amazon is now the last place I wanna go get my stuff. I wanna see what I can get in my community.”--Anita

The Farmacy Garden offered Anita an opportunity to begin to critically reflect on her impact and consider what contribution she could make within her community, realizing that not only was engaging in the Farmacy Garden is itself a form of community support, but that she could give to her community in other ways as well.

Anita’s insight speaks to the role that the Farmacy Garden has played in inspiring additional forms of community engagement beyond the scope of the garden. Many study participants touched on this impact of the garden in different ways. For instance, in more vague terms, Sandra postulates how the generous and reciprocal nature of community gardens have the potential to incite other forms of community involvement for participants and staff:

“So there’s a need for more spaces where people work together, and they put some work in, and they get something out, or maybe someone else gets something out down the road--kind of like creates this domino effect. I feel like in Christiansburg or in the New River Valley area, gardens like this, it can be the same thing...but I still think in terms of the community involvement--if someone gets involved in their community in a garden,

that might trickle down into getting involved in the community in other places where there is a need as well.”--Sandra

June supports this claim, reflecting on her experiences in the garden and how they have inspired her to consider different ways she can contribute to her community beyond the scope of the garden.

“So I guess it’s really like helped to reframe the way that I look at contribution and community and how I can continue to contribute when it’s not necessarily the season of the garden.”--June

Neel also sees this potential, recognizing the Farmacy Garden as a catalyst for broader community action and cultural transformation. Its role as a place for knowledge sharing, along with the inspiration it instills in participants and passersby could help ignite a movement for more widespread community food production, with impacts extending well beyond the space of the garden to help create positive community change:

“The more and more you go into that, you get more interest, and then you will do something more in another place, and you give advice or inspiration to another place. The more and more gardening, the more inspired other people can become, all the surrounding people, it spreads and spreads, and this way we are spreading our knowledge, experience, and change their minds. It’s the best activity to improve your lifestyle.”--Neel

### **Learning for Self-Reliance and Empowerment**

“Wanna be a rebel? Grow your own food.”

This quote from Lucy reflects a broader theme of self-reliance and empowerment that was demonstrated through stakeholder narratives and manifested as the sub-themes of *building knowledge and skills, putting control locally, and localizing food systems*. Through these processes, Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners cultivated greater power and autonomy in their food system, and aligned with both the CFS frame and the tenets of food sovereignty, revealing how the two movements intersect.

**Building knowledge and skills.** Paul's narrative showcases the role the Farmacy Garden has played in his life as a space for building knowledge and skills surrounding food production. Originally drawn to participate in the garden as a way to cultivate skills in self-sufficiency, Paul found his experience realizing these skills to be very empowering:

“I realized the garden was impactful so many times when it bore fruit, and I brought things home, it was like wow, I was part of that. That was impactful. That was just amazing. I mean, you know the work that I did helped support growing food. And that's, you know, pretty amazing. That's really a phenomenal event. You didn't go to a grocery store, you actually did it yourself. That's very empowering. That's impactful. Your refrigerator is full of food, and all of a sudden you can eat. I feel very empowered that I can take care of myself. I would need to know a lot more, but I feel like, I feel comfortable that I could live off the land now. There's still lots and lots to learn, but there's always lots and lots to learn. But I don't feel scared about growing plants. You know, I feel comfortable that I could do that.”--Paul

He continues by expressing how the skills and knowledge he gained at the Farmacy Garden have changed his perception of how accessible growing food is, empowering him to believe in his capacities to not only engage in the process himself, but actually teach someone else how to do it. He then draws connections to our larger global situation by critically reflecting on the pertinence of this knowledge in the present era of food waste and global starvation, recognizing that this information is “life preserving” and a means for survival:

“The Farmacy Garden has made me feel more comfortable. I feel empowered...Gardening is more approachable. I feel like anybody could do it, and I feel like I can teach someone how to do it. Which is really cool. I feel like gardening is for anyone. And, we have a problem in the world--a third of the world's food sources are thrown away, and people starve to death in the world, and teaching people how to grow food is life preserving. So, yeah, my values have changed. I feel like anybody can learn how to grow food, and from that, no one should be in a position to starve. So gardening is a survival tool.”--Paul

Finally, he talks about how the experiential skills and knowledge he gained at the Farmacy Garden has given him the confidence to take action to share this information more widely, helping others in their learning process:

“Well, what I learned over time is that information gathering and the internet has really catapulted my ability to be able to learn for myself and to help others. And so the Farmacy Garden helped in that regard, because it helped me get hands on knowledge about how to be self-sustainable...I knew what to do around the garden in terms of my own self-sufficiency, but it also helped me to feel comfortable about suggesting to others.”--Paul

Sara was also inspired and empowered to share the knowledge and skills she has gained from the Farmacy Garden with her neighbors in her section 8 housing complex. Through her experiences working in the garden, Sara describes how “the Farmacy Garden showed [her] what could be in places like this where [she is] living now.” Recognizing the need for section 8 housing to actually be “healthy living for vulnerable communities” that teaches people pertinent life skills, Sara envisions a community garden in her neighborhood that could support residents, particularly those that are disabled or lack transportation. While the garden is still just a vision, Sara has taken steps to determine potential garden sites, consider potential challenges, and talk with stakeholders at the Health Department about funding and garden management options:

“my involvement with the garden made me realize I wish we had something like that in our apartment community. I felt that way at the Christiansburg property too, simply because section 8 properties have people on disability that can’t walk or have mobility issues so even taking the bus is a pain for them, but walking downstairs and being able to go garden would be really nice. The idea of community gardening is not a new concept to me, but it’s a new involvement for me, so I don’t really know how to enact that in our community and it’s very challenging. I did some precursory reading on how to do that, and I’ve learned that many property managers can be very resistant to it, they start griping about things like pests. So the short answer is, I want a community garden in my complex, not necessarily for me, but for folks who might enjoy it who can’t get to a community garden...You know, like, if we’re actually saying, from a section 8 or subsidized housing property standpoint, saying this is healthy space, healthy living for vulnerable communities, let’s make it that. Let’s say we’re actually trying to do it, you



know. Anyway, so if we want poor people to live, why don't we actually teach them to live. So, I'm gonna bring this back to the Farmacy Garden. The Farmacy Garden showed me what could be in places like this where I'm living now. So there is that benefit."--Sara

She continues by highlighting how these spaces could break down broader stereotypes that depict people living in poverty as lazy, while also envisioning the garden as a space where people in similar socioeconomic situations could learn from each other through dimensions of their shared lived experiences:

"The thing that's nice about going with a DSS emphasis is there's a special emphasis that one could place on working with people in poverty. I'm gonna try to say this much more colloquially--I'm really poor and so I can share poor person tips. When you have sort of the DSS stamp on it, there's a lot of win-wins for the DSS being involved, which is you can kind of give them a pat on the back and say 'hey, these are DSS recipients that are trying to be healthy, who value this. We're not all all the same, we're not the stereotype, you know, free-loaders, whatever.' But, from an idea of, okay, if DSS recipients are involved, and we all know that, we can actually just share, like I said, poor people tips."--Sara

Neel's narrative also reveals how the acquisition of knowledge and skills is a form of power and inspiration that can be applied within the larger context of a person's life. In Neel's experience, the Farmacy Garden provided him with the knowledge and skills in organic food production, and served as a vision and source of empowerment and inspiration to take social action to develop a garden at his hotel where he lives and works:

"So I was inspired to create my own garden from the organic Farmacy there. And I got a little experience and knowledge. That knowledge and experience I transfer here, contribute here. That's the way I start here--a lot of experiences from the Farmacy. What time to seed plants, what time to harvest, how to take care, everything."--Neel

In my personal narrative I reflected on my experience visiting Neel's garden for the first time:

"In the long landscaping strip median between the parking lot and hotel, there was a strip of landscaped area with kind of your traditional shrubs and stuff, and he had planted sunflowers, and marigolds, and indian squash, and indian beans, and tomatoes, and okra, he had planted the whole thing. Like probably 300 feet in that long strip, and had hand watered the whole thing. And I remember he looked at me and was just beaming with

pride, and said to me ‘the Farmacy Garden inspired me to grow food for my community’, and I was just blown away. I mean he would talk about his garden, but actually just going there and seeing it and seeing how the Farmacy Garden space could inspire him to do something like this.”--Maureen

Seeing first-hand how the Farmacy Garden had inspired Neel to apply the gardening skills and knowledge for the benefit of his own community was deeply impactful for me. It gave me insight into how learning in the Farmacy Garden extends out into the community more broadly. As I describe, the benefits of Neel’s garden extended well beyond the personal, not only giving him an opportunity to grow Indian vegetable varieties for himself and his immediate family, but produce food for his extended community across Virginia. According to Neel:

“I give to our Indian community, twenty families, every year. In my garden, I grow for other families and my family here, in Luray, Harrisonburg, Stanton, Lexington, and here. It’s too much for me alone. I grow more than 1000 tomatoes in my garden. I grow lots of chilis. I have lots of chili, my Indian chili, so everybody I give to in our family.”--Neel

Further still, Neel discusses the ways his garden has provided him with opportunities to connect with the guests staying at his hotel:

“Some guests come here, and say ‘what is this?’ and I say ‘it’s a bitter gourd’ ‘how can you...’ and I say it’s a very anti-diabetic medicine, and they are interested. I sometimes cook, and they eat it, and I harvest my bitter gourd, and they take it with them. This way, I am also connected with my guests, so that I can spread lots this way.”--Neel

Neel’s story exemplifies the power of knowledge and skills acquisition. Learning how to grow organic food at the Farmacy Garden was a process of transformative learning that empowered Neel to develop a new vision of what was possible for him and his community, take action toward that vision, and make it a reality.

**Putting control locally.** By acquiring and applying gardening knowledge and skills learned from the Farmacy Garden, both Paul and Neel’s stories align with the second dimension of self-reliance and empowerment--putting control locally. As a tenet of food sovereignty,

putting control locally means giving local food providers authority over their land, water, and seeds, while challenging the privatization of natural resources (Nyéléni Forum in Mali, 2007).

With the recognition that local control does not have the same socio-political circumstances when applied to projects in the Global North, it remains an important dimension to strengthening CFS, and is showcased widely in the transformative learning experiences of study participants.

In her narrative, Marge touches on role the Farmacy Garden, and community-based agriculture more broadly, plays in cultivating local control:

“I think that’s what is so powerful about community-based agriculture, is that not only that you have the potential of reducing your ecological footprint, it can save money depending on how you value your time, and how much resources you have to build your garden, cause that’s a resource-intensive thing. And then also you have more say in what you have access to, and how it’s grown. You can have organically grown lettuce in your yard, potentially with free seeds that you get from a community seed exchange, rather than have to go spend six bucks on organic lettuce that comes in a container that was grown in California with like potentially questionable labor practices, and shipped in a truck, and you know, potentially contaminated by E. coli. So, you have a lot more say in how your food is grown, and produced, and who’s to say it’s healthier for you, but you have a lot more autonomy in what you have access to if you can grow it--*if you can grow it* being the key component to that. And that’s what I think is so awesome about the Farmacy Garden is that it teaches people how to do those things, and can offer resources.”--Marge

By growing food in community-based agriculture projects such as the Farmacy Garden, Marge recognizes the role these spaces can play in giving people both access to and choice in the foods they are eating, and the ways those foods are being produced. Marge continues by describing how giving low-income people the skills, knowledge, and resources to grow their own food is a form of power that enables them to circumvent the capitalistic industrial food system in place of local control:

“But what I think is kind of the cherry on top, or the main structure I think that what really makes me excited about it is that it gives people power. It gives people a sense of autonomy, it gives people the power of choice, that’s sort of outside this capitalist

system, you know? And what the Family Nutrition Program is, which is great, they're teaching people how to eat healthy on a budget, but like when you have to eat healthy on a budget, you don't necessarily have the same choices as when you don't have to eat on a budget, right? Like, you don't buy organic, you don't necessarily get to afford to spend your money buying fair trade stuff, or you don't have the power necessarily of all of these certifications that tell you how things were grown, or where or why. Even then those certifications don't necessarily always mean what you think they mean, or they're not as powerful as you think they are, and you just don't know. I have friends who want to be able to spend more money on food, and buy from local farmers, because they're a low-income person, and they know what it's like to be taken advantage of in a job, and what it's like to experience higher instances of environmental degradation, and they want to be a better consumer, or whatever, but they can't fucking afford it. And so I think when you have public spaces that are growing food and sharing resources, and teaching people how to grow food, that gives people a power that they didn't have before. So I think that that's one of the values that guide me to do that type of work."--Marge

The power of choice that Marge speaks of moves beyond healthy eating on a budget, actually enabling people to be their own food source, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

As an employee of the Family Nutrition Program Evelyn was drawn to use the Farmacy Garden as a tool for her nutrition education classes. She recognizes the role the garden can play in not only encouraging increased fruit and vegetable consumption, but re-enlivening a culture of small scale home food production, and ultimately reducing the economic burden of getting healthy food from the grocery store:

"The first thing that drew me to the Farmacy Garden was that I see a lot of people these days not gardening, even small gardens, like patio gardens, when they can have fresh fruits and vegetables that way, and they're just dependent on getting it from the grocery store. When you don't have a lot of funds and fruits and vegetables are more expensive, they're more likely to buy unhealthy foods than they are healthy foods, so that was my concern. The garden was a way to introduce them to being able to have a lot of produce coming out of a small area, and then also showing them how they can do patio gardens too. It was a tool for me to use to help people see that even with a small piece of property, or if they just had three buckets that they could put on their patio, they could add more nutrients to their families diets and do it, it's not really a lot of work, not a lot of planning, you know? And it does add a lot of benefit to their diet."--Evelyn

While Evelyn's perspective is pertinent to local control, her commentary above does not specifically address the structural injustices underlying the present food situation. By centering gardening as a means for better nutrition, Evelyn misses the role gardening plays in giving people autonomy in their food system. As she continues in her interview, Evelyn expresses concern about the lack of home gardening in the modern era, and sees the Farmacy Garden as an opportunity to create a culture that values home grown food:

“The Farmacy Garden has made me more sensitive to our food situation and the lack of small gardens that I do see in residential areas. I even live in Elliston where it's kind of rural, and you just don't see those small gardens anymore, and I think a lot of it is generational where people are not goin' outside as much, and I worry about that with our kids. Like I said, I don't have a garden right now, and I know I should, so what are my kids gonna do? Are my kids gonna do that? So, if I can introduce that to as many people as I can that are in my program--that's gonna give more people an opportunity to come to that realization that it is important, because, you know, fruits and vegetables can be expensive when we get them at the grocery store, 'cause they have to go through so many pathways to get there. So, if they are gettin' seeds, or starts from plants, and doin' it in their own garden, they're gettin' it at such a low cost for their family.”--Evelyn

It is clear that Evelyn sees the importance of strengthening the culture of gardening, particularly for the next generation, and recognizes the potential of the Farmacy Garden to instill value, and inspire engagement in local food production. With that said, her view is absent of a politicizing critique of the industrial food system, positioning the Farmacy Garden and home food production as ways to save money instead of seeing how it works to decommodify food and localize control.

From another perspective, James sees food production in the Farmacy Garden as a way of putting control locally. Recognizing that the industrial food system poses health and safety risks to consumers, James sees how producing food at the Farmacy Garden provides people with an alternative source for their food, with the means of production controlled by the community:

“The Farmacy Garden fits into the food system really well. I mean what a great opportunity for everybody and they just don't understand it. What a great opportunity to

have safe, organic foods produced right in your own community, and you could be a part of it, and it's free. Wow. I don't get what there's not to get about that. I mean, we can grow romaine and it's gonna be healthy, safe romaine. You don't have to worry about going to the grocery store and wondering if the romaine's gonna be contaminated this week or not. And everything we grow there is organic and it's very, very safe. And what a great, great way to eat healthy, safe food."--James

James continues by expressing his vision for extending the Farmacy Garden model into a larger community food production effort:

"I mean there's a lot of vacant land around everywhere. And so my thought would be to develop these parcels of land into gardens and have people in the community, and eventually in most communities you'd probably be able to grow enough produce to supply almost the entire community, not just the poor people in the community, but everybody. I mean it'd be wonderful, and what an opportunity being missed. Take the food production into our own hands, and then we don't have to rely on the mega producer that isn't necessarily doing everything properly, and therefore contaminating our food. It's a great vision and it would be really simple to do, but you'd have to have participation, obviously one person couldn't do it all. And as far as getting the land goes, let's take my property as an example. I've got just under an acre, and half of it is level and pretty good soil. I'd be willing to let people come and farm my entire piece of property. I'm sure there's other people that'd be willing to do that. I mean, if people wanted to come here and grow a garden, I'd say hallelujah, let's do it, and then I wouldn't have to mow it...But it's kind of an utopian thought, because people are people, and people think that their land belongs to them, but then, of course, there's people like me. I'm sure there's more than one of me here, but you'd have to find those people. There'd have to be some effort made, you know?"--James

Here James highlights the ways community food production fosters local control, providing an alternative means for food that enables people to circumnavigate the "mega producer" who is risking consumer health and safety through their unsustainable practices. In his vision, James proposes a collective effort to reclaim land for community food production, recognizing that while notions of private property may inhibit this vision, there may be people like him who would be willing to disrupt these normative notions of land ownership, and offer their land for the greater good. With a similar tone, James also calls for the decommodification of food,

recognizing that food is a basic human right, and access to food should not be contingent on income:

“And, I’d love to live in a community that basically grew all of its own produce. And here’s the thing: I wouldn’t want to be selling the produce. See, that’s the problem, everything turns into money in the world, and I would like to just grow all the produce and let everybody eat good decent produce, and not pay for it. And then you say ‘how would you pay for the seeds and do the...?’ People like me and other people could donate a little bit, I mean it doesn’t cost a lot to buy seeds.”--James

While James adopts a position that really decenters a market orientation to the food system, his proposal for how to pay for community food production initiatives may contribute to reproducing neoliberalism by devolving state responsibility. Regardless, James’ vision provides alternative insights into how putting control locally through community food production could substitute dimensions of our present unsustainable food system.

**Localizing food systems.** For some participants like Anita, growing food at the Farmacy Garden initiated a process of critical reflection that transformed the way she engages with her food system more broadly:

“Because of the Farmacy Garden I don’t want to shop in the produce section of the grocery store anymore, and actually I pay more attention to my fruits and vegetables at grocery stores. Sometimes when we were at the garden a lot I’d drive to the grocery store and go ‘we got that at the garden, we got that at the garden’, and ‘local, that’s not local, local’s the garden. The garden’s local’, so I see the world differently. I was watching something the other day where they said local could be 250 miles. Local could be by region, or hemisphere. And I’m like ‘noooo’, and it has me checking what local really means. That’s what the garden does. It has me going to the farmers market, that I hate most days, but I go.”--Anita

Bringing a critical lens to her shopping experiences, Anita now questions aspects of her food system that were formerly taken for granted, such as where her food is coming from, and what the construct of ‘local’ actually means. Growing her own food in the Farmacy Garden has

resulted in her developing new priorities surrounding her food and her community. She continues:

“I also want to know my farmer, I want to know where my food comes from more than before. Before I kinda cared, but I kinda cared in the grocery store, I didn’t care in my community. I thought about it a little bit in Alaska because they’re more subsistence living there, but we didn’t live there all the time, we only lived there a couple years before we lived here. Before we lived there that was not a thing, it was ‘oh okay you go in the store, you buy organic, you buy a box, whatever.’ But my values have completely shifted to say now I will walk in a store and if it’s in too much plastic, or like I’ll go to the farmers market first, and if I have to get something I’ll go to a health food store second, and then I’ll go get what I can’t get and absolutely have to have at a grocery store. It never went that way in my brain, because a lot of health food stores, and I’m still noticing, are expensive. They’re expensive, and for that, with a budget, it’s prohibitive for a lot of people, but with the garden supplemented, it makes me think, okay go to the garden, that helps. That reduces your burden in other ways, and you can use that to buy better quality ingredients for the rest of your meal. So that’s kinda how I’m approaching life because of the garden.”--Anita

Here Anita speaks to the way that her values connected to the food system have changed her perceptions and actions in her community. With a new priority for local foods, Anita now tries to source her groceries from the Farmers Market or local health food store before a conventional grocery store. Recognizing that it is often more expensive to shop locally, Anita subsidizes the extra cost with the free food she grows in the Farmacy Garden. Beyond Anita’s experience, Sara has also been witness to the way the garden supports the localization of food systems. Reflecting on her experience at one of the garden potlucks, Sara recalls noticing that the food people brought to share had been grown at the garden, or sourced locally:

“I think there was a couple of potlucks one of which was when the garden coordinator was leaving, but seeing how many people had come, and they made an effort in the food that they brought to either be local or sensitive to people with food needs. Like the people there were intentional about the food they brought, but they were also intentional about being there. There were people who brought vegetarian food, and I’m vegetarian, so I was really happy about that. There were people who specifically tried to use produce that was in season, and they talked about it, you know, they talked about what they brought



and why. I can't remember any of the dishes, except that there was vegetarian food, and that there were people who were using produce....So, I guess I was kind of primed to look for that when I came to the potluck. I was actually kind of looking to see if people were using, like food from farmers market and stuff, and some people actually did, like they were proud to say it. Not everyone did, and if they didn't I wouldn't care, like it was food, and I'm still gonna eat it, but I noticed because of that prior experience."--Sara

Sara's experience reflects how the Farmacy Garden fostered a culture that valued the localization of food. Participants at the Farmacy Garden were proud to share the dishes they had made from the food they had grown personally or sourced locally.

These critical reflections, actions, and visions of garden participants and practitioners are indicative of the way the Farmacy Garden supports self-reliance and empowerment for community food security and food sovereignty. Manifest in the interconnected domains of knowledge and skill-building, local control, and food system localization, Farmacy Garden study participants are asserting their power and agency to change their own reality in their food system.

### **Reimagining Health**

Interviews with both participants and practitioners also reflected the Farmacy Garden's role in reimagining health from both a personal and community level. With dominant conceptions of health rooted in the 'pill for every ill' mentality, the Farmacy Garden helped study participants begin to examine structural influences and root causes of diet-related illness, reconsider health from a holistic perspective, and realize the interconnection between humans and the environment. Anchored in the CFS movement, the process of reimagining health through the Farmacy Garden helps ensure "nutritious and culturally appropriate food [is] accessible, not just any food" (Abi-Nadar et al., 2009).

**Examining structural influences and root causes.** Marge, a former employee of the Family Nutrition Program, approaches health from a structural perspective, recognizing that

while individual health is a necessary consideration, individuals cannot be blamed for having an unhealthy lifestyle if measures are not being taken to address structural injustice. Individuals need choice in their food system, and Marge sites the Farmacy Garden as a creative approach that provides people with fresh fruits and vegetables, and the skills to grow their own:

“Because people’s health is important, like we should definitely be considering health, but when you think about marketing, and you think about where cheap food is, and all these sorts of things, that definitely plays a role, but people shouldn’t be shamed for eating fatty foods. It’s just that healthier vegetables need to be more of a choice. For a lot of people, their only options are fast food. It’s more expensive to buy a salad at McDonalds than it is to buy a cheeseburger, so why aren’t we addressing that, rather than telling people they need to do all this stuff to eat less fat? So, the Farmacy Garden is doing that--it’s making vegetables more available, and it’s showing people they can grow them themselves, and they don’t have to rely on their food sources around them. They can be their own food source.”--Marge

With growing cases of diet-related illness as a consequence of the industrial food system, addressing structural injustices and root causes becomes imperative. While many of the garden participants shared concern about community health, and regarded the Farmacy Garden as an innovative approach to address underlying health issues, many still adopted an individual, rather than structural perspective. For instance, while Anita highlighted how the accessibility of the Farmacy Garden, and ingenuity of the prescription program helps reimagine disease management and gives her hope for future generations, she discussed it largely in terms of individual behavior change:

“The prescriptions given to the people to come to the Farmacy Garden gives me hope for the diseases and management of the children for the future because if we teach them now, those are lifelong lessons, like the kids that grow the stuff in the Farmacy Garden. I believe the children are our future, teach them well, let them lead the way. I know it’s corny, but it’s starting with the children, and you’re also making it accessible and available to the parents. A lot of times, you can teach them that, but when they go home to a situation where the moms, or dads, or whoever’s there, auntie, grandma, they haven’t been taught either, but you give them the opportunity to participate with the children, so the children aren’t the only ones learning then the parents too can change their eating

habits, and improve their health. Because it's never too late, that's the thing about this, it's never too late. Vegetables are gonna be here as long as we don't eradicate and kill ourselves. But beyond that, they will be here and they're accessible to everybody as long as you're willing. And I think the garden stands there and says if you want it, you're welcome to come."--Anita

Similarly, Neel is also concerned about the health of the community and cites the Farmacy Garden as an opportunity to address diet-related health conditions through fresh produce and exercise. While his perspective challenges the 'pill for every ill' mentality, it does not fully address the element of structural injustice at the source of these health disparities:

"I see surrounding people over in our community, they are poor, homeless, they are not able to get that kind of organic food to stay fit, improve their health, and they are getting canned food, fast food, and this product has lots of fat, salt, and ultimately it has an adverse effect on their body. They are always going to New River Health Center or pre-medicine, or pre-doctor. So ultimately it's in the primary stage where this kind of disease is caused, and it's only because we eat fast food, and other canned food, so we tell them to participate in this garden as a way to help that. You also get a little exercise and stay fit, and whatever produce you can take with you, take it home, and stay healthy, plus they get pure, organic food, so that's what motivates me to do that with people."--Neel

**Holistic health.** While both Neel and Anita did not explicitly address the diet-related health crisis in terms of structural injustice, it is clear from both of their perspectives that the Farmacy Garden plays a role in making fresh fruits and vegetables more accessible to people that may need them, while uniquely showcasing the direct link between human health and diet. This perspective to medicine challenges the presiding pharmaceutical-orientation, as Lucy reflects on from her own experience with her existing health conditions:

"So, when it says, Farmacy, and I have pills that I have to take for conditions that I have, I have heart problems and stuff, and that's what the doctors tell me I have to take. So, ok, I have to go to the pharmacy, and it's never a fun trip. But this is the Farmacy, only it is a fun trip, and you're getting better health. You're actually curing what might be wrong with you, instead of putting a bandaid on it, and that's the difference, that's what I really, really, really, found. So, I loved it. I absolutely loved that."--Lucy

Anita also found that participating in the garden resulted in improved health for both her and her family, inspiring her to critically reflect on the origins of her food, and consequently completely transform her eating and shopping habits:

“It makes me more aware of what I eat, where it comes from, and what’s being put in it. I read more ingredients than I care to imagine because of the garden. I have stopped eating a lot of stuff because of the garden. But I’m okay with that, because I haven’t been as sick, I’ve noticed my dad has not either. We haven’t had flus or colds. He got sick after the stroke, but that was a whole other issue. Beyond that, the illnesses, and just overall mood is better. Like I said, I pay more attention to what I eat and where it comes from, and we went to a more plant-based diet because of the garden, because there were so many vegetables that were available and good, so that was another thing. So it changed our shopping.”--Anita

Further, Charlotte, a founder of the Farmacy Garden and instigator of the Garden Prescription Program, speaks to the ways the Farmacy Garden fosters this broader vision of health in an institutional context, and how promising that is for the future of medicine:

“What gives me hope about the Farmacy Garden is that the Department of Health got behind it, the Federal Clinic got behind it, the sense that medicine is changing to include this point of view, and to value access to a garden, growing food, education, tasting things, like all the time and effort that takes, as opposed to just assigning a person pills, is very exciting to me. I hope that that continues, and that value of exposure to nature, and community in a garden is equal a value as access to fruits and vegetables cause I think that is part of the magic. I just feel like we have a very innate reaction when we’re surrounded by green, and when it’s green that we’re stewarding and taking care of in a way that’s not harming it, that’s like really human, you know? We’ve been doing that for thousands of years, and it’s kind of what sets us apart from most things, and I don’t know, I think you just tap into something very human when you do that.”--Charlotte

Charlotte’s commentary touches on the way the Farmacy Garden helps cultivate a different approach to medicine, shifting agency priorities, and transforming larger state structures. This process works against the neoliberalist trend of devolving state responsibility in lieu of market individualism. Here she also speaks to other value-laden dimensions to health that are usually considered irrelevant in the presiding empirical approach to medicine. Charlotte sees access to

nature and community as integral parts of healthcare and hopes these dimensions of the Farmacy Garden are recognized to the same degree that access to fresh fruits and vegetables are.

**Linking human and environmental health.** Charlotte also touches on how gardening provides us with an experience of stewardship with the natural world, which she believes brings us closer to our humanity. Building off Charlotte's understanding, June suggests there is a mutual reciprocity that happens through the process of gardening where we tend to the Earth and it tends to us:

“We take care of our space, and we take care of the garden, and we nourish it, and then it nourishes us, so it's like this constant cycle.”--June

Their perspectives reveal the way engagement in the Farmacy Garden helps foster a deeper understanding of the inseparability of humans and the environment, particularly in the domain of health. Reflected in Sara's commentary:

“To me the Farmacy Garden means that someone cares. When I think of it, I think of someone who has put intentional effort into putting a visible reminder that there is a direct relationship between our health and the earth's health.”--Sara

Further, other study participants such as Lucy reflected on how engaging in the process of gardening helps develop a deeper understanding of our interconnections with the land and soil:

“...you are what you eat. That works for plants too. If you put toxins in the soil, then your plants are toxic and they're giving you toxins, and then if your soil isn't the right consistency with the vitamins and the minerals, and the pH balances then your vegetables aren't really gonna grow a whole lot, and the fruit that they're producing is gonna be lacking in those vitamins and minerals. So what you thought, here I'm eating healthy, no, you're just eating something that's tomato flavored. It's not really having the vitamins and minerals, so then it really matters what we're doing to the soil, and how we're growing the vegetables.”--Lucy

Lucy grew up on a farm and learned how deeply our health is entwined with the health of the Earth. She learned about the Farmacy Garden at the WIC clinic and was inspired to work as a way to grow her own food, and share this deeper understanding with her children:

“I was like oh finally I can teach my kids this is the importance of growing, and what’s in your soil, and this is how you’re taking care of the plants, and here are the plants, and then here is the fruit of your labor, and the continued fruit of your labor is good health, because now you’re eating better.”--Lucy

Across study participants perspectives, it is apparent the Farmacy Garden plays a role in helping participants and staff begin to reconsider the diet-related health crisis in terms of structural injustices and root causes, while inspiring a holistic vision for healthcare that considers a broader scope of human needs, and bridges the modern disconnect between human and environmental welfare.

### **Learning for Emotional Well-Being**

The role the Farmacy Garden plays in reimagining healthcare extends into the domain of mental health. Just as study participants reflected on the way the Farmacy Garden helped them reimagine healthcare to address some of the root causes of diet-related illness, it does the same for issues of mental health. For instance, Lucy reflects on how the Farmacy Garden offers an opportunity for mental healthcare providers to look beyond pharmaceutical interventions, and get their patients involved in the community in a meaningful way:

“Also the recognition that it’s not all about medication, it’s not all about, ‘well here, let me isolate you, you’re gonna go into this counseling session, and you’re just you and me, and now you get to go home.’ No, here, let’s talk about the issues and stuff, but let’s get you involved with something bigger. And that’s where the Farmacy Garden comes in.”--Lucy

Aligned with Lucy’s perspective, study participants across interviews elaborated on the powerful role the garden plays in promoting emotional welfare by building supportive community connections, while also acknowledging the healing nature of both the garden site itself, and the act of gardening.

**Building supportive community connections.** The Farmacy Garden helps forge community ties which strengthens the emotional welfare of its participants and staff, as reinforced by both June and Marge:

“I also feel like I have kind of gained a better sense of the needs of the community, and I think a lot of it, what I hear is that connection piece. For a couple of the clients that, one of them in particular, she’s a stay-at-home-mom, she has five kids, so I think for her to be able to come out to the garden and talk to someone is really nice. You know, we’ve stayed in contact over the holidays and we’re gonna go grab some lunch next week, and I think it’s nice, again, to touch on that connection point. And then, you know, our older participants that are retired, and again, it’s a space that they can come out and kind of connect again. I think that need for connection is kind of all over the garden, and all over the participants, and everyone.”--June

“I feel like there’s a lot of stories that I could tell that reflect the Farmacy Garden’s impact. A lot of the stories, I would say, are categorized less about access to food, and more about access to being outside and to other people, and to community. For instance, at one point this older guy came into the garden and was just kinda walkin’ around, and I was like ‘oh hey! What’s goin on?’ and he was like ‘oh! What is this?’ and I was explaining to him what the garden was, and he was like ‘wow, this is so cool!’ and then he started telling me about his gardening experiences and then started talkin’ to me about how he had gotten surgery recently on his knee and that he was unable to do things like this, garden, and how he was out of work, and on unemployment and all he wanted to do was to get better so he could get back to work, and he didn’t like being lazy. And you know, I was a stranger that he was like unloading all of this information on. And maybe the garden just sort of provided this space for him to feel comfortable enough for him to talk to me about his personal frustrations and shame around not working.”--Marge

Validating the perspectives of June and Marge, James, an older retired participant benefits from the intergenerational social opportunity the garden provides him with. With a larger cultural phenomenon of ageism, the Farmacy Garden is a space for James to feel a sense of purpose and belonging:

“The social aspect means everything, because I’m a very social person, I think people are social to begin with even though they don’t know it. And, uh, the interesting thing is, all the young people that I met there, and I have to say all, because all of them expressed that they wanted to hear from me--things that I had to say, not just about gardening, but about

life in general. So, yeah, I was wanted. So, it's a big deal. So when the garden ends in October, it's kind of, get back into my cave type of thing."--James

Further, Neel posits that the garden provides him a sense of emotional well-being and relief from loneliness, while also suggesting that the garden is a healing space that transforms negativity and enables people to relate to one another from a place of unity:

"The garden gives me hope because it provides peace of mind, my inner core is very pure, and stays friendly, and gives me relief from loneliness. All of that. Soul to soul, we make contact from soul to soul, just like a pure soul to pure soul in the garden. We bring negative energy and gain positive energy. This is the reason we joined this organic Pharmacy Garden. Pure soul to pure soul we meet and interact with that. This is the real life, we are starting the real life. Whatever obstacles in life are gone, positive energy. We collect positive energy, and store positive energy."--Neel

Finally, Anita reflects on the emotional toll she experienced after her dad had a stroke and she was unable to make it to the garden. It was through this experience of loss that Anita was able to realize how important community support in the garden was to her:

"I realized the garden was impactful when I couldn't go. When I couldn't get there when my dad had his stroke, I realized I missed the garden. I still miss the garden. I did go once, I had to, but when I realized that I couldn't get to the garden, I couldn't get out there that season, that was the hardest thing for me--and I'm gonna get emotional, that's just who I am, but that hurt me so bad, you have no idea, because I needed that, that's my place. It's healing, you're outside, you breathe clean air, and I was in a freaking hospital, breathing germs. And there was no support, I didn't know those people, but at the garden there are people. And everybody's got a common goal, so you're all there for the same reason. And everybody has their own problems at home, but in the garden, the garden is it. You're focusing on the garden, and that was when I realized, oh my god, I miss the garden!"--Anita

**Gardening for healing.** In this excerpt, Anita also specifically highlights how the garden itself is an inherently healing space, and how the shared objectives of the garden both foster a deeper sense of connection between participants, and enable participants to focus on a common goal, leaving the stresses of life behind. Other participants also highlighted how the space of Pharmacy Garden elevates emotional health. For instance, Sara speaks to the Pharmacy Garden's



innately healing nature through her own experiences using the garden space as a place to recover after stressful doctor's appointments with her son, and acknowledges the immensely beneficial role community gardens could play in any medical context:

"In five to ten years I would like the Farmacy Garden itself to stay as sort of a display garden, like I don't know that I would change it's existence, because it's very valuable-- it's been very valuable for my son and I when we have to visit the Health Clinic, cause like I said, we were patients at the New River Community Health. I think there's value in having it there for that reason. I don't know if you'll get more participants from having it there, but you'll get more foot traffic and just from a therapeutic standpoint, having it there for patients who've had crappy appointments is really handy, so I wouldn't change that. I think having it at the Health Department actually says something, or DSS, cause the Health Department is there too. If you think from a hospital standpoint, having a garden in a hospital is just a really good idea, you know? It's not particularly deep, it's giving people a space to walk away from all the crap."--Sara

Further, Neel speaks to how working with the Farmacy Garden has greatly contributed to his mental health, particularly in context to the healing capacity of working with plants:

"This pursuit has changed me totally, my cool, calmness, in my body, and that's the way I stay a cool person. No irritation, or no anxiety, I'm like a cool person, it makes me cool, nature does, so I stay with nature. I stay with these vegetables or plants, and I get lots of energy, new life."--Neel

Anita mirrors this perspective, further suggesting that the act of gardening itself promotes emotional well-being by providing participants with a focal point that anchors them into the present moment and helps them consider their life situation from a larger context:

"But, like I said, going to the garden, you just let stuff go. Because you're focusing on the dirt, and for some reason you can't go in the garden with a bunch of stuff in your head, but you can't be in the garden and be present in the moment with all that. You're sitting there, you can't smell the basil, and look at the tomatoes, and eat those little cherry things with the paper thing that you let us try that we have never had before in our lives, and oh my god they're addictive. You know? You can't do that if you're worried about some nonsense. This is a year of no-nonsense. I started my year of no-nonsense with the garden, let me just say that. You go in there and it's like, why? You look at these plants and you're thinking, 'okay, why was that important?' No, this is what's important--this feeds me, this nourishes my body, that's not nourishing kinda thing."--Anita

She continues by reflecting on the role the Farmacy Garden played in the emotional health of her father after he had his stroke. While they were unable to make it to the Farmacy Garden to work onsite, they used the gardening knowledge they gained there to start a small home garden, which helped him recover from the emotional toll of the stroke:

“That got my dad out, cause he was very depressed after the stroke because he was in the chair, and he can’t use but one half of his body, and it’s not the half that he’s used to using. So, that was the one thing that we could all do. Even if he couldn’t dig, he picked the seeds--I’d get the seeds in my hand and he’d pick them out, and he planted the seeds, and he’d cover them up, so that was something. Every day we’d go out and I even got him a little bitty watering can, cause his motor control was off, and he’d water cause he could. So there was that, again, something the family could do, even after. That was the one thing that brought him...he’s not completely healed, but emotionally he’s in a much better place, because of what we learned at the garden, so that did help a lot because his thing was he couldn’t get to the garden.”--Anita

These combined perspectives of Farmacy Garden stakeholders reveals the role the garden has played in improving the emotional health of its participants. It is apparent that the garden offers mental healthcare providers a unique opportunity to reimagine therapeutic interventions, while clearly making a difference in the lives of its participants through community connections, the healing nature of the space itself, and the restorative process of gardening.

### **Summary of Findings in Context to Research Questions**

Through the analysis of twelve narrative interviews I was able to understand how the Farmacy Garden has been a space for transformative learning for sustainability in participants’ and practitioners’ lives. The meanings that I have made from the combined experiences of study participants illustrate how the Farmacy Garden is a space for *community solidarity, community engagement, self-reliance and empowerment, reimagining health, and emotional well-being*. These domains reveal how participants and practitioners are engaging with the garden as part of the CFS movement, while exploring what possibilities may lie beyond the neoliberal frame. In

this summary of findings I will showcase how these themes and their associated sub-themes reveal how the Farmacy Garden is a space for learning for critical consciousness, learning for social action, and learning for creativity and vision. I will then move into my discussion chapter and further elaborate on how these three domains of learning sustainability are occurring more broadly in the Farmacy Garden.

**Learning for critical consciousness.** Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners are learning for critical consciousness through multiple themes and sub-themes reflected above. Learning for critical consciousness occurs in the theme of *community solidarity* through the process of dismantling normative power hierarchies and promoting diversity and inclusion. As participants and practitioners are able to more clearly and critically examine structures of power, they are able to simultaneously create new ways of being rooted in the life values of diversity and inclusion. Participants and practitioners are also learning for critical consciousness through the theme of *self-reliance and empowerment*. Through the Farmacy Garden, participants and practitioners are able to critically examine their food system and strengthen alternative ways of seeing, being, and doing through the processes of building knowledge and skills, putting control locally, and localizing food systems. Finally, study participants in the Farmacy Garden are learning for critical consciousness through the theme of *reimagining health*. The Farmacy Garden enables participants to begin to critically examine structural influences and root causes of diet-related illness.

**Learning for social action.** Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners are learning for social action through multiple themes and sub-themes reflected above. In the theme of *community solidarity*, study participants are learning for social action through the ways that the Farmacy Garden reflects community care and support. Through the theme of *community*

*engagement*, Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners are learning for social action through their engagement with the Farmacy Garden itself, and through the ways the Farmacy Garden inspires new forms of community contribution. Through the theme of *learning for self reliance and empowerment*, study participants are learning for social action through building knowledge and skills. Finally, through the theme of *learning for emotional well-being*, study participants are learning for social action by building supportive community connections and recognizing the healing nature of the Farmacy Garden and the healing act of gardening.

**Learning for creativity and vision.** Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners are learning for creativity and vision through multiple themes and sub-themes reflected above. Through the theme of *community engagement*, Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners reflect how the space inspires new forms of community contribution. Through the theme of *self-reliance and empowerment*, Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners are building knowledge and skills that inspire new and creative visions for themselves, their communities, and their food system anchored in local control. Finally, through the theme of *reimagining health*, Farmacy Garden participants and practitioners are cultivating new, holistic conceptions of health, and recognizing the interconnections between human and environmental health.

These findings reveal the ways the Farmacy Garden is a common ground for learning sustainability. Through instances of learning for critical consciousness, learning for social action, and learning for creativity and vision, the Farmacy Garden promotes a conception of sustainability rooted in life values, counter-hegemony, and social justice through the CFS movement.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Introduction

In my findings chapter I examined what learning sustainability looks like in the Farmacy Garden. Through instances of critical consciousness, social action, and creativity and vision, learning sustainability manifested as *community solidarity*, *community engagement*, *self-reliance and empowerment*, *reimagining health*, and *emotional well-being*. These domains reveal how Farmacy Garden stakeholders are strengthening community food security as part of the larger project of sustainability. In this chapter, I will first re-center my three operational questions in context to the broader literature to elaborate on how the Farmacy Garden is a space of learning for critical consciousness, social action, and creativity and vision.

The first operational question asks how, if at all, is the Farmacy Garden a space of learning for critical consciousness? Through the process of humanization, the Farmacy Garden is enabling study participants to critique existing systems and structures, and have new choices and possibilities in their food system rooted in life values. The second operational question asks how, if at all, is the Farmacy Garden a space of learning for social action? By enabling opportunities for community economy rooted in reciprocity and gift-based exchange, the Farmacy Garden is inspiring study participants to take new forms of social action. The third operational question asks how, if at all, is the Farmacy Garden a space of learning for creativity and vision? By inspiring critical hope that disrupts fatalistic perspectives on the current condition, and encouraging creative imagination for integral development rooted in a true quality of life, study participants are transforming the “conditions of possibility we live with” (Mol, 1999, p. 95). Following the discussion of my sub-research questions, I will explore the ontological implications of this study by arguing the necessity of community gardens as spaces for learning

sustainability in the challenging and contradictory work of “making new worlds” (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 628). I will then close this chapter by suggesting recommendations for future research and practice, discussing study limitations, and concluding with final remarks.

### **Operational Research Question One: Critical Consciousness for Sustainability and the Humanization of the Food System**

Referring back to Chapter Two, critical consciousness, or *conscientization* is “the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality” (Freire, 1970c, p. 27). As people deepen their awareness of their historically situated realities, they begin to reclaim their humanity, understanding themselves as subjects, not objects, “engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (Freire, 1970b, p. 66). This process of humanization is one that never reaches a determined endpoint, but rather continues to evolve as people, together, realize their capacities to become “social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons” (Freire, 1998, p. 95) through a process of authentic and ongoing praxis realized through the union of reflection and action. In an examination of Freire’s work, Roberts (2000) notes that “The pursuit of humanization is a quest to become more profoundly what we already are as humans; that is, beings of praxis” (Freire, 1970b, p. 16).

So, how is humanization happening in the Farmacy Garden? Study participant narratives showcase the plurality of ways the Farmacy Garden is a site that enables new choices and possibilities. Pivotal moments where study participants reveal how the garden helped them cultivate a new sense of self, invigorate new forms of social action, and nurture new imaginaries for themselves and their communities demonstrates the Farmacy Garden’s role as a space for

humanization. While these moments are multiple, I will highlight a few examples here for clarity.

In Paul's narrative he talks extensively about how the process of developing the skills and knowledge to grow his own food in the Farmacy Garden made him feel "empowered." This new sense of self gives Paul more choice and possibility to engage in his food system differently: "Gardening is more approachable. I feel like anybody could do it, and I feel like I can teach someone how to do it." For Neel, while engaging in the Farmacy Garden gave him the skills and knowledge in organic food production, it also inspired a broader vision that manifested as his own garden on his motel property where he grows food for his extended community. His interaction with the Farmacy Garden enabled him to change his reality by invigorating social action, and thereby affecting his broader community, too. For Sara, the Farmacy Garden inspired a vision for a community garden in her Section 8 housing complex, showing her "what could be in places like this where I'm living now." The Farmacy Garden provided her with a new sense of possibility for true "healthy living for vulnerable communities" and enabled her to see her own capacity to help make that happen. These examples, just a few of many, highlight the ways the Farmacy Garden is an agential space that enables participants to become more fully human through the process of changing their own reality within their food system.

**Humanization for life values.** So, what does this process of humanization mean for sustainability? The examples above demonstrate how study participants are enacting alternative ways of being, doing, and seeing in the Farmacy Garden. Across participant and practitioner narratives, it is clear that these new realities are anchored in the life code of value.

The effects of the present system that operates in the monetary code of value can be seen in the following excerpt:

“The market requires the brutalization and destruction of the sense of community; the transmutation of living spaces—cities, streets, houses—earth, water, air, bodies, people, work, and life into goods; and the taking away of individual and population characteristics that serve to realize and complete any project compatible with a human vocation that is not mechanization. The market ideology demands the “objectification” of the people, who are to be treated as disposable objects easily replaced, which in turn facilitates their exploitation as labor that is increasingly devalued. This ideological stance requires a maximum of ephemeral human relations, fragile and poorly conducted, and always places suspicion on movements and forms of union that can become the seeds of troublesome questions. The strengthening of this ideology needs to devalue and disrespect life. This devaluation and disrespect culminate in the disregard for other human beings evident in the violence plaguing the planet like an epidemic of horrific proportions. Another side effect is the disregard for other living beings and nature in general, both of which are now also perceived as “economic resources,” thus an anthropocentrism that is leading to the destruction of the environment and of life itself.” (Oliveira, 2014, p. 74).

Commodification, privatization, dehumanization, it is apparent that our present situation is desperately calling for new and ethical ways of living. Returning to Sumner (2003), this calls for a form of sustainability anchored in a value system that gives life precedence and recognizes human and non-human life forms as indispensable.

Through the process of becoming more fully human, study participants are enlivening the life code of value through their alternatives. As another example from the findings, Anita discussed the way that the skills and knowledge she gained from the Farmacy Garden enabled and inspired her to start a home garden that was crucial to the emotional well-being of her father during his recovery from a stroke. This story shows how Anita acts on a value system not guided by monetary gain or material consumption, but rather by the way it supports her father's healing process, and gives her family an opportunity to share an experience together, despite their limitations, i.e. a life value system. If you read study participant narratives closely, you will see the multitude of ways that life values are enacted in the agential processes of garden stakeholders realizing their creative capacities through the Farmacy Garden.



## **Operational Research Question Two: Social Action for Building Community Economies**

This process of humanization for life values is informing a way of relating that could be considered a “post-capitalist praxis” (Gibson-Graham, 2013). Findings from stakeholder interviews demonstrated how the Farmacy Garden is a common ground to explore and experiment in new forms of community economies. Gibson-Graham (2013) have called for a reframing of normative perspectives to the economy to encompass the broad scope of everyday endeavors to secure basic material needs. Recognizing that the current economy is a human construction that does not have existence outside of our performed realities and the broader world we live in, Gibson-Graham (2013) posit that through the process of reframing we can begin to bring life to the community economies already happening every day. Defined as “economies in which ethical negotiations around our interdependence with each other and the environment are put center stage” (Gibson-Graham, 2013, p. 13), they liken the economy to an iceberg, with the present mainstream economy as the tip above the waterline, while the broader scope of economic activity is occurring below the surface, unaccounted for, but still contributing to our collective well-being (Gibson-Graham, 2013).

**Reciprocity and gift-based exchange in the Farmacy Garden.** One facet of this sub-surface economy is the scope of human and non-human exchange in the forms of reciprocity and gift. When considering notions of quality of life, it quickly becomes apparent that people most effectively survive and thrive using mechanisms largely outside of transactions based in money (Gibson-Graham, 2013). Inter-relations grounded in mutual care and support nourish us over the course of our lives and take form in acts of reciprocity or gift giving. Reciprocity involves “negotiated equivalences” (Gibson-Graham, 2013, p. 105), whereas gifts are more open-ended, without expectation or guarantee that the gift will be returned. It is these forms of economy that

enable deeper connections between human and non-human subjects, and foster a guiding ethic of altruism whereby we take what is essential, leave some for others, and give back what we are able (Gibson-Graham, 2013).

Study participant narratives showcased many examples of social action for building community economies through reciprocal and gift-based exchange. The Farmacy Garden site itself provided ample opportunities for stakeholders to decommodify food by accessing this life good by means of work exchange in the garden, though instances of reciprocity and gifting extended well beyond transactional negotiations of food. The findings demonstrate that through the process of humanization for life values, the garden site fostered an ethic of community contribution exemplified through instances of community food production for others, knowledge and skill sharing, friendship, and emotional support. As an example, James sees his participation in the garden as a way of “helping people” by growing fresh fruits and vegetables for those in need. In return, James receives not only fresh vegetables, but a sense of belonging, being “wanted” by a community that cares. These exchanges reflect forms of community economy that extend beyond the monetary code of value, and seemingly carry forth in ongoing instances of reciprocity and gift. These exchanges demonstrate the way the Farmacy Garden serves as a “seedbed for innovation, experimentation and learning for how postcapitalist futures may unfold” (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020, p. 38).

### **Operational Research Question Three: Creativity and Vision for Integral Development**

**Challenging fatalism through critical hope.** Dimensions of the study findings also reveal the presence of Friere’s conception of critical hope (1992). As an integral component of transformation, hope is as equally essential to the processes of critique and active resistance for the transformation of our world. As a motivating source to initiate and persevere in the struggle

for liberation, critical hope enables us to see beyond our present reality, and refocus on aspects of promise and potential, transcending fatalistic perspectives that view capitlocentric systems as inevitable. Throughout narrative interviews with study participants, this idea of critical hope was central. Referred to as a “beacon of hope”, “hopeful”, a “blessing”, an expression that “someone cares”, it is clear from study participant perspectives that the Farmacy Garden itself is a source of critical hope that inspires them to keep working toward creating a better reality for themselves and their community.

**Toward a true quality of life.** Through the transformative learning experiences of critical consciousness for sustainability and the humanization of the food system; social action for building community economies; and critical hope for challenging fatalism, study participants are creating new realities for themselves and their communities, while opening the possibility to imagine new forms of development. Returning to O’Sullivan (2002), education for integral development involves a reconceptualization of development, transcending the dominant market-driven frame, for a holistic paradigm that links the “creative evolutionary processes of the universe, the planet, the earth community, the human community, and the personal world” (p. 8). The Farmacy Garden is a small, but important space for enabling stakeholders to begin to see their capacity to transform their own reality, and thereby their community, contributing to a broader conception of “quality of life” that O’Sullivan (2002) speaks to. Inviting new potentialities for cultivating a sense of place, diversity and inclusion, community, and civic culture, the Farmacy Garden, and its caretakers are reimagining the “conditions of possibility we live with” (Mol, 1999, p. 95) through their stories, lived, told, and retold.

## **“Making New Worlds”: Reimagining Community Gardens for Learning Sustainability**

When examining this research in the larger context of our present unsustainable situation, the meta-narrative of this study reveals broader implications for “making new worlds” (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 628) by reimagining community gardens as sites for learning sustainability. Through this research, the Farmacy Garden is presented as a “site of creative resistance” (Walters, 2013, p. 523), where garden stakeholders have a common ground to begin to unravel the challenges of our present unsustainable situation, and explore alternative ways of being, seeing, and doing. This study gave insight on the ways learning sustainability manifests in the Farmacy Garden (as the interwoven stories of solidarity, self-reliance and empowerment, reimagining health, and emotional well-being through the community food security movement), and the way learning sustainability is performed in the Farmacy Garden (through critical consciousness for sustainability and the humanization of the food system; social action for building community economies; critical hope for challenging fatalism; and creativity and vision for integral development). While these ‘fixed’ dimensions to study findings are pertinent to clarify the inner workings of learning sustainability at the Farmacy Garden in particular, perhaps what is more significant is the ways this research holistically reimagines community gardens as sites for learning sustainability more broadly, recognizing the possibilities these spaces provide for creating openings for an imaginary beyond the current condition. Without these grounds for exploration and creativity to unravel these ‘wicked’ problems, we risk business as usual, and stand no chance of rupturing our present unsustainable situation (neoliberalism), nor cultivating alternative possibilities.

**An opening into the imaginary.** It has been suggested “that maybe the challenge of sustainability isn’t to prove the world more real--rubbing people’s noses in the parts per million

and the hectares--but to prove the world more imaginary” (Bendor et. al., 2017, n.p.). To understand this quote in depth, I must first define imagination, imaginary, and social imaginary, drawing from Kagan (2019) who skillfully outlines and articulates these concepts. The *imagination* is both an individual and social “perceptive and creative process” (Kagan, 2019, p. 163) that enables us to mold our realities from our experiences in and with the world. The *imaginary* is a “patterned set of shared images, forming a *matrix* that affects our access to the world” (Kagan, 2019, p. 163), and a “cognitive and cultural humus” (Kagan, 2019, p. 161) whereby new perspectives, stories, visions, and ideals can establish themselves and grow. Finally the *social imaginary* is an “enabling but not fully explicable symbolic matrix within which people imagine and act as world making collective agents” (Gaonkar, 2002, p. 1). It is important to note that the spaces of the imagination are not illusory or fantastical, but rather “the faculty to make present what is potentially absent...the very basis of the possibility of action” (Wright et al., 2013, p. 651). Consequently, the space of the imaginary is fertile ground to begin to consider what imagination(s) is/are presently guiding our collective trajectory, and how we can strategically intervene for the creation of new and productive forms (Kagan, 2019). This process is an infinite endeavor, as the scope of the imaginary is as wide as the world itself, and holds promising potential for the field of sustainability in research and practice, as “the dimension of creativity suggested by the claim that our world is an imaginary world allows for the possibility of it being imagined in different ways, being open to alternative visions” (Lennon, 2015, p. 12).

This research suggests that community gardens are ripe sites of potential for ‘tinkering’ with these potential imaginaries. With no singular nor clear path to sustainable development, to begin to understand what realities are possible is a praxis that could benefit tremendously from sites of creative exploration and experimentation like community gardens. Scott-Cato and Hillier

(2010) contend that it is through the apertures left by our present institutions and present ways of enacting the world that transformative practices live, ready to oppose and supplant the current condition. These processes and practices are not likely to manifest in momentous revolutions or disruptions, but rather “micropolitical processes that stress the importance of local context, local provisioning, community and a renewed civic life” (Phillips & Jeanes, 2018, p. 698). Community gardens are one of these interstitial spaces that, while imperfect, offer realities that would not exist otherwise.

It is here that I suggest that we begin to reimagine community gardens as sites for learning sustainability. Returning to Sumner (2003):

“Learning sustainability is based on a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons. It is a participatory, transformative process that involves learning through social action, developing critical consciousness and encouraging dialogical engagement, all within a life-values perspective. Sustainable learning is a process of building the capacity and power of people to recognise, name and confront the impacts of corporate globalisation and to change the present unsustainable situation. It should enable people on both sides of the North-South divide to make sense of the complex local-global dynamics in order to create solidarity around a common sustainable vision of individual and community well-being based in building the civil commons” (Sumner, 2003, p. 28).

This *process* has no determined outcome or established endpoint. Learning sustainability is an ongoing exploration into the social imaginary of what could be beyond the current condition, and without spaces like community gardens for people to come together and ‘tinker’ in alternative ways of being, doing, and seeing, we risk the bleak trajectory of business as usual.

**The imaginary in alternative agri-food movements.** With scholarly calls to bring more radical and politicized approaches into US alternative food movements (Alkon & Mares, 2017; Alkon & Guthman, 2017), perhaps what is needed are spaces like community gardens that can provoke new imaginaries, enabling movements to think and do differently. As reflected in the findings from this study, learning sustainability in the Farmacy Garden is enacted within the

community food security (CFS) and food sovereignty (FS) movements. Despite the unique trajectories of these two social movements, bringing them closer together in community gardens may enable new courses of action to arise.

While this intersection could prove fruitful, it is still important to note that integrating the CFS and FS movement agendas into the community food spaces of the Global North could elevate the risk of adulterating the radical aims of food sovereignty through direct opposition, false equivalence, and dilution (Navin & Dieterle, 2018). This can be seen in the case of the Farmacy Garden, where participants and practitioners are engaging in new and important ways of thinking, doing, and imagining that *align* with the food sovereignty movement, but definitely fall short of the pinnacle vision of food sovereignty where priorities of smallholder peasant farmers in the Global South are foregrounded, and consumers in the Global North stand in transnational solidarity.

While I believe it is important to critically examine what it means to be in movement solidarity, I simultaneously acknowledge the importance of not letting critique dampen the potential for new possibilities to arise. Perhaps the Farmacy Garden is not, and may never be, a ground where stakeholders will collectively organize in transnational solidarity with smallholder farmers, but it is still a space where people are coming together to build knowledge and skills in food production, strengthen local food systems, and foster local control--all significant aims that contribute to food sovereignty. This more fluid position of simultaneously holding critique and possibility enables us to begin to see openings where alternative agri-food movements intersect. These areas are ripe places of leverage for community food system practitioners to focus their energies and efforts, a fertile ground of movement cross-pollination that may enable us to explore possibilities not yet seen or realized.

## **Recommendations for Future Research and Practice**

This research provided an opportunity to broaden the scope of study in community gardens to creatively assess for outcomes that extend beyond pounds of produce and hours of participation. What do spaces like the Farmacy Garden inspire in people that supports the larger project of transforming our unsustainable situation? How can we capture these opportunities, and leverage them to experiment with what possibilities could lie beyond our current condition? While this study provided an opening to examine some of those questions in more depth, in this section I will outline recommendations for additional future research and practice.

**Recommendations for future research.** What does this mean for research? Gibson-Graham's (2008) anti-essentialist approach to research through ontological politics holds promise in continuing research on learning sustainability in community gardens. Guided by the following questions: "How can our work open up possibilities? What kind of world do we want to participate in building? What might be the effect of theorizing things this way rather than that?" (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 615), they follow the logic that knowledge is performed, and therefore by changing their understanding of the world, they *are* changing the world (Gibson-Graham, 2008). This process demands that researchers become "different academic subjects" (p. 618) that adopt a stance of possibility, tolerate complexity, and use "weak theory" (p. 619) to create openings for new worlds to form instead of concretizing the 'inevitability' of neoliberal globalization, seeing its pervasiveness to the point that it becomes a "disabling discourse" (Hart, 2002). The type of research approach Gibson-Graham (2008) advocate for is one of deep ethical consideration, as every question of inquiry and research approach is a choice in what to make more real. In their approach they recommend three techniques: "ontological reframing to produce the ground of possibility; re-reading to uncover or excavate the possible; and creativity



to generate actual possibilities where none formerly existed” (p. 620). Using these techniques in context to further research on community gardens as sites for learning sustainability offer new opportunities to explore the potential of these common grounds to “make new worlds.”

*Narrative inquiry and action research for political praxis.* Applying the ontological orientation to research posed by Gibson-Graham (2008) to the project of learning sustainability in community gardens demands methodological approaches that have enough latitude to account for the creativity and complexity inherent in this world-making work. In this research study I leveraged narrative inquiry as a methodology to better understand how the Farmacy Garden is a space of transformative learning for sustainability in participants’ and practitioners’ lives. While the approach that I used provided enough latitude to explore a broader scope of processes and outcomes in the Farmacy Garden, I suggest future research extend the potentialities of narrative inquiry by bolstering its capacity for pedagogy and political praxis through critical reflection sessions and action research (Niewolny & D’Adamo-Damery, 2016). Integrating these dynamic and interactive processes into future narrative inquiries could elevate their change-making potential. For example, through collective reflection sessions, excerpts of study participant narratives could be shared amongst the group, serving as a tool to incite critical reflection and dialogue, with the potential to deepen or create new understandings, inspire collective action, and promote a more unified and creative vision for the future. Dialogue is a fundamental component undergirding sustainability, so harnessing a dialogic approach to research could enable new opportunities to arise. When combined within the larger context of an action research project (Greenwood & Levin, 2007), the narratives and critical reflection session(s) could serve as one piece of a larger project to collaboratively envision and experiment with new forms of change-making work through the spaces of community gardens.

**Recommendations for future practice.** What does this mean for practice? While the above recommendations edge the line between research and practice, this study imparts other implications for future practice more directly. Within the Farmacy Garden itself, study participants weigh in with suggestions and aspirations for the site and programming moving into the future. Suggestions include: satellite gardens in low-income housing communities for people who do not have transportation; a program linking social service recipients with gardening supplies (i.e. planter box, seeds, etc.) as part of their benefits; a public marketing assessment of the Farmacy Garden to improve marketing and branding strategies; a more formal refrigeration system unit for free produce at the Health and Human Services Building; a full-time, well-compensated, benefited position for the Farmacy Garden coordinator; horticulture and cooking workshops; potlucks; shuttle transportation to the garden; beehives at the Farmacy Garden; a covered structure for shade and workshops; an irrigation system; and better vertical trellising systems. In my interview I also suggest developing a community board of directors that co-manage the space. In this model the Farmacy Garden coordinator would still serve as the liaison between the agencies and community, but garden participants and practitioners would together envision how the Farmacy Garden operates and the purpose(s) it serves for the community. Ideally, all board members would be compensated for their time and effort, and all garden decisions would be made collectively and democratically. This model would hopefully be a response to the underutilization of the garden by the community, giving more opportunity for citizen ownership and autonomy over garden management and programming, while maintaining agency fiscal and staff support.

Beyond practical programmatic recommendations, this research also speaks to the importance of garden practitioners cultivating a critically reflective practice. In order to leverage

the transformative potential of community garden spaces, community garden practitioners must have the capacity to see the ways that community garden efforts are embedded in the larger matrix of social, economic, cultural, and political systems. By cultivating this critical consciousness, practitioners can begin to understand how their efforts have been guided by existing dynamics of power where certain ideologies get privileged over others. By cultivating criticality in their work, practitioners can begin to harness the emancipatory potential of their fields by using it as a mechanism to “unearth and challenge dominant ideology and the power relations this ideology justifies” (Brookfield, 2000, p. 38). This requires not only an awareness and criticality of the outside hegemonic systems at play, but a deeply reflexive process of understanding how these dominant ideologies have been embedded, naturalized, and perpetuated by the practitioner themselves. This is a process that has largely been overlooked by educators and community development practitioners, even amongst practitioners engaging in ‘critical’ work. According to Usher and Edwards (1994), “many criticalist texts seem curiously unreflexive as they do not subject themselves to the forms of critical engagement to which they subject others” (p. 220). Consequently, if community gardens are spaces to help foster justice and equality for all, it is imperative that community garden practitioners begin the deeply honest processes of deconstructing their ideological biases and recognizing their positions of power and influence in the production of knowledge while working to “concretize abstractions such as democracy and equality” (Cevero & Wilson, 2001, p. 10) in their pedagogy and practice.

Brookfield (2000) posits that to cultivate a critically reflective practice one must honor the nuance and complexity of local context, rejecting notions of standardization, generalizability, and universal measures of success, despite the dominance, and often, systemic obligation to use these approaches in both the fields of adult education and community development. This

humbling process fosters regard for the dynamic nature of community work, understanding that while attaining a state of perfection is an impossibility, practitioners do have the capacity to continually evolve as they negotiate and involve the perspectives of others in collaborative processes. By considering the perspectives of garden participants and fellow practitioners in context to their own practice they are offered the possibility to negotiate their approach with regard for others, “elevat[ing] learners’ voices to a position of prominence...in an inclusive and collaborative way” (Brookfield, 2000, p. 48). Inherent in this call for collaboration is a renegotiation of power, as the practitioner/community relationships are accommodated for greater equity. Therefore, community garden practitioners must develop criticality in their work as a precursor to leveraging the potential of learning sustainability in community gardens.

Once community garden practitioners have deepened their own critical consciousness, I invite them to reconsider program evaluation with a softer gaze, looking beyond reductionist outcomes to explore what is growing in the gardens beyond pounds of produce, and how these opportunities can be leveraged to experiment in the politics of the possible. I also invite community garden practitioners to leverage the potential of these sites to strengthen community connections. While this study did not bring garden stakeholders together, it did accentuate the importance of these spaces for developing community, not as a tool for sustainability, but instead recognizing that “To build communities is an end in itself, which...relates to a subjectivity of inter-being and thus has transformational potential” (Nieto-Romero et al., 2019, p. 114).

### **Final Remarks**

When I set out on this research project, I hoped to find a way to explore the broader impacts of the Farmacy Garden program that I had been privy to as the former coordinator but had never been able to accurately capture in annual program reporting or evaluation. This study

provided the methodological and theoretical breadth and depth to holistically examine the role the Farmacy Garden has played in garden stakeholders' lives. While these narratives offer a 'fixed' snapshot of participant and practitioner stories, perspectives, actions, and aspirations, my hope is that these narratives may live beyond themselves, finding their way into the minds and hearts of those who read them to inspire and enliven creative opportunities and interventions in the ongoing praxis of transforming our world.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Script for Garden Participants

#### Introductory script:

We are glad you have agreed to talk with us and be interviewed. I want to explain how this conversation will be structured and work. We'll do about a 60-90 minute interview that will be audio recorded, the audio recording will be transcribed, and then edited into a narrative that will include only your words. The specific questions will be edited out. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to ensure your anonymity, and you will have an opportunity to review the final narrative, make edits, and eliminate text at your own discretion.

As part of the conversation, I would like to focus on a particular story/experience/instance that illustrates how the Farmacy Garden has had an impact on your life. Do you have a specific instance in mind? Can you provide me with an overview of your story? Ask prompting and clarifying questions to hear what the story is and how they convey the story.

- (IF THE STORY IS GOOD AND STRONG) That sounds like a great story.
- (IF THE STORY IS NOT STRONG AND CLEAR) What other projects might fit what we're looking for?

The interview will be divided into three parts: (1) an overview of their personal background and experience with the Farmacy Garden, (2) the experiential story, and (3) critical reflections. Make sure they get a chance to provide feedback and are able to ask any clarifying questions.

#### Questions to guide the interview

The questions are structured with three main sections (1) background (2) the experiential story, and (3) critical reflections. While listed in a logical order, these questions may be asked in any order, responding to the natural flow of the conversation and discussion. This process will be seen more as a "structured conversation" with someone whose story you want to hear and learn from rather than as a formal "interview."

#### Part 1: Background

- Tell me about yourself and your history.
  - What aspects of your personal history led you to participate with the Farmacy Garden?
- Please provide an overview of your engagement with the Farmacy Garden.
  - How and when did you get involved?
  - What initially motivated you to participate?
  - Describe your role. What activities did you engage in? What activities did you choose not to engage in? Why?

- What does the garden mean to you?
- What motivates you to stay involved? What has prevented you from staying involved?
- What types of values drive you to participate? How so/Why?

## **Part 2: Experiential Story**

- Was there a time when you realized the garden was impactful?
  - What was the context?
  - Who was involved?
  - Were there any key turning points in this experience?
  - Were there any surprises?
  - Any “a-ha” moments?
  - How has this experience influenced you?
  - What did you find most challenging? How did you overcome these challenges?
  - What impact has this experience had on yourself or your community?

## **Part 3: Critical Reflection**

[Critical consciousness]

- What have you learned by being part of the Farmacy Garden?
- Did your involvement lead to any personal realizations?
- How, if at all, has participating in the Farmacy Garden changed the way you see the world?
  - Has it shaped your values? In what way(s)?
  - Has it changed your perception of your food system? In what way(s)?
  - Has it changed your perception of your community? In what way(s)?
  - Has it changed your perception of the natural world? In what way(s)?

[Social action]

- How, if at all, has participating in the Farmacy Garden changed the way you live your life?
  - Has it inspired you to act differently? How?
  - Has it changed the way you engage in your community? In what way(s)?
- What, if anything, about the Farmacy Garden gives you a sense of hope?

[Creativity and vision]

- Where would you like the Farmacy Garden to be in five to ten years?
- At the end of the day, what kind of community do you want to live and work in? How might your involvement with the Farmacy Garden help build and sustain that community?

## **Appendix B: Interview Script for Garden Practitioners**

### **Introductory script:**

We are glad you have agreed to talk with us and be interviewed. I want to explain how this conversation will be structured and work. We'll do about a 60-90 minute interview that will be audio recorded, the audio recording will be transcribed, and then edited into a narrative that will include only your words. The specific questions will be edited out. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to ensure your anonymity, and you will have an opportunity to review the final narrative, make edits, and eliminate text at your own discretion.

As part of the conversation, I would like to focus on a particular story/experience/instance that illustrates how the Farmacy Garden has had an impact on your life. Do you have a specific instance in mind? Can you provide me with an overview of your story? Ask prompting and clarifying questions to hear what the story is and how they convey the story.

- (IF THE STORY IS GOOD AND STRONG) That sounds like a great story.
- (IF THE STORY IS NOT STRONG AND CLEAR) What other projects might fit what we're looking for?

The interview will be divided into three parts: (1) an overview of their personal background and experience with the Farmacy Garden, (2) the experiential story, and (3) critical reflections. Make sure they get a chance to provide feedback and are able to ask any clarifying questions.

### **Questions to guide the interview**

The questions are structured with three main sections (1) background (2) the experiential story, and (3) critical reflections. While listed in a logical order, these questions may be asked in any order, responding to the natural flow of the conversation and discussion. This process will be seen more as a "structured conversation" with someone whose story you want to hear and learn from rather than as a formal "interview."

### **Part 1: Background**

- Tell me about yourself and your history.
  - What aspects of your personal history led you to your work with the Farmacy Garden?
  - What is/was your job title (when working with the Farmacy Garden) and how long have you been/were you in the position?
- Please provide an overview of your engagement with the Farmacy Garden.
  - How and when did you start working with the garden?

- Describe your role. What activities did/do you engage in? What activities did you choose not to engage in? Why?
- What motivates you to do this work?
- What does the garden mean to you?
- What types of values drive you to do this kind of work? How so/Why?

### **Part 2: Experiential Story**

- Was there a time when you realized the garden was impactful?
  - What was the context?
  - Who was involved?
  - Were there any key turning points in this experience?
  - Were there any surprises?
  - Any “a-ha” moments?
  - How has this experience influenced you?
  - What did you find most challenging? How did you overcome these challenges?
  - What impact has this experience had on your yourself or your community?

### **Part 3: Critical Reflection**

[Critical consciousness]

- What have you learned by being part of the Farmacy Garden?
- Did your involvement lead to any personal realizations?
- How, if at all, has participating in the Farmacy Garden changed the way you see the world?
  - Has it shaped your values? In what way(s)?
  - Has it changed your perception of your food system? In what way(s)?
  - Has it changed your perception of your community? In what way(s)?
  - Has it changed your perception of the natural world? In what way(s)?

[Social action]

- How, if at all, has participating in the Farmacy Garden changed the way you live your life?
  - Has it inspired you to act differently? How?
  - Has it changed the way you engage in your community? In what way(s)?
- What, if anything, about the Farmacy Garden gives you a sense of hope?

[Creativity and vision]

- Where would you like the Farmacy Garden to be in five to ten years?
- At the end of the day, what kind of community do you want to live and work in? How might your involvement with the Farmacy Garden help build and sustain that community?

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent for Garden Participants**

### **VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

#### **Informed Consent for Narrative Interviews with Garden Participants**

**Title of Research Study:** The Role of the Farmacy Garden as a Site for Transformative Learning for Sustainability: A Case Study

**Principal Investigator:**

- Dr. Kim Niewolny, 540-231-5784, [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu)

**Other study contact(s):**

- Maureen McGonagle, 703-314-1737, [mqm138@vt.edu](mailto:mqm138@vt.edu)
- Dr. Jennifer Culhane, 540-231-2608, [jh7788@vt.edu](mailto:jh7788@vt.edu)
- Terry Clements, 540-230-4597, [tclement@vt.edu](mailto:tclement@vt.edu)

#### **I. Purpose of this Research Project**

The purpose of this study is to explore your perceptions and experiences as a participant in the Farmacy Garden. I aim to understand how, if at all, the Farmacy Garden is/has been a site for transformative learning for sustainability in your life. This research will be conducted for partial fulfillment of a Master's degree, culminating in a thesis. I plan to include approximately 12 people in this research study.

#### **II. Procedures**

You will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute semi-structured interview in the location of your choosing to explore your perceptions of and experiences with the Farmacy Garden. The interview will be audio-recorded, and I will take notes on salient points you make during the interview. All interviews will occur between December 2019 and January 2020. Once your interview has been conducted, I will transcribe the it verbatim, and transform it into a narrative by eliminating the voice of the interviewer (me), and lightly editing it for readability. I will send you your draft narrative to solicit edits, feedback, and approval. Within this process, I will also provide you with guiding questions to assist you in identifying salient and meaningful themes in your narrative that I will use to help guide my data analysis process. If you are not satisfied with your narrative, we will collaboratively adapt it to meet both of our standards.

#### **III. Risks**

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. They include potential misrepresentation and possible emotional discomfort during the interview, though steps will be taken to mitigate these potential risks. Please note that your participation in this interview is in no way required. You will remain anonymous in any publication or profile documents produced from your interview.

#### **IV. Benefits**



Participating in this research may enable you to reach a deeper level of self-awareness due to the reflective nature of this research. You will also receive your individual narrative at the end of this study.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Your identity will be kept confidential in all dissemination of this research. You will be given a pseudonym in all stored data. Your name will appear on a code file, which links your name to your pseudonym, but that file will be kept on a password protected computer and a file that will be locked in a cabinet. All data will be destroyed after three years. Myself and my committee members will have access to all data and your identity. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. Your information that is collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies, even though all of your identifiers will be removed. The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Human Research Protection Program may view the study’s data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

**VI. Compensation**

You will not receive financial compensation for participating in this study.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can leave the research at any time, for any reason, and it will not be held against you. If you choose to withdraw from the research, any information about you and any data not already analyzed will be destroyed. You are also free to choose not to answer a question asked during the interview process.

**VIII. Questions or Concerns**

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may communicate with them at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu if:

- You have questions about your rights as a research subject
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team
- You cannot reach the research team
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team to provide feedback about this research

**IX. Subject's Consent**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Subject signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Subject printed name**

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact the research team. Contact information is provided at the top of this form.

## **Appendix D: Informed Consent for Garden Practitioners**

### **VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

#### **Informed Consent for Narrative Interviews with Garden Participants**

**Title of Research Study:** The Role of the Farmacy Garden as a Site for Transformative Learning for Sustainability: A Case Study

**Principal Investigator:**

- Dr. Kim Niewolny, 540-231-5784, [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu)

**Other study contact(s):**

- Maureen McGonagle, 703-314-1737, [mqml38@vt.edu](mailto:mqml38@vt.edu)
- Dr. Jennifer Culhane, 540-231-2608, [jh7788@vt.edu](mailto:jh7788@vt.edu)
- Terry Clements, 540-230-4597, [tclement@vt.edu](mailto:tclement@vt.edu)

#### **I. Purpose of this Research Project**

The purpose of this study is to explore your perceptions and experiences as a practitioner in the Farmacy Garden. I aim to understand how, if at all, the Farmacy Garden is/has been a site for transformative learning for sustainability in your life. This research will be conducted for partial fulfillment of a Master's degree, culminating in a thesis. I plan to include approximately 12 people in this research study.

#### **II. Procedures**

You will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute semi-structured interview in the location of your choosing to explore your perceptions of and experiences with the Farmacy Garden. The interview will be audio-recorded, and I will take notes on salient points you make during the interview. All interviews will occur between December 2019 and January 2020. Once your interview has been conducted, I will transcribe the it verbatim, and transform it into a narrative by eliminating the voice of the interviewer (me), and lightly editing it for readability. I will send you your draft narrative to solicit edits, feedback, and approval. Within this process, I will also provide you with guiding questions to assist you in identifying salient and meaningful themes in your narrative that I will use to help guide my data analysis process. If you are not satisfied with your narrative, we will collaboratively adapt it to meet both of our standards.

#### **III. Risks**

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. They include potential misrepresentation and possible emotional discomfort during the interview, though steps will be taken to mitigate these potential risks. Please note that your participation in this interview is in no way required. You will remain anonymous in any publication or profile documents produced from your interview.

#### **IV. Benefits**

Participating in this research may enable you to reach a deeper level of self-awareness due to the reflective nature of this research. You will also receive your individual narrative at the end of this study.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Your identity will be kept confidential in all dissemination of this research. You will be given a pseudonym in all stored data. Your name will appear on a code file, which links your name to your pseudonym, but that file will be kept on a password protected computer and a file that will be locked in a cabinet. All data will be destroyed after three years. Myself and my committee members will have access to all data and your identity. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. Your information that is collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies, even though all of your identifiers will be removed. The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Human Research Protection Program may view the study’s data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

**VI. Compensation**

You will not receive financial compensation for participating in this study.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can leave the research at any time, for any reason, and it will not be held against you. If you choose to withdraw from the research, any information about you and any data not already analyzed will be destroyed. You are also free to choose not to answer a question asked during the interview process.

**VIII. Questions or Concerns**

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may communicate with them at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu if:

- You have questions about your rights as a research subject
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team
- You cannot reach the research team
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team to provide feedback about this research

**IX. Subject's Consent**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Subject signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Subject printed name**

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact the research team. Contact information is provided at the top of this form.

## **Appendix E: Contact Letter for Email Correspondence**

DATE

Participant Name

Subject: Would you consider being interviewed for my research regarding transformative learning in the Farmacy Garden?

Dear, Name

My name is Maureen McGonagle and I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education. I am contacting you about the opportunity to participate in a study about your experiences engaging with the Farmacy Garden. This research will be conducted by myself under the direction of Dr. Kim Niewolny, Dr. Jennifer Culhane, and Terry Clements. The research has been approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board.

This study was developed to explore how, if at all, the Farmacy Garden has been a site for transformative learning for sustainability. If you agree to participate, I will conduct one 60-90 minute narrative interview with you that is audio recorded. I will transcribe the interview verbatim, and then lightly edit it to compose a narrative of your work (basically, I will eliminate my voice from the transcript, and lightly adapt for readability). I will send you back your narrative to read over, provide feedback and edits, and then provide you with a few guiding questions to help you identify pertinent themes in the document. I will work with you to find a convenient date, time, and location to conduct this research. Data collection will occur during the months of December, January, and February. There are no financial benefits to participating in this study, but there may be several indirect benefits. The reflective nature of the interview will provide you with an opportunity to think more deeply about yourself. You will also receive a narrative account of your experiences.

I reserve ownership rights for the thesis document I submit based on this research as well as presentations and professional journal publications. I do not anticipate any negative effects of this research on you. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty. Your identity will be confidential--only me and my research committee will know your identity. You will be given a pseudonym in all dissemination materials. All data will be kept on my password protected computer as well as an external device that will be locked in a cabinet or drawer. I will keep all data for three years.

For more information please contact me at [mqm138@vt.edu](mailto:mqm138@vt.edu) or (703) 314-1737 and/or my faculty advisor Kim Niewolny at [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu) or (540) 231-5784. For information about

your rights as a participant please contact the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board at (540) 231-4991.

Thank you so much for considering this opportunity. I very much look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

## **Appendix F: Contact Letter for Social Media Correspondence**

Hi [insert name],

As you know I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education. I am contacting you about the opportunity to participate in a study about your experiences engaging with the Farmacy Garden. This research will be conducted by myself under the direction of Dr. Kim Niewolny, Dr. Jennifer Culhane, and Terry Clements. The research has been approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board.

This study was developed to explore how, if at all, the Farmacy Garden has been a site for transformative learning for sustainability. If you agree to participate, I will conduct one 60-90 minute narrative interview with you that is audio recorded. I will transcribe the interview verbatim, and then lightly edit it to compose a narrative of your work (basically, I will eliminate my voice from the transcript, and lightly adapt for readability). I will send you back your narrative to read over, provide feedback and edits, and then provide you with a few guiding questions to help you identify pertinent themes in the document. I will work with you to find a convenient date, time, and location to conduct this research. Data collection will occur during the months of December, January, and February. There are no financial benefits to participating in this study, but there may be several indirect benefits. The reflective nature of the interview will provide you with an opportunity to think more deeply about yourself. You will also receive a narrative account of your experiences.

I reserve ownership rights for the thesis document I submit based on this research as well as presentations and professional journal publications. I do not anticipate any negative effects of this research on you. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty. Your identity will be confidential--only me and my research committee will know your identity. You will be given a pseudonym in all dissemination materials. All data will be kept on my password protected computer as well as an external device that will be locked in a cabinet or drawer. I will keep all data for three years.

For more information please contact me at [mqm138@vt.edu](mailto:mqm138@vt.edu) or (703) 314-1737 and/or my faculty advisor Kim Niewolny at [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu) or (540) 231-5784. For information about your rights as a participant please contact the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board at (540) 231-4991.

Thank you so much for considering this opportunity. I very much look forward to hearing back from you.



## **Appendix G: Contact Recruitment Script for Phone Correspondence**

Hi [insert name]. How are you? I'm calling to see if you would be interested participating in my research project as part of my Master's degree in Agricultural Leadership and Community Education. I've been back in school at Virginia Tech and have to do a final research project to finish my degree. I've decided to do my research exploring participant and staff perceptions and experiences of the Farmacy Garden, specifically looking at experiences of transformative learning for sustainability. This research will be conducted by myself under the direction of Dr. Kim Niewolny, Dr. Jennifer Culhane, and Terry Clements. The research has been approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board. I'm calling to see if you'd be interested in participating as a research subject. If you agree to participate, I will conduct one 60-90 minute narrative interview with you that is audio recorded. I will transcribe the interview verbatim, and then lightly edit it to compose a narrative of your work (basically, I will eliminate my voice from the transcript, and lightly adapt for readability). I will send you back your narrative to read over, provide feedback and edits, and then provide you with a few guiding questions to help you identify pertinent themes in the document. I will work with you to find a convenient date, time, and location to conduct this research. Data collection will occur during the months of December, January, and February.

I do not anticipate any negative effects of this research on you. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty. Your identity will be confidential--only me and my research committee will know your identity. You will be given a pseudonym in all dissemination materials. All data will be kept on my password protected computer as well as an external device that will be locked in a cabinet or drawer. I will keep all data for three years. Does this sound like an opportunity of interest to you?

## **Appendix H: Marge's Story**

I was born in Kentucky on an agricultural tourism farm where we road horses and stuff like that, so I grew up outside and my mom had a little garden, and so that was kinda the first experience I had with agriculture and farming and gardening and stuff. And then I totally rejected that as a kid until college when I got really into food, the food system, and knowing where food came from. My roommate and I started our first garden together in college, and that led to me shopping from the farmers market, and led to me wanting to pursue gardening as a job. I found an AmeriCorps position in West Virginia that I ended up getting, and I ran school gardens at a three different schools. I ran school gardens and did an afterschool program, and I worked with local farmers and cafeterias and teachers to try to get local food into the cafeterias. So that was my first food project coordinating job. And then I got another AmeriCorps position out in Olympia, Washington with GRuB, where I coordinated the Kitchen Garden Project, and we built gardens for people with low-incomes for free with their help, if they were able to. We offered them free seeds and starts and gardening workshops and things like that, so people could grow their own food. That was a really life changing position and I really wanted to do that kind of work in SouthWest Virginia, so I went to grad school, and studied home gardening in rural Appalachia, and did research on a home gardening project in Grayson County. After that I tried to get my hands in some food access projects in Virginia and the surrounding area, and I ended up getting a job with Virginia Cooperative Extension's Family Nutrition Program coordinating their Healthy Retail Program. I moved to Lynchburg and did that for a little bit. Then I moved back to Blacksburg and was coordinating that job, and then ultimately decided I didn't really wanna work in an office or work in the field of nutrition, and was more passionate about agriculture and production of food, and the distribution of food, and farmers supporting farmers,

than I was passionate about telling people what was and was not healthy. So I quit, and worked this past season on a flower farm, which I'm really passionate about. But when I moved back to Blacksburg for my job with Extension I got involved with the Farmacy Garden because the Farmacy Garden was a collaboration between Cooperative Extension, the Family Nutrition Program, and the Health Department. I became the person representing the Family Nutrition Program that held garden hours Friday mornings at the Farmacy Garden.

So I ran the garden hours from nine to noon on Friday mornings. Over the summer I had an intern that was working for us, and we would drive over together in one of the state vehicles, or maybe I used my own personal vehicle. I would go over there sometimes with interns, and we would just do garden tasks, and if anyone showed up then we would hang out and talk about the garden. If they wanted to work then we would work, but the garden coordinator always had this list of tasks that needed to be done, and so we would find that list of tasks and start doing what needed to be done. We would water, weed, harvest, and then take that harvest into the Health Department and put it out for people to take. When the garden coordinator left their position in August, I was basically the main coordinator of the garden from August through November. And I was the one that ended up making the task sheets and gathering information, etc. During my time at the garden we did have some service learning students who would come to the garden and work, and they were great, and I helped coordinate them being there on different days as well. They were great, they showed up. Some of them knew some things about gardening, but most of them were really new to gardening, so they would come and do good work, and got to a point where they could show up and do some of the task lists without explanation. One of them redesigned the flyer for the garden, managed the Facebook page, stuff like that. So they were

great, and dedicated and helpful. And the majority of them were from HNFE, though we had some from the Civic Ag class.

The garden is more along the lines of what I studied in grad school, and the many projects I had coordinated prior then the job I was doing with the Family Nutrition Program. And so the garden would've been something I was more interested in pursuing professionally than what I was doing in my current job. I care a lot more about food production. I care a lot more about showing people how to produce food, offering land access for people to produce food, and offering free produce to people than I do about making sure that they're choosing low-fat milk options. I just feel a lot more excitement and passion about it, and I also loved that I was outside working in the garden, making sure that things looked good, you know, that sort of project coordination. I wish I could've done more with the garden--have had it been a bigger part of my job, but unfortunately that just didn't work. And when the garden coordinator left people were asking me if I was gonna apply for the position, and the truth was that it was too much of a pay cut at the time for me to think about doing that. I had a full-time position that required a masters degree, so I was making a lot more money than they could've offered me in a part-time wage position, but I ended up leaving my job anyways, so who knows, maybe I should've applied for it, but it was what I needed to do at the time for my mental health. So, anyway, it didn't quite intersect with what I was doing with the Family Nutrition Program, because I was working with grocery stores, trying to get people to see the healthy food that was available in grocery stores, convenient stores, whatever, across the state, and working with extension agents, and like, it was very nutrition based, and it was all food access, and working with retailers, and customers rather than production and access on that side of things. So, it was an interesting job, but it wasn't

where I wanted to be. The Farmacy Garden was definitely way more of what I was interested in at the time.

Part of what motivates me in this type of work is that I love gardening. I love being outside, I love growing food, I love plants. Even when I was farming I still had my own personal garden that was like 30 minutes from where I lived, my little garden plot in a community garden. So, I just love being outside and working with plants, and growing seeds and all that kind of stuff. And I love helping people learn about gardening, which is what I loved about my AmeriCorps positions is I got to teach kids about gardening, and when I worked with Grub I got to teach families and people how to garden at their homes as well as do workshops to the public. What I really care a lot about is people being able to acquire skills so they can do these things on their own, and they don't need me or somebody else. I think there's something really powerful about being able to grow your own food.

I've always kind of had this idea that a good way to shift our food system to make it more sustainable without totally upending the system and completely changing people's diets is if we could redirect the focus of the global food system towards storage foods, preserved foods, and kind of reduce more perishable fruits and vegetables, milk, these sorts of things--these fresher foods--pull these out of the industrial system, and have that be more locally produced. Not everybody can have a bunch of fruit trees in their yard, not everybody can have a cow, not everybody can have chickens, but a lot of people can grow lettuce and tomatoes, and some of these things that are highly perishable and therefore more expensive, and therefore require a lot more input with packaging and transportation and a lot of cost added in like the shipping process. And I just feel like home gardening, and community-based agriculture could play such a huge part in reducing the ecological impact of the food system by basically taking the most resource

intensive parts of the food system, and the most expensive products as a result of that, and have that be something you could just get out of your yard, or out of a community garden plot, or out of a community project like the Farmacy Garden. I think that's what is so powerful about community-based agriculture, is that not only that you have the potential of reducing your ecological footprint, it can save money depending on how you value your time, and how much resources you have to build your garden, cause that's a resource-intensive thing. And then also you have more say in what you have access to, and how it's grown. You can have organically grown lettuce in your yard, potentially with free seeds that you get from a community seed exchange, rather than have to go spend six bucks on organic lettuce that comes in a container that was grown in California with like potentially questionable labor practices, and shipped in a truck, and you know, potentially contaminated by E. coli. So, you have a lot more say in how your food is grown, and produced, and who's to say it's healthier for you, but you have a lot more autonomy in what you have access to if you can grow it--*if you can grow it* being the key component to that. And that's what I think is so awesome about the Farmacy Garden is that it teaches people how to do those things, and can offer resources. When I was there and we dug up a bunch of raspberry plants, we gave them to people--free raspberry plants, that's huge. Berries are really good for you, and delicious, and expensive if you buy them from the store, and especially if you buy them from the Farmers Market. And so, things like community projects like the Farmacy Garden, we're offering not only knowledge and access, but also resources for people to start their own home or community gardens.

Also, when you're a low-income person you don't take risks with your money. You have this much money to spend and you have to make it count, like there's no risk-taking involved, like you can't take risks. And so, if there's something at the supermarket, and you're like 'I have

no idea what that vegetable is. I don't know if I will eat it, I don't know if my family will eat it, I don't know how to cook it, I don't know if it will fill up my belly', you're typically not gonna buy it, you know? But, the Farmacy Garden allowed people to try new foods that they had never tried before, that's like one thing that it allowed. You could go to the Health Department and you could see all this free produce available to you, and be like 'what is okra?' or like, 'I've heard of okra, but I've never bought it, I don't know...' blah blah blah, and so you could take a couple free okras, look up a few recipes, try it, and if you hated it you didn't waste any money. Maybe you wasted a little money with your olive oil, salt and pepper, but you're not buying something. And then, there were those great classes that the Family Nutrition Program was able to do, so people could try new things for free if they were there for a WIC class, which was pretty awesome. And then also, another beautiful thing with the Farmacy Garden was there's a lot of international folks in the New River Valley, and so there's a lot of like food preferences, and traditional foods that aren't always available in the NRV. And the Farmacy Garden was always asking people what they wanted to grow, and then there were also gardeners, like one who would come and plant his own seeds, and he would have these beautiful ginormous indian gourds that would grow up into the trees, and like, I still don't know what they're called, but he grew so many of them, and I don't think he could find them anywhere. And he also grew bitter melons, or bitter gourds, and tons of cilantro and dill, like TONS of cilantro and dill, like more than the average US person, white person, may eat. Non-hispanic, white person. Yeah, so I think that because the Farmacy Garden was such a community based project and so open to the community's input, and the produce was free, it offered people the opportunity to try new things that maybe they could grow easier. You know, like maybe it was a variety of beans that grew really easily, or like, maybe it was okra--okra grows pretty well here, and so it'd be something

easy for people to grow to get a green thing in their diet, and it's also really good for you. It's mucilaginous so it's really good for your digestive system and all these sorts of things. So anyway, being able to grow things that maybe people can't find at supermarkets. It gives people an option.

Also, I guess when you're living in Blacksburg as a student, you tend to see the University, right? Like, maybe not the University itself, maybe you're hanging out with people that aren't in school, but Blacksburg the town is shaped by the University, so you see a certain type of person a lot, not to be reductive. But working at the Farmacy Garden, there's like a lot of different people in the New River Valley, and while I knew that, being in the Farmacy Garden you see it more. You see a place that is extremely independent if you take me and you and the students out of the picture, a lot of people that are working in the garden have nothing to do with Virginia Tech--like nothing at all. The only part that Virginia Tech plays is Cooperative Extension and the student part. I think that that's a beautiful thing about the Farmacy Garden, it wasn't Virginia Tech the way everything else is here. Even the community gardens in Blacksburg are Virginia Tech dominated. They're all students, or people who came here for work related to Virginia Tech working in the community gardens, but when you pop over to Christiansburg and go to the Health Department over there, you see people from all over the New River Valley. So that was like a cool reminder that there's people here that aren't Virginia Tech people.

I feel very passionate about people feeling like they have options. And that they're not stuck in their decisions, because the decisions that we make are the decisions that we have in a lot of ways, and so showing people that there's more than one option, feeling like you have choice, like you have autonomy is really important. And that's what I like about the Farmacy



Garden, because the Farmacy Garden doesn't tell you what to eat, it shows you that you have options of what to eat. Whereas, I felt like the job I was in was telling people what they should and shouldn't eat, but I feel like showing them they have options, and giving them the tools and resources, at least some of the resources that they may find helpful to pursue other options is one of the really valuable things about the Farmacy Garden.

To me, the Farmacy Garden is like a public park, but better staffed with free food and classes. People didn't necessarily see it that way, people didn't necessarily feel like they could go hang out in the garden. It wasn't like, 'oh look at this great park where I'm gonna sit and have my lunch!' Maybe some people felt that way, but I feel like it was a diamond, like a gem that nobody knew about. Maybe people felt like they couldn't go there because they weren't helping, but it was actually accessible, you know, it's like a park, and just because somebody's mowing the grass doesn't mean you can't sit and enjoy yourself. And so I feel like people perceived the garden as like an inaccessible place, or like an exclusive place, whereas to me it was public space for people to hang out in and to go harvest things in, you know? It was publically funded. People working in a public space, with free food and free education and free, free, freeness. But, like, it wasn't seen that way necessarily.

Part of that disconnect could be related to the story of the garden. Like the history of the garden is one thing, and that's like great and everything, but like honestly sometimes that's like snooze, you know? Like I don't really care when it was built, I just wanna know what it is now, what it means now, and I feel like that doesn't always come across. We had a Facebook page, and maybe there was an Instagram account, but it doesn't have the support and maybe there wasn't the resources for that, maybe there wasn't the support for that in other areas, but I don't feel like people got the story of what the Farmacy Garden was at that point in time. And maybe

that's like the white picket fence, maybe the signage wasn't good enough, maybe it wasn't staffed well enough, maybe it wasn't recommended to people well enough or explained to people enough. Maybe there wasn't enough pictures in the Health Department and the clinic. I went to the Health Department and didn't even see the Farmacy Garden the first couple of times I went there. And even when I looked for the Farmacy Garden I didn't even know where it was. I was like 'I know there's a garden around here somewhere, but I honestly have no idea where', and I walked around the building and couldn't find it. And so I just think there needs to be some sort of assessment on what other projects do that are similar to the Farmacy Garden to try to get people to know what it is and to really convey the message. So to me it's like a public resource, an underutilized public resource, and maybe that's just because people don't get it, they don't trust it or something. I also think it's ambiguous. I don't think that there's a solid brand of what the Farmacy Garden is. Like even the name Farmacy Garden--what does that mean? Does it really convey that it's a public space? So it'd be interesting to do some sort of public marketing assessment of the garden itself. To be like, here's some pictures, here's the name, here's the description, tell me what you think it is. I just feel like people who are in it are so close to it, there's hardly ever any fresh eyes that feel like they have the power to critique it. There's a lot of students that cycle in and out, but you know, they're students.

The values that drove me to work with the Farmacy Garden have a lot to do with the way I like to spend my time personally. I like to be outside, I like to be working in the dirt, I like to watch something grow from seed to harvest, seed to kitchen, and I love showing people how easy it is to do that, because it is. Gardening's hard work, but it's ultimately really easy. So that value is grounded in my environmental ethic. I was into environmental activism in college, and then got introduced to food systems work through that, and that's what got me into it, and the

environmental stuff is really important, but what I think is kind of the cherry on top, or the main structure I think that what really makes me excited about it is, it that it gives people power. It gives people a sense of autonomy, it gives people the power of choice, that's sort of outside this capitalist system, you know? And what the Family Nutrition Program is, which is great, they're teaching people how to eat healthy on a budget, but like when you have to eat healthy on a budget, you don't necessarily have the same choices as when you don't have to eat on a budget, right? Like, you don't buy organic, you don't necessarily get to afford to spend your money buying fair trade stuff, or you don't have the power necessarily of all of these certifications that tell you how things were grown, or where or why. Even then those certifications don't necessarily always mean what you think they mean, or they're not as powerful as you think they are, and you just don't know. I have friends who want to be able to spend more money on food, and buy from local farmers, because they're a low-income person, and they know what it's like to be taken advantage of in a job, and what it's like to experience higher instances of environmental degradation, and they want to be a better consumer, or whatever, but they can't fucking afford it. And so I think when you have public spaces that are growing food and sharing resources, and teaching people how to grow food, that gives people a power that they didn't have before. So I think that that's one of the values that guide me to do that type of work.

I feel like there's a lot of stories that I could tell that reflect the Farmacy Garden's impact. A lot of the stories, I would say, are categorized less about access to food, and more about access to being outside and to other people, and to community. For instance, at one point this older guy came into the garden and was just kinda walkin' around, and I was like 'oh hey! What's goin on?' and he was like 'oh! What is this?' and I was explaining to him what the garden was, and he was like 'wow, this is so cool!' and then he started telling me about his gardening experiences

and then started talkin' to me about how he had gotten surgery recently on his knee and that he was unable to do things like this, garden, and how he was out of work, and on unemployment and all he wanted to do was to get better so he could get back to work, and he didn't like being lazy. And you know, I was a stranger that he was like unloading all of this information on. And maybe the garden just sort of provided this space for him to feel comfortable enough for him to talk to me about his personal frustrations and shame around not working. Then there was like another person who showed up at the garden, and I guess she had been in the garden, and done work with the garden before, so she knew the garden coordinator and stuff. She just showed up and didn't do any work, was just following me around and talkin' at me for like an hour, you know, about all these different things. I was listening to her, and there was a point where I was thinking she's gonna keep talking, which is fine, but I need to get some work done, so I just started walkin'. You know, I stood there 20 minutes listening to her and talking to her, but I wasn't actually saying anything, I was just listening, and then I was like, she just needs to talk it out, alright, I'm just gonna work. So I did, I just started working, and she just followed me around the garden and just talked at me for another 45 minutes or something crazy, and then she left and was happy as a clam. And, she didn't work at all, which was fine, but was like so pumped to get to talk to somebody about whatever. I don't even remember what she was talking about--her family maybe? But yeah, so that was pretty fun. And then there was another gardener who I used to pick up and take with me, and we would go to the garden together, and he loved the garden. I know that he loved being in the garden, and he felt really passionate about the garden itself and growing food for the community, and he would take some food home, but my perception was that he was really excited about being part of a community project that provided food to the community at large, and that he wanted to be a part of that, and it was great that he

could take some food home too. And we would have these great conversations, and he would talk to people that would come to the garden, and enjoyed being outside, and that social interaction as well. I can't remember if he ever actually commented on that as being a reason why he went to the garden, so I don't know. But then there's like the folks where I would be setting up produce in the lobby of the health department, and people would walk past, like they would come in, or be leaving the offices, and their faces would light up, and they'd be like 'oh my god!', or 'woooo!'. They'd be like, 'what is all this?' and I'd show them everything, and they'd be like 'oh my gosh', and I was like 'yeah, take whatever you want!' And they'd be like 'really?' and they'd get really excited and I'd have a couple bags for them and they'd take it and they'd be like 'so, what is this?' So I think that the most impactful part of the garden is having those interactions, and unfortunately there was no full-time person managing the garden that could be there and doing that, showing people what the different vegetables were, holding space for them to chat while they were working, because the most impactful moments that I saw was when I was interacting with other people. The garden's just not as exciting to go to when there's nobody there. When I was there doing the daily maintenance tasks and planting stuff, like I love that stuff for myself personally, and thought it was really fun, but it wasn't as impactful as when someone was there, and I was like 'we're gonna plant these spinach seeds', and this is how you do it. Or 'this is how you plant garlic', or like 'THIS is an eggplant, and it's delicious! Take it for free!' So those were the moments that I thought the Farmacy Garden was the most impactful was when people were physically there, and I was interacting with them in whatever ways. Not even necessarily transferring knowledge, but holding space for them to get all their words out that they needed to get out to somebody, anybody, but they felt safe doing that in the garden, which I think is really cool.

I think there's another really cool element of the garden that like takes the element of a hierarchical power structure out. When you go into an office and you're talking to somebody who's wearing a suit versus going to the garden and talking to somebody who's wearing dirty pants and work boots and a t-shirt, and how that makes people feel towards you when you're just doing manual labor in casual clothes versus asking people about their income, and making them prove if they deserve free government services, and you're wearing a suit, and you clearly don't qualify for those services, I guess I shouldn't say clearly, but the idea behind that is that if you're working there then you don't qualify for those services, and these are the needy people that you're helping. So I think that that's another beautiful thing about the Farmacy Garden, that everyone is just working in the garden together versus some weird power dynamic. I think it's a safe place, it's a safer space than transferring knowledge between two people that are sitting in an airconditioned office space and have two different clothings and are on opposite sides of a desk and one person asking really invasive personal questions and honestly doesn't have time for them, because they have thirty other clients they have to see that day or something.

I've worked in a bunch of different public community gardens like school gardens and educational gardens and stuff, so it was really cool to see how they did water differently, and that they had a shed, and different organizational stuff. I learned more about the Health Department, like how the Health Department worked behind the scenes, because I got to sit on the interview panel for the next Farmacy Garden coordinator, so I learned about that. I learned about what collaborations could look like between agencies, and I feel like I got a bunch of ideas of what to do, and what not to do in a similar program. I would say, more than anything, I got a lot of ideas of how to propel the project into the future, like ideas around grant writing. We were looking into writing a grant for an irrigation system, we were looking at writing a grant for doing a more

formal refrigeration unit to put the produce in for free, and just making it look prettier because it was just in these random bags and bowls and stuff, and just not very pretty, a little rough looking. Yeah, that's what I learned.

Working at the Farmacy Garden also helped validate the fact that I wanted to leave my job. I think that it helped validate the fact that I didn't want to work in nutrition, and that I didn't want to work in an office behind a screen 40 hours a week, because Fridays were the best days cause I could drive straight to the Farmacy Garden and work the first half of the day and then do follow up in the office. When that season ended, and I wasn't going outside during the work day anymore, I was really sad. So it sort of validated the fact that I care more about that type of work, maybe it's not necessarily the work I wanna do forever, or even full-time, but that sort of face-to-face community project work is really important. I like statewide programming, and training people to administer the programming into communities but like, I love community-based work, and I love face-to-face involvement, and I love gardening, I love working in the dirt and making things grow, and giving it to people, and so I wanna support that type of work moreso. I think nutrition is important, but again, in the sense of showing people that they have options, not necessarily telling people what to do. I think it's important for people to understand like, this is what fat is, this is what it does. This is what sugar is, this is what it does. These are vegetables, this is what they do, but I just don't want to be part of that. I'm tired of talking about obesity, I just wanna make people realize that vegetables are delicious and they could eat more if they wanted to. And I do see that as different than nutrition, because in that instance I think the focus is on people feeling good. There are a lot of people out there that are super "healthy", and they're really unhappy, and they don't feel good. As long as you feel good, and you feel like you have a choice in your food system, I just don't see why not eating the "perfect diet" is a bad thing.

Because like, the perfect diet, whatever that is, is not the same everywhere, and it's definitely not ecologically friendly. The idea of this sort of homogenous national diet, this prescription of a diet, like, not everybody can eat that way. It's crazy, silly to think that everybody should be eating the exact same thing, because that's not true, like our bodies need different things, and our environments provide different things. But I don't think nutrition is unimportant to talk about. If you feel bad, if you feel really bad, whatever that looks like, belly hurts, your knees hurt, your brain hurts, it's important to consider nutrition as a factor in why those things are happening. But, the best example is low-fat milk. Like, why? Why? Why? I don't understand--so you can lose like five pounds? Just eat fatty milk, I don't know understand, like, it's more delicious. Why are we putting so much energy into eating low-fat stuff when we could be growing vegetables for people. And I'm not a nutritionist, but to me that seems more important. To me. So, it's really tricky, right? Because people's health is important, like we should definitely be considering health, but when you think about marketing, and you think about where cheap food is, and all these sorts of things, that definitely plays a role, but people shouldn't be shamed for eating fatty foods. It's just that healthier vegetables need to be more of a choice. For a lot of people, their only options are fast food. It's more expensive to buy a salad at McDonalds than it is to buy a cheeseburger, so why aren't we addressing that, rather than telling people they need to do all this stuff to eat less fat? So, the Farmacy Garden is doing that--it's making vegetables more available, and it's showing people they can grow them themselves, and they don't have to rely on their food sources around them. They can be their own food source.

So another thing was when I was part of the Farmacy Garden I got to participate in the hiring process, and got to hear from all these really amazing people, and what it's made me realize is that the support the Farmacy Garden needs to be the best that it could be isn't there,



like the support from the organizational structures. The person that coordinates the Farmacy Garden is insanely skilled, right? They have to be physically able to lift and carry dirt and whatever, they have to know about gardening, they have to be able to order things, they have to be able to hold space for people, they have to be super organized and clean, they have to know how to market the program. It is such a multi-dimensional position, and there's so much the Farmacy Garden coordinator either has to know or to learn really quickly that like, they're not paying that person enough, and they're not giving them the budget that they need to do what the expectation is. Now, I understand that like there's only so much money, and this is an elective program, and there are people that really, really care about it in the Health Department, but there should be more support. So I think that that's something I've learned at the Farmacy Garden, is even though it's been said over and over again, nothing has really changed around the position and what they're expecting of the person, and what they're willing to compensate the person, and the resources they're willing to give them.

So I guess working at the Farmacy Garden made me realize that I'm not willing to work as hard as the garden coordinator did for as little money that they made. I did that, as an AmeriCorps volunteer, and I got my masters degree, and I worked for Extension, and that's what I've learned, I'm not gonna do it again. And maybe that's harsh, and you shouldn't share that with people, but I do feel like that position needs to get paid more if they want somebody to stay, and if they want to find someone that's good at it. From my past experiences I already felt like community gardening projects are really important, really impactful in a lot of different ways, and the Farmacy Garden is no different, it's a really important, cool project. For at least some people, and if it's important for some people, then I think it's an important project. And I think it could be even more impactful if it got more funding, and the support that it needed to really

flourish. But, yeah, I already knew that kind of, but maybe I learned that again. So the project needs more support financially, but also time. For the amount of times that people who said they thought the project was important, did they actually invest time in keeping the project alive? I think some people did, but I feel like it could've had more support, financially but also otherwise. Everybody likes a sexy project, but do they like to support that sexy project with their time and energy and money?

So while I've complained a lot about how they're not paying the person enough, the fact that it even exists is awesome, and I do want to be thankful for that. I wanna be really thankful for the people that put their time, and their energy, and their budget towards building the garden. And for people like the garden coordinators who are multi-talented and took it to the next level, and put their heart and soul into it. I think that gives me hope, that even though maybe the Farmacy Garden isn't putting money in people's pockets the way the WIC program does, it's still a project that's happening, and that gives me hope. The fact that the Health Department is paying somebody to coordinate it gives me hope. It could be better, the support could be bigger, but the fact that it exists is amazing, and I feel like I've complained a lot, but I do want to say that I'm really thankful for that. And that I got paid, however much I got paid, and still got to spend four hours a week working in the garden. I think that's beautiful. So I think there is a lot of support for it. Who knows what it would've looked like if I wasn't excited about going into the garden, you know? But, the fact that I had the opportunity that allowed me to be there for four hours a week was pretty amazing.

As far as big perspective shifts that I've had, many of those were from previous experiences, not from the Farmacy Garden perse. I got that in my personal home garden, I got that when I started shopping at the Farmers Market, I got that when I ran my school gardening

program--HUGE perspective shift there, because I went from Blacksburg, to a town of 1200 people, and a county of 9000 people, and working with these tiny schools in the middle of nowhere, and working with the school system for the first time. Talk about a freaking culture shock there, going from working with a bunch of gung ho 22 year olds, 21 year olds, 20 year olds in the streets yellin' about the power plant, to being like 'let's do local produce in your cafeteria', like nobody cared. People were like 'you're gonna make us more work? What is wrong with you?' And also, working with GRuB was one of the biggest perspective shifts I ever had, because I got to see the power that gardening had on people, around growing food, and feeling autonomy, and connecting with other people through food. So like, the social dynamics as well as the economic and internal relationship to yourself that gardening evokes, and the power of giving people resources and showing them how to grow food, and how to cook food out of the garden, what that did for people. That was life-changing, and that's why I studied it in grad school, it's why I did what I did in grad school. So I feel like going to the Farmacy Garden, knowing about it, I was like 'this is important work.' Even if it's maybe not super impactful, I know it could be. And if it is impactful for like three people, it's really impactful for three people. So, I don't think that the Farmacy Garden offered huge perspective shifts and teaching moments for me, but if I hadn't had the experiences I had previously, I think it would've offered similar perspectives.

In five to ten years I'd like to see the Farmacy Garden with a full-time coordinator position paid an appropriate amount of money with benefits. I would love to see the garden have consistent volunteers hosting garden hours. I would like to see a shade structure with events happening, cooking demonstrations happening out there regularly. I would love to see maybe both the clinic and the WIC office having refrigerators stocked with garden produce for free. I

would like to be able to walk up to somebody on the street and say ‘have you been to the Farmacy Garden?’ and they’re like ‘no, but I’ve heard about it and I really wanna go!’, or like ‘heck yeah, I go every week!’ or like, ‘oh, I’m planning to go on Friday’, instead of being like ‘what is that?’ I would like for it to be a recognizable name and idea, and for people to feel like they could go there, even though they have three kids in tow, and could only be there for thirty minutes, and don’t know anything about gardening, have people eat lunch there every day. I have a hard time imagining it getting any bigger, because there’s no space for it to get any bigger, except maybe in the berry area. And maybe if that project is successful, having another one. The Floyd one being successful, and well attended, and I have no idea about the Pulaski ideas, and what’s going on with that. I think the biggest thing is having a full-time supported coordinator, and having it be a commonly recognized and used space, and then just having some better infrastructure for produce delivery, distribution, and volunteer coordination.

Broadly speaking I’d like to live in a community where everybody gets what they need. One where everybody has enough money and food and mental health services, and medical care, and you know, a nonviolent world, an empathetic community. Pie in the sky, idyllic world. One where we produce all of our produce locally, at least like the majority of it. I think there’s definitely room for sort of an international global food system that imports some fruits and vegetables, because there’s so many international folks, and we can’t grow certain things here, and I feel like it’s important for people to have access to that, at least some access to that. I think in an ideal community there would be community farms and gardens where you’d be a public worker, just like there are people that you pay to pick up your trash, there are people that you pay to grow your food. You pay for people to pick up your trash, but I think like, if we could have public local farms and gardens producing communities worth of food, and have it be funding

locally, I think that would be awesome because it's really hard to be a farmer and get the money that you deserve. You have ginormous ag subsidies going towards certain grains and soybeans and stuff, which ends up getting fed to cattle, and what if we could have those subsidies going towards community farms? It'd be amazing. So I think that that's what the Farmacy Garden does. You've got taxpayer dollars going towards growing food for your local community. So it's like a model for that, it's like one example of a model that is working towards that. And if the Farmacy Garden could grow more food, and get better distribution stuff, I think that the Farmacy Garden could be one little piece of the big puzzle, and be like a pioneering model for that kind of stuff. Then not only would the Farmacy Garden be recognized locally, but it'd be recognized nationally as a concept--like a CSA, GLOBALLY EVEN--Christiansburg, Virginia, New River Valley, coined the term Farmacy Garden.

I feel like I have been involved in so many different projects that are collaborative projects between various organizations with different goals and missions, and having worked for the government I think it's really easy for me to feel disenchanted by these types of projects. I'm sure that that came out in the interview with my complaining about not getting paid enough, and this, that and the other thing, people not being as supportive as they should be. I worked for a non-profit that was amazing, and really successful in the project that I coordinated, and at the same time were struggling financially to support it in the form that it was in. They've now completely restructured and are doing it completely differently, but the project was a success in my eyes. So many people were engaged, and it was an amazing experience to be able to see a project work like that, and at the same time, so many resources were put towards that project and it had been happening for so many years, and the community knew about GRuB, people had heard about GRuB--it was a well-known non-profit in the area. And so it's easy to get frustrated

with community projects that aren't what you envision for them. And, I do feel really impressed by the effort and energy that's been put into creating the gardens, even though there's things that can be improved on, I can see the path towards improving them, and I can see the support that the garden has in a lot of different ways to make those types of things happen.

## **Appendix I: Charlotte's Story**

The idea of the Farmacy Garden developed when I met Kim at the Appalachian Foodshed Project meetings. I met her there, and we started talking, and she had just been hired. I had seen an article about the WIC garden in Floyd in like the Roanoke Times, so I was really impressed with what she was doing, and we started talking and she told me they were thinking about expanding the garden, and I went and observed her doing a nutrition education with WIC moms. I saw the garden, and she explained how they were having a lot of trouble getting people to come to the garden because either people were really far out and they didn't think it was worth the tank of gas to come, or they were pretty well versed and had land and already had their own garden--were the two reasons she told me. And so, even though they had done a survey and had gotten positive responses, they were having a really hard time. So they went from individual plot to shared plot, and she was giving away the produce at their nutrition education classes, but even though it wasn't really working, they wanted to expand the garden to another site, which, looking back now, I'm like, 'hmm, that was an interesting choice, but...'. So, I met with her and Molly, and they had the money and the infrastructure funding already in place, so I thought that was a really good partnership for SNAP-Ed. We don't really have the funding for infrastructure, but I wanted to partner with them on nutrition education, so I came up with the idea of a garden prescription program based off of merging two ideas of parks prescriptions for physical activity, and fruit and vegetable prescriptions for fruit and vegetable access, and I was like 'what if we did that with the garden, since it's right next to the clinic', and they both really loved that idea. And then I found out other people had done it too, but that just made me feel like it was a great idea. And so we started planning and pulled in Kelli Scott, the Ag Agent from Montgomery County to start planning the garden. We started planning the infrastructure together, and I started working

on programming ideas, and the ball started rolling really quickly, people really wanted to help out. The idea was really accessible to people, which I found really interesting. People really love community gardens, and they love the idea of teaching people how to do something, as opposed to just giving something to them. It seems to really match with the culture of the area, and so it went really smoothly right from the beginning, getting people signed on to help. We got volunteers from Tech, students, and from the Medical Reserve Corps through the Department of Health. And so we got a lot of help from people, and Kelli and Kim really had the plan going infrastructure-wise, and we just had a few volunteer days, and the garden came together really quickly, physically. And we started reaching out to the physicians at the clinic to kind of get them on board with the idea of the actual prescription program. They had a new director at the time, and she was very on board, and we found through trial and error that it took a lot of convincing of the rest of the staff. We tried to do some presentations at staff meetings, and, really, what my personal opinion is, is you need the front desk staff behind you, because those are the people who get the word out about your program, so trying to keep those people on board with the idea was important. But, yeah, that's how it was launched. It came together really well. It was actually a really nice merging--no one ever really talked about funding, no one talked about anything like that, everyone just really wanted to pitch in, and the programs played together really, really well, which was really exciting to see.

My personal history with community gardens was in New York City. I worked for a group called New Yorkers for parks, and they are a parks advocacy group, so their main thrust is to advocate for equally safe, accessible, beautiful parks for every neighborhood in the city. Harlem should be the same as Midtown, Manhattan should be the same as Staten Island, and that is not the case. They've been around for a long, long time, actually the first people who started



this idea, like Jacob Reese was on the original board, so it's been around for like 100 years in different permutations, and they have a history with the community gardens in New York. So the history of community gardens in New York is they are often built on lots that were abandoned by the city. In the '70s and '80s when there was all this white flight and there was a lot of abandoned buildings, buildings that were knocked down because they had either safety issues, or there was drugs going on in there, the community built gardens on those sites that were abandoned by the city, so they were city land usually, but not being used. And so, to make use of these sites, which were often used for prostitution or drug dealing they turned them into gardens. When the late '90s came around, Giuliani started to sell off the land, because now it was worth something again, and there was this huge legal battle, and they actually won, the gardens won, to maintain themselves as gardens. They are often still under attack, but if you can get them mapped as parkland, that usually means they are safe, so some of the gardens have been mapped as parkland, some are still just gardens that aren't parkland, but long story short, I worked for this organization that had a partnership in getting them preserved.

Because I was the outreach coordinator for the New York for parks group, I worked for all different types of parks groups. And there's a million different types of parks groups. There's joggers, there's dog people, there's soccer people, there's environmental people, there's bird watchers, there's fishers, there's like all these different groups that access parks for different reasons. I really loved that job, fucking weirdest people in New York City, oh man, you see them when you walk in a meeting room you're like-- 'that one's a fisher'. But, I would go to the monthly meetings for the New York City Community Gardens Association, which was a very interesting organization--it was actually run by Karen Washington, she was president, so I met her several times, and so they would run these meetings and I would attend them. I ran this

memorial project for 911 that was a partnership between New Yorkers for Parks, my organization, and New York City Parks Department, and basically, it's this project where we get a million daffodil bulbs, it's a weird fuckin' thing, we get this million daffodil bulbs every Fall, and we plant them in the Fall all over New York City Parks and gardens, anywhere that's accessible. They've been doing this every year, so there's like 15 million daffodils spread across New York City every Spring. My job was to get the million daffodil bulbs off the boat and into the hands of people across the city every Fall. It gave me so much gray hair. It was horrifying. I had to maintain the relationships with the community gardens to make sure they would take the bulbs and get the word out to all of their gardeners that these...get these fuckin' bulbs off the boat, we've gotta get them off the boat, 'cause they're rotting. And so, it was, oh my god, it was horrific, but a fun project in the Spring when you see them come up. You're like 'oh, this is why we do this.' So that was my relationship with community gardens, and it was like I always wanted to be more involved, but I was always this outsider 'cause I wasn't a community gardener. It's really hard to become a community gardener in New York. It's usually a two year waiting list or something, and so I was in the gardens but not of the gardens, I wasn't this huge participant. I was feeding them resources at some points, but I wasn't really like doing it, and I really always wanted to be more involved. I feel like every meeting I go to about food access or about revitalizing a low-income community, or beautifying a city, or any of that, whatever meetings I happen to roll into, someone always raises their hand and says 'let's build a community garden!' You know? It's like the first answer people have for some reason. People have like this incredible belief in their healing power, and their power to bring people together, and I was really excited to be given the chance to build a community garden from the ground up,

because I had just always wanted to see how it happened, and I learned a lot. It was really, really exciting and fun to be there from the beginning.

So my role in the garden has changed over time. Originally I was helping to plan it, and we did some programmatic outreach, and I worked with the SNAP-Ed program assistant to see if it would fit in her schedule to do nutrition education in the garden, and then we also provided an intern in the garden to provide some staff time, and then I also provided staff time, so I was in the garden one day a week for the summer, for like two or three summers. I also helped with some evaluation, so like helping to plan what surveys we asked clients and things like that, and trying to link the Farmers Market. There was the Christiansburg Farmers Market, and once we got the funding for the Vouchers Increase Produce Access program, we tried to link the garden to the farmers market, but that farmers market was always hard to work with so it was just like an uphill battle. So, just trying to figure out different ways we could use the garden since it was such a beautiful tool and just sitting there. As my role at the Family Nutrition Program started to get bigger and change and grow just beyond farmers markets to other things, I had to kind of step back, so we just ended up really providing the intern, and another staff member was in the garden the summer before last, and then this past summer summer it was just the intern. So, we really started to just provide stafftime, and access to nutrition education through one of the FNP program assistants. It was kind of hard to maintain that closeness with the Department of Health when they had trouble hiring, so I haven't met the new garden person yet. I think the Department of Health really took the garden on more, and so I just haven't had the hand in that I have in the past.

The garden embodies this idea of, if you think it, it can happen. You know? It kind of just got spoken into existence at some point, it was just like three ladies chattin' about a good idea,

and everyone was like, 'yes, yes, yes, do it, do it, do it', and I was like 'oh, this is how you do it, you just do it.' And so it was very exciting to see that, that an idea can become such an actual grounded reality. Cause usually I have a lot of programs, but they're not like a physical space, so that was really exciting to see--what was literally just a parking lot become like, 'oh my god, there's a bird over there, and he's eating that thing,' you know? It's just really exciting to see.

I've had a kind of winding road to this work. When I went to social work school, I was working in a vocational ESL program at the time, so I was working with immigrants who were learning English to be better at whatever job they had, so they got job training and English. I really, really wanted to work with farmworkers, but I was in Manhattan, so that wasn't really coming to fruition, but that was as close as I could get to that group--was this vocational ESL group that I worked with. So I went to social work school, and I found myself going to the park outside my apartment, 'cause I was constantly stressed 'cause I was in grad school, so I would just go to the park. And so then I started researching like, is there something behind that? And I found horticultural therapy. So then I started volunteering at the botanical garden, and I was like this is what I want to do, and I think I can do this with Social Work, and I just need more exposure to the gardening side. My husband and I thought we were gonna move to Colorado, so I graduated, and I only had like six months before I thought we were leaving. We ended up not leaving, but I thought we were leaving so I was like I need a temporary job, and I looked on Craigslist under agriculture, even though I had a social work degree, and I found Green Market, the Farmers Market, so that's when I ran Farmers Markets. Then, after that, we decided to stay in New York, because he was going to grad school, so I got the job at New Yorkers for Parks so I had this kind of experience with gardens and farmers markets and they all kind of went together. I just really felt like the food access part was the most interesting part of all of that to me, and the

food justice, and also the sense of empowerment people get from either growing their own food, or learning about where their food comes from, or the cultural relevancy of all of that. I just really loved all of that, and felt like all of a sudden it was very popular too, and so there were a lot of avenues to do it. And then I found this job here and I was like this is crazy cause literally every bullet point on the job description I had done. And I was like, it's like someone made me a job in this tiny-ass town in the middle of nowhere! I don't know how I got here, it just kind of all worked out.

I think there's a few different times that I realized the garden was impactful. One was when the Surgeon General under Obama came to Southwest Virginia, and they were looking for stories and somebody told him, I don't know who, but someone told him about the Farmacy Garden and he talked about it in a speech, and I was like 'wait, what now?' And he was talking about the prescription part of it, and I was like 'that's my idea', but no one wants to hear you say that, so I couldn't really tell anybody, 'that was totally my idea', so that was really exciting for me personally. And then, I remember being in the garden one time, and some families came over from the Federally Qualified Health Clinic, and it was a mom and a son, and the son was like three. I showed them around, and I let the son have like a string bean, and the mom was like 'oh, I never, I hate string beans, he's not gonna wanna eat that string bean, I hate string beans.' And he happily ate it, and wanted more, and I could see her be like 'ohhh', because she was saying how like 'I don't eat raw string beans, I only want them heavily salted' basically was the long story short of how she would eat string beans. Watching her watch her kid eat a raw string bean and enjoy it, and be like 'oh, maybe there's another way to feed my kind a string bean' other than really processed and canned, it was just like really interesting to watch her be like 'oh, I really thought he wouldn't, and then he did.' And I also really enjoyed another family that came

by, and it was like grandparents, and parents, and kids, and watching the grandparents and kids really feel comfortable in the garden, and with the parents it felt like there was this missing generation. Like grandparents grew up with gardens, and then these people who are like 40-50 just don't have that same facility in a garden. I feel like they just weren't as exposed, I don't know what's going on with Generation X. I think they're like the first generation that didn't grow up doing that as much, and then the kids just love gardens. So it was just really interesting to see this generational gap. Or maybe they just work more and don't have the time? The idea of having to grow your food, it takes all summer, it's like they just didn't have that same attachment, and I was like 'oh, that's really interesting.' So I think the garden helps people, and it's nice that it's a garden you can dip in and out of if you don't have the time to maintain it on your own. And it's also a nice place for people to go and learn how to do some container gardening at home to supplement what you're eating. I think it's a really nice, accessible living classroom for families to come together and have some space to be like, 'I do like this, I don't like this. Oh, you know how to do that? I never knew you knew how to do that.' It's like a really nice place for people to show off some skills they might not even be sharing with their family. It's just really interesting to watch what comes out of people. And once the relationship with people from other countries was built in the garden, like the guy from India, I mean, immigrants and gardens are like peas and carrots, because they come from places where this is still a thing. And being able to grow your own food and then share it with others, and talk about it, it's just such an elicitor of memories for either grandparents and children, or people from other countries too, it's just such a story producer, a story lab and it's just really interesting to watch people do that while their hands are busy doing something. It's just really nice.

Being in the garden I have learned I'm not a gardener. Really thought I knew things, I don't. Really failed my vegetable patch this year, I was like 'oh god, really bad.' But I also learned patience, like these programs take time, the garden takes time, it takes time to build the relationships with the other programs to get them to value the garden, just how much time all of that takes, and if you want people to really buy in, and that participatory action model to work, how much relationship building that takes, and to maintain it, and stuff like that. I had known that before, but when there's a physical site involved, it just feels different. It felt more real than just running a program that pops in and out of existence. I had never really had that feeling of like stewardship of a site before, and so that was really interesting.

With the Farmacy Garden I just felt like we had a really good idea. And like, 'oh this is fun,' and to have other people buy in so quickly, you know, it felt really gratifying. I was like 'oh, maybe we're good at this'. It was the easiest program I've had to launch and explain to others. People just grasp it very intuitively. Whereas like SNAP at Farmers Markets, you would think that would be intuitive, and it's just not. And all the other stuff that we do it just, takes me ten minutes to explain, whereas the garden's like \*snap snap\* 'ah, that's great.'

I'm very cautious about physically starting gardens now. There's so much fallow garden site around Virginia that the Family Nutrition Program partners with, for example schools, so many schools have fallow gardens. Having learned from the Farmacy Garden of what it takes to start and maintain a site, it requires paid staff is my new opinion on this and I feel like without that it's really gonna flounder. So my point of view is, with our staff, I really encourage them to get into partnerships where the infrastructure is built and waiting, and just needs a little help, as opposed to putting together a site. Because at the end of the day, it's more of a sustainability plan

than building something from scratch. It's just not in SNAP-Ed's strength to do that. And I really had to learn that, so it was interesting.

I think the Farmacy Garden underlined what I had observed in the community gardens I partnered with or volunteered with in the city in like what a garden provides to the people who participate in it. Like I was saying before, access to community, and access to feeling that they're learning something and are useful, and that sense of wonder and magic, and connection to the Earth, and all that healing that comes from all those different things just made me really believe that yes, that is an outcome of being committed to a garden, but it didn't really change anything, it just underlined that for me.

I also learned a lot about Montgomery County from that project, and being outside the Tech bubble in Montgomery County in that project, and actually talking to people who grew up in Christiansburg vs. Blacksburg, or Shawsville vs. Blacksburg. You know, the insane difference that is. I learned what it meant to be country, which I literally had zero idea what that meant. I'm sorry to say, but I didn't. I mean I grew up in the suburbs and moved to Manhattan, so I just had never experienced people who grew up in a really small town and what that means, and what family means, and what religion means, and what owning land means, and working it, and not just like looking at it like a weird tourist you know? That was very eye opening.

I think the Farmacy Garden helped me understand what rural poverty means in a way I hadn't really thought about before. This sense of making do with what you have, and growing your own things, canning your own things, is like independence, and of knowing how to do things, and respecting all of that cause I was taught to respect professionalism, and academics, and not that like, 'I can fix this entire house with like string', you know what I mean, rust and nails, and it's gonna last, and it's like 'oh, I cannot do that.' So, that idea of being able to like fix



things, and work with your hands, I don't know that like mechanical know-how, like when they put that freaking glass house up, you know, the greenhouse? And like, watching that woman do that, and just like 'I'm gonna do this', I'm like, that would've just stayed in the box for the next ten years if I owned it. So, yeah, I just really learned to respect that, and be in awe of that, because I just don't have that in my wheelhouse. And around food too, preserving food, and talking with people about what they grew up gleaned from the land, and growing, and hunting, and it's like, 'oh, man, I never thought about any of that.'

I feel like when I started this work it was like, obviously farmers markets and community gardens are gonna save everything and everyone. And it's just so much work to maintain both of those different kinds of outlets that I'm like 'um, maybe there needs to be something else too.' But it made me appreciate the different levels of food access and how hard it is to change access, and increase it. And just how much sweat goes into that, and how much sweat goes into feeding us every day on this planet. You know? And, to not waste it. And to not take it for granted. It made me really look at what was going on around me and what wasn't going on around me. What we didn't have access to, or things I had never really thought about. Like, I didn't know, there's a cattle auction building in Christiansburg, and I don't think they use it too often, but I'm like 'huh?' You know, now I kind of know what that means and what that is, and I had never paid attention to that stuff before. And, I don't know, I just learned a lot about country stuff.

I think the Farmacy Garden teaches people the same thing, of like, this took us months to grow, and you saw what that meant, how we had to defend it against bugs, and nurture it, and tell it it's lovely, and watch it slowly create it's little self. It's getting people to also appreciate that and how much time that takes, and to open their mind to other possibilities--that there's other vegetables than the 10 we see every day at the grocery store, and to think a little more creatively,

because you're gonna have to, because the way we're doing things now isn't sustainable, and it's probably gonna have to change soon, and so get a little flexible in what you're feeding yourself, and appreciate what you have on your plate.

I think I learned a lot about just gardening in general at the Farmacy Garden. I hadn't really done vegetable gardening, I'd done flowers, and I just didn't know a lot of stuff. I didn't know how long it took. And so, I just really appreciated what nature was able to do on that little plot, and how animals came, and those giant meadow spiders, those giant yellow ones in the compost bin, and how terrifying they looked, but they're like so sweet, you know? Just stuff like that, you know, taking time to notice little things was really nice.

I think the Farmacy Garden gave me a deep appreciation for community gardens that are doing the work, and maintaining themselves. I see a lot of them go in and out of existence and the ones that are able to stick around, I'm like, 'man, they've really put the time and work in.' And it also makes me appreciate the ones that go in and out of existence. I understand why that happens, you know? And, I feel like I learned that I'm not really a maintainer, I'm a starter of these things, and what that means. And to not overextend myself on things, and so I learned that on just planning programs in general. Like right now, I saw LEAP took over the Roanoke Community Garden Association, because RCGA basically decided to dissolve, because again, it's really hard to maintain a non-profit that runs gardens and only runs gardens. I'm really good friends of the Executive Director of LEAP and I'm just like 'ahhh, it's hard!', and they are stellar. They are an excellent organization, and I have nothing but faith in their ability to do it, but I'm like man, it's hard, and it's so different from running farmers markets. Whereas farmers markets mushroom up and then disappear in like five hours, this is a site you're maintaining, and it's in a community, and it's such a different skillset, so I'm just watching from afar, like oh god.

What gives me hope about the Farmacy Garden is that the Department of Health got behind it, the Federal Clinic got behind it, the sense that medicine is changing to include this point of view, and to value access to a garden, growing food, education, tasting things, like all the time and effort that takes, as opposed to just assigning a person pills, is very exciting to me. I hope that that continues, and that value of exposure to nature, and community in a garden is equal a value as access to fruits and vegetables cause I think that is part of the magic. I just feel like we have a very innate reaction when we're surrounded by green, and when it's green that we're stewarding and taking care of in a way that's not harming it, that's like really human, you know? We've been doing that for thousands of years, and it's kind of what sets us apart from most things, and I don't know, I think you just tap into something very human when you do that. And it helps us bridge all the divide of like provider to client, or immigrant to person who grew up here, or parent to child. It kind of helps you bridge any of those divides that might be experienced by the people that are there, and find something in common really quickly and easily, and I think that's exciting.

In five to ten years I hope the Farmacy Garden is still there. I hope the Department of Health gets other sites to do it too. I do think it's replicable, as long as there's funding for staff time from somebody and the clinic is kind of close. I would love to see it in other sites around the state. I think it's a good idea. I hope it's grown. I hope it's taken full advantage of, because I feel like there's still room to grow with the number of people using it, and so I hope that it becomes such a part of the social service community right there, the Health and DSS and everybody right there. I hope it becomes such a part of that fabric that it's just really used to its full advantage by everybody.

Generally, I'd love to live in a healthy community that's safe and equal for everybody, everybody has access to the same good stuff. I think something like a Farmacy Garden helps with that. Gardens are proven to increase public safety because there's people out and about, and people take ownership, and it's increasing access to fruits and vegetables obviously, and it's just helping people learn about things they might not have otherwise, and so I think that somewhere like a community garden is really important to maintaining a sense of community and a sense of place.

I just think the Farmacy Garden is a really beautiful place. It's a little piece of heaven. I just remember sitting under that shade tree and looking out over it and being like 'we built this!' you know? And it wasn't just me, and wasn't just one person, it was a lot of hands, and a lot of different people keeping an eye on it, and taking care of it, and no one claiming ownership of it, and that idea of like the commons really coming to life, and that felt really lovely. It was like a little secret gem, and I think everyone felt that about it, and that everyone was able to be like 'it's my little secret gem', but everyone was working on it is really nice, it was really kind of magical. It felt like a real community.

## **Appendix J: Anita's Story**

Growing up I was a military child and we moved a lot, and everywhere we moved my father planted a garden. That was one thing that was consistent no matter where we lived. It may have been small or big depending on where we lived. The very last place we lived in the military was Illinois, because that's where he retired. He also taught gourmet cooking at the vocational school there and they grew some of food they would cook with in a garden out back. That was in 1978, so that was a long, long time ago. He grew a huge garden with the students, and then also one for home. That was like the biggest one we ever had, you know, back before farm to table was a thing, I'm looking at that thinking it's a little behind, but hey, whatever works. So always having a garden was something we did and I never knew that you could not have a garden. So, that's where I started as far as gardening, and that's how when we first moved here it was like, okay, what can we do to, first of all, integrate into the area that we're moving in. It was a big move, and how do you meet people with similar belief systems or ideas, or things that are common, a community to share in with people like you? Finding people like you makes it a little more comfortable to get along. And so, looking around, we were at the hotel in Christiansburg, that was where we stayed, and the first thing I did the day we pulled in was go get a library card at the local library, it was from there that I learned about the garden, that was the Christiansburg Library, so thank them, they're awesome. I got my first library card, which is usually the first thing I do in every town that I move to, get a library card. But then we were in a hotel, so there was not going to be a garden, but I had little plants, I took cuttings, you can't travel across country lines with plants, so I took cuttings--we were growing little things on the windowsill at the hotel.

When I found out there was a Farmacy Garden (it was the thought behind it that brought me at first), and research, because that's who I am, I did a lot of research, and I was like, okay, why do they call it the Farmacy Garden? Then I heard what the Health Department was doing in

conjunction with the garden, and I was like, okay, even if I can't get any vegetables out of there, it is something I can believe in and support. We can go do this and it gets us out into the community. We didn't know our way around, so that was our first experience meeting people, getting out of the hotel room, and something that my dad, my daughter, and I could do together, and it was free. So it was definitely enticing--do something for free, get your hands in the dirt, get some sunshine, and then go home. That's basically all I expected, was to come help and make it a place for people to come that got the little garden prescriptions. I thought that was just the greatest idea ever. I wish everybody could do that and that's how we got there.

So I was motivated to participate by the idea of helping create a space where everyone could access fresh vegetables, and whatever else was growing in the garden. Even the flowers, for me is an emotional support--they're beautiful, they smell good, they help the pollinators. People learn about their food, not just-- 'hey, I go to the grocery store and get this or that ', or 'I can't go to the grocery store right now, my money doesn't stretch that far'. This is something that, even if they can't be there to help maintain, they can still come benefit. We were able to have the time along with the motivation behind the place, not only as a resource for health and welfare of other people in the community, but to teach them that it's really not that hard. It's very important that it's not hard, because the obstacle for the success of a lot of things is how much effort is it gonna take? They don't have to dig in their own backyard, the spaces are already there. Everything's provided, you just come and put your hands in the dirt, plants food share and learn. If you don't know something, you ask. And if you are like us, and don't really know a lot of things--companion planting--did not know about that! I learned about companion planting in the garden. And just the fact that, people came in and they could ask questions without judgement. There's always something you can do in that garden, even if it's just to keep people company--that all contributes to the garden. Just being there is a contribution, because at

least you made that first step, and that was kind of my thing, taking that first step. Also, like I said, learning more about vegetables, trying things I may not have tried, because of the Tuesday night cooking gatherings. For example, when I was younger I had a bad experience with squash, like ‘eww, that squash, horrible, the worst thing ever!’ but having it not overcooked, boiled, or boiled the flavor out of, was an experience in itself. I just didn’t know there were other ways to prepare it! I learned about, I don’t eat okra and tomatoes, but now I you don’t have to deep batter, and deep fry it. I mean, that’s generally a southern way to prepare it, but you can eat it with sautéed tomatoes, and it’s just like, wow. You don’t have to use pesticides. Who knew? All the things you can learn, and how different the flavors are, as opposed to the unflavored stuff in your store.

At the Farmacy Garden I engaged in digging sweet potatoes. I did not realize how deep sweet potatoes could actually grow. I thought, ‘oh this is it! Because digging sweet potatoes is actually a most satisfying thing, because you just keep going and going. I had no idea. I thought like everything else, there’s one layer and then you’re done, not in sweet potatoes. You can get pounds and pounds in one little square foot. I was so amazed, and if I could have just dug all day, I probably would have. That was just like the most awesome thing to me. Oh, and the huge sunflowers. Now, the sunflowers, they were like walking to sunshine, just being surrounded by little sunshines, I did like that. The Tuesday cooking event with things from the garden, it was just an amazing feeling knowing it went from garden to plate without a lot of transport, without going to the grocery store, without plastic, it was just so very environmental, it was eco-friendly. Getting together with people, bringing things from the garden was a wonderful community-like meal. It was like having a family reunion with people you picked for family as opposed to your actual family, you actually wanted to see them, and you were willing to enjoy the space that you were in. It was just a fun time. The dinners were probably the best. I liked being dirty, but being

around people who were just kinda hanging out and trying whatever was brought, like the squash casserole that my daughter's just crazy about--she never ate squash either, but blame our grandparents for that. My mom was not a good cook, trust me, we were like 'wow, it could've tasted like this, what were we eating? What were they feeding us, because this is so great!' Also I never ate beets until I moved here. I now eat beets! FYI I eat beets--never ate beets because they were horrible, but prepared well they're good.

To me, the garden means love. It just means love. We used to go, even when it was closed and just walk around for the flowers just to look at what had been done. If you had a bad day, going to the garden always makes it better. I can't explain it, it's just the garden. It can be empty, but you just look over there and you know what's gonna be over there in the Spring, you mulch over here, there's a compost happening in the corner, everything's not gonna always make it. Like some of the tomatoes had little blemishes and blight and there were little creepy crawlies, and SLUGS, oh my god. So, I mean, it's not perfect, but it doesn't have to be, cause we're not perfect, so that makes it even better--it's more like me. You're connected to the space, you're connected to the earth. I'm a sensitive-type person and I like my spaces. It's the energy, you can always get some positive energy out of that garden, even if you're not doing anything but standing in it, and absorbing it. So, like I said, we would drive through the parking lot, and just sit in the car and just look at the sunflowers. We've done that. My daughter has gotten out of the car and taken pictures because they're on the outside gates, and then we go on the other side and there are wildflowers just for the garden. You don't even have to get in it, we're just there. We've done that many times and she's got film of it, but what's important is it's love. It is love, kindness, it's nonjudgmental, welcoming, healing, freedom, you're free to be, you're not confined by the expectations of what people expect you to be or who they want you to be, you can just be you in the garden, cause everybody's dirty, everybody's nasty, everybody's hot,



everybody's sweaty. There's no hierarchy up in there, we're all dirty. We all get dirty together. You can't try to be cute up in there. You walk into that garden looking rough, and that's ok, because you're gonna look rough when you leave anyway.

I'm motivated to stay involved for the vegetables, they're wonderful, but really it's the ability to ensure that space stays for others, even if it's not me, for others. My dad had a stroke not long after we started with the garden and very recently he was in the hospital for a week with congestive heart failure. He went from mobile to wheelchair in one day, so that has prevented my active involvement, but we are working our way back out. Now that he's in a wheelchair getting in and out of there will be a little more difficult. We did get new wheels so they may work, but I'm not really sure, so that's the only other thing, wheelchair accessibility.

The values that drive me to participate in the garden are community, empathy, nurturing, helping, I like to help, I like to learn, I'm always looking to learn new things. I like to try new things, and whether I fail at them or not, at least I tried. Adventurous, spiritual--that's a big reason, because again, that place has an effect, it has an aura. Just a warm, embracing aura. Let's see, what else...Educational, learning, active, community involvement, caring, nurturing, loving, kindness, sharing. Lots of words. All the words. All the good words. Positivity, I try to stay positive, even when situations look like they're dire. I'm a big, hey it could be worse, but I'm still here. Survival, because you can grow a garden when you can't go grocery shopping. You can go outside and get that tomato if you did it right, and you might not get a lot, but that one is more than you had when you started. I said half my yard is gonna be garden. Just gonna get out there with a big thing and just rake it all up. I'm also doing a wildlife habitat on one side because I hate lawns, they're stupid and they don't feed us.

I realized the garden was impactful when I couldn't go. When I couldn't get there when my dad had his stroke, I realized I missed the garden. I still miss the garden. I did go once, I had

to, but when I realized that I couldn't get to the garden, I couldn't get out there that season, that was the hardest thing for me--and I'm gonna get emotional, that's just who I am, but that hurt me so bad, you have no idea, because I needed that, that's my place. It's healing, you're outside, you breathe clean air, and I was in a freaking hospital, breathing germs. And there was no support, I didn't know those people, but at the garden there are people. And everybody's got a common goal, so you're all there for the same reason. And everybody has their own problems at home, but in the garden, the garden is it. You're focusing on the garden, and that was when I realized, oh my god, I miss the garden!

The changing of the garden leadership was also a little bumpy, cause there was a gap, and it was like, what do we do. It was like, we had no guidance. We were like on a ship with no captain, we were just wandering through the night, going well, what do we do next? There's no list on the door--how do we know what to do? So, that was another little bump, which kinda messed with the flow. And so that kinda threw the schedule off, for all the people. So that's when I realized the stroke, the gap, how do we get back on track. It's kinda like we lost the momentum.

By being part of the garden I learned companion planting, I learned that I can grow things without pesticides, and that all vegetables, and rhubarb, and things are not horrible if I try it fresh, or get a recipe, and somebody always has a recipe for things in that garden. There's always, 'oh, have you tried it this way?' and not everybody knows every recipe, but somebody will know how to cook everything in there. I've learned proper planting techniques, companion planting techniques, like how to properly manage tomatoes and basil. I had some basil last year, just for the record--it was gorgeous. And I learned how to properly care for a garden without pesticides and chemicals, which I did not think was possible, I didn't know any better. But that was a big thing, you could grow it, it will be okay, and it can be beneficial to the insects, and you

don't have to kill them all. There are actually some that are good for you. I knew what was good and what was bad. Pollinators, I learned a lot about pollinators, and how they are necessary in our food cycle. I had no clue, no clue, but I learned about that. I learned that you can plant a lot of stuff in little bitty spaces, you don't need a huge acreage. You can use, like that little square, the little rectangles that we planted in. I also learned about rotation. I learned that you can grow squash, and then you take it out and put something else in there, but it's certain things that you can plant behind other things to help put nutrients back into the ground for the next crop season. It's like, really? Really? Yeah, I learned a lot about planting, and growing, and managing a garden naturally, and that was just the best. Like I said, I didn't grow a lot last year, but we had containers with basil, tomato, and I even got a little watermelon, just a little one, it wasn't real big, it was a little one, it was all in containers because they were high enough for my dad to get to. We also got some little carrots, but we did it with no chemicals and it was so awesome. We didn't get much, except the basil, it kept coming back. So the Farmacy Garden was responsible for my ability to have more produce from a smaller space. I companion planted, which like, again-- had no clue! I had to get some chicken wire and stuff after I realized the rodents would eat my stuff, bunnies and deer and groundhogs, you know, lots of little things, lots of little creatures. So that's the thing, it was just a few plants, and we're a family of three, so it was perfect. I had to share the basil with neighbors, there was so much of it, but I learned that at the Farmacy Garden--I thought I had to have rows. Nope! A little bit, proper planting techniques, water management and it was on, but that was all from the Farmacy Garden.

Working at the Farmacy Garden I realized that gardening is one thing that you can do no matter where you are, no matter how small the spot is that you have, and you can do it with your family. It doesn't take a lot of money, it doesn't take a lot of commitment basically the plants grow on their own--you don't have to coddle them. But it's something to look forward to as a

family, to watch your food grow, and check on it daily, or just to go out. That got my dad out, he was very depressed after the stroke because he was in the wheelchair, and he can't use but one side of his body, and it's not his dominant side. So, that was the one thing that we could all do. Even if he couldn't dig, he picked the seeds--I'd get the seeds in my hand and he'd pick them out, and he planted the seeds, and he'd cover them up, so that was something. Every day we'd go out and I even got him a little bitty watering can, cause his motor control was off but, he'd water. So there was that, again, something the family could do, even after. That was the one thing that brought him...he's not completely healed, but emotionally he's in a much better place, because of what we learned at the garden, so that did help a lot because his big thing was he couldn't get to the garden. Again, I told him 'we're gonna work on it, we're gonna figure it out. We're gonna figure it out, cause this year, it's on!' The chair he had before was awful, this one's a little more for the outdoors. I took him hiking at Claytor Lake so it should do better, but I got to look at what's on the ground this time. Maybe we'll figure it out, and if not we'll put him in the corner, just to get him out there. He likes being out there. Even if he's just watching, but he'll pick stuff, trust me. You don't watch him for a second and something will be shoved in his pocket. Trust me. This is something you could do as a family no matter what your situation is--be you completely able, partially able, completely disabled. Yesterday he went just outside to show me he could be outside. I'm like 'well we're not planting anything, it's still a little too cold.' But, I have a whole bag of tulips in the refrigerator from Tech that we're gonna plant when it's time. So yeah, just to get him out, like I said, that was the thing. Again, no matter where you are, even if it's one little plant, in a little cup, on a shelf. Anybody can do it, and watching it, just watching it grow. Anyway, watching it grow, watching us grow. We grew as people.

Because of the Farmacy Garden I don't want to shop in the produce section of the grocery store anymore, and actually I pay more attention to my fruits and vegetables at grocery

stores. Sometimes when we were at the garden a lot I'd drive to the grocery store and say 'we got that at the garden, we got that at the garden', and 'local, that's not local, local's the garden. The garden's local', so I see the world differently. I was watching something the other day where they said local could be 250 miles. Local could be by region, or hemisphere. And I'm like 'noooo', and it has me checking what local really means. That's what the garden does. It makes you more aware of the world around you. It has me going to the farmers market, that I hate most days, but I go. It makes me more aware of what I eat, where it comes from, and what's being put in it. I read more ingredients than I care to imagine because of the garden. I have stopped eating a lot of stuff because of the garden. But I'm okay with that, because I haven't been as sick, I've noticed my dad has not either. We haven't had flus or colds. He got sick after the stroke, but that was a whole other issue. Beyond that, the illnesses, and just overall mood is better. Like I said, I pay more attention to what I eat and where it comes from, and we went to a more plant-based diet because of the garden, because there were so many vegetables that were available and good, so that was another thing. So it has changed our shopping style.

I also want to know my farmer, I want to know where my food comes from more than before. Before I kinda cared, but I kinda cared in the grocery store, I didn't care in my community. I thought about it a little bit in Alaska because they're more subsistence living there, but we didn't live there all the time, we only lived there a couple years before we lived here. Before we lived there that was not a thing, it was 'oh okay you go in the store, you buy organic, you buy a box, whatever.' But my values have completely shifted to say now I will walk in a store and if it's in too much plastic, or like I'll go to the farmers market first, and if I absolutely have to get something I'll go to a health food store second, and then I'll go get what I can't get and absolutely have to have at a grocery store. It never went that way in my brain, because a lot of health food stores, and I'm still noticing, are expensive. They're expensive, and for that, with

a budget, it's prohibitive for a lot of people, but with the garden supplement, it makes me think, okay go to the garden, that helps. That reduces your burden in other ways, and you can use that to buy better quality ingredients for the rest of your meal. So that's kinda how I'm approaching life because of the garden.

Being part of the garden has changed my perception of my community because my community is real. A lot of people don't know their neighbors, and that is your community, but you don't think of that until something major happens, like if there's an earthquake, or a fire. Now all of a sudden you come together and these are your neighbors, but did you know them prior to that? I know both of my neighbors on either side of me right now. I know their names, I have their phone numbers, if something happens, if they go on a vacation they say 'hey, we're gonna be out of town'. I know my neighbors and I vote. I vote all the time, but what I voted on before was different. What I'm caring about now is the environment, I mean I cared about it, but did I really? It's like you care about it as you turn up your plastic water bottle. Ehhhhh, where's the level of care? We all now have reusable water things (REI helped with that too). And, I have Nalgene's, but we have our stainless steel now. We have our conscious cutlery, each of us has a little pack--it's stainless steel or bamboo, and we're not using the plastic silverware. To me it's not a lot, but it's one person making a change, and now a whole family has made that change, and so the garden, and community, it made me think 'what is my impact in this space?' I didn't think of my personal impact in a space before that. And it's like, what am I giving to this space? Working in the garden was me giving to my community, and going to the farmers market is me shopping in my community, supporting small businesses. I mean, Amazon was like THE place. Amazon is now the last place I wanna go get my stuff. I wanna see what I can get in my community.

As far as the natural world, I hike now. I hike, and I take natural snacks, and I know that I can. Because like I said, the garden taught me that there are things you can do, even just getting out more, which I was not doing, and like I said before, I learned that even just going to the garden was getting out. Even if we couldn't put our hands in that dirt, we were outside. Being outside now is a priority, as opposed to 'ehhh, I guess I'll go...' No. It's a priority in my life. It's a priority for my family. We weren't those people. We traveled, but we didn't travel and go 'ohhh! Is there a place to hike while I'm traveling?' We traveled a lot, like the first thing I did when I realized we were going to Cleveland--well where's the nearest trail? I'm gonna walk this trail. He was in the hospital in Giles County. I walked around that little hospital to see how many times I could. I'm like 'how big is this hospital?' 'Can I get out that door?' And they were like 'okay, she's crazy.' But every day, I walked outside around that itty bitty community hospital because I needed to be outside. I can't sit in a house anymore. Even if it's thirty minutes, if I can get out just for thirty minutes a day, that's what the garden instilled in me, just a little bit, it doesn't have to be four or five hours, four or five hours is great, but if you can't get there don't give up. Just do it for as long as you can, you did something. And it motivates me to do something every day, even though, again, I can't be out as long as I'd like, but did I get out there? Did I inhale deeply? Did I breathe, kinda thing? Even when it's cold, I'd be out there in the rain. Just like, I just need to stand outside here five, ten minutes and inhale. Just, I just need to be out here, get some of this in me, I'll be fine. Connection with the earth, kinda thing. That's a real thing. And if you take your socks and shoes off, and walk--just the feet in the grass. So again, the Farmacy Garden has increased my awareness. I'm more aware of my environment, my community, my life, how I'm living it. Life philosophies. I don't let things bother me as much as I did before, as far as outside forces. I used to take peoples' things and wear them like armor, and it's not very healthy, but I let them go. But I feel guilty sometimes, it's like,

‘shouldn’t I feel bad about that?’ It’s like, ‘well, does that serve me?’ Hmm, ‘how well is that serving me?’ And it’s not, and are they really taking that much time with my situation? Not really, so why am I taking on so much? But, like I said, going to the garden, you just let stuff go. Because you’re focusing on the dirt, and for some reason you can’t go in the garden with a bunch of stuff in your head, but you can’t be in the garden and be present in the moment with all that. You’re sitting there, you can’t smell the basil, and look at the tomatoes, and eat those little cherry things with the paper thing that you let us try that we have never had before in our lives, and now they’re addictive. You know? You can’t do that if you’re worried about some nonsense. This is a year of no-nonsense. I started my year of no-nonsense with the garden, let me just say that. You go in there and it’s like, why? You look at these plants and you’re thinking, ‘okay, why was that important?’ No, this is what’s important--this feeds me, this nourishes my body, that’s not a nourishing kinda thing. You get creative, creativity has increased with the garden because I actively look for recipes and different ways to prepare things that are healthier, no-sodium, we have decreased our sodium intake, yay! We have almost completely eliminated sugar. We are down to cinnamon sweetening my teas now, I know, I’m so proud. Because, like I said flavors are more important to me now. I like seasoned food because of my heritage, but flavors of the actual individual vegetables are more important to me now. Trying to taste my food, as opposed to seasoning it to death. Or like when I was little, ketchup, I had everything with ketchup. You wanted me to eat it? Put ketchup on it and I won’t know what it is. But now I want to know what it is, and I like the flavors. I’m learning more about what things are supposed to taste like. They’re not supposed to be boiled down to nothing and put some stuff on top. It’s actually supposed to have flavor. I do more smoothies, more green smoothies. But I wasn’t doing smoothies. I do a lot of smoothies with vegetables now. Who woulda thought? What kind of nonsense is that? Right? So, yeah, we’re increasing that way.



And I try to tell everybody to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, and if not I give them mine. It's like 'oh! Here!' I shared a lot more. I did. I shared a lot more when I was working in the garden and going to the farmers market. I always got a little extra something and I would give to like Maria--our little lady that was at the hotel, the extended stay we were staying at. Yes, I did. I shared more vegetables with people because I had so many more to share. That is it. I didn't think about that. The peppers, loved the peppers, and I would make things, and I would share, like whatever recipes, so yes, I shared more stuff with my people. Wow! I didn't think about that. I shared more. With even people like, there was a little house behind us, I shared with them and I shared with little Maria, and now that I live in this house, I share with my neighbors to my right and to my left. So yeah.

The prescriptions given to the people to come to the Farmacy Garden gives me hope for the diseases and management of the children for the future because if we teach them now, these are lifelong lessons, like the kids that grow the stuff in the Farmacy Garden. I believe the children are our future, teach them well, let them lead the way. I know it's corny, but it's starting with the children, and you're also making it accessible and available to the parents. A lot of times, you can teach them that, but when they go home to a situation where the moms, or dads, or whoever's there, auntie, grandma, that haven't been taught either. You give them the opportunity to participate with the children, so the children aren't the only ones learning then the parents too can change their eating habits, and improve their health. Because it's never too late, that's the thing about this, it's never too late. Vegetables are gonna be here as long as we don't eradicate and kill ourselves. But beyond that, they will be here and they're accessible to everybody as long as you're willing to try. And I think the garden stands there and says if you want it, you're welcome to come. It's there for you, and like I said, it's not pretentious. It's just like 'hey, you wanna come in? My gate might be stuck, but you can get it up. You know, that's

fine, you can come on in. If you're persistent enough to get that gate open, you too can enter this garden.' But, yeah, it stands there as a beacon of hope, because 'I'm here for you' kind of a thing. The garden is like, 'I'm here for you. If you want me, come in and partake.' Like the giving tree, but not as sad, but it gives. It grows to give.

I think the Farmacy Garden is a very good starting place, I think it's a fantastic idea, I just wish more people would partake. In five to ten years, I would like more people to actively want those prescriptions and look forward to like 'hey, I can get some beets, and kale, and melons!' Of course our melons are not as good as yours. I did miss the watermelons, but we're not gonna go there. But anyway, but you know beets, peppers, I have an idea, I want my family to eat healthy, let's all go to this Farmacy Garden. I want it to be a place to go, as opposed to like 'you really need to get over there!' No, I want people to want to come and I want it to expand as far as education, and not necessarily beating people down with facts and statistics, but just saying 'hey, you can have a little basil plant on your window shelf, little basil, fresh basil, tastes much better in your food.' I'd like it to have more potlucks. Not four or five, and not necessarily every week, but more potlucks featuring whatever's in the garden. I think that is the best thing ever is to have the potlucks and to let people know. Or, like they do sometimes at the Farmers Market, to do maybe a simple hands on demonstration for an hour, hour and a half. Kinda like a pickling workshop we did at the Glade Road Growing. It was limited to a certain amount of people, but we all participated hands on and everything that was there was from Glade Road Growing. And we did it ourselves. Now we couldn't pick it up cause they had to heat seal it, vacuum seal it, so we couldn't get it till the next day, but something that they could do that day, nothing that they have to come back for, because coming back is gonna be a problem. Those were the best beets ever. Those were the best beets, and we made pickles out of the cucumbers, so we had a big jar. But, like I said, hands-on. We didn't pick it, which I would've preferred to have done, but that's

ok. Time constraints, we couldn't pick, but that's ok. But the garden is small enough to where we could pick our things. And, they do things like that at the Hahn, you go out and pick your flowers and your things, and make little flower things--I would like that to be something in five to ten years. Say 'hey, come make this, we can show you how'. Simple things, that way they know that it's not that hard to eat well and it doesn't take a lot. Cause that's my issue now, working with my dad with his stroke. I have to have things that do not take a lot of time because I'm tired. There's just a lot more I have to do for him, but I still want him to eat well, and it's hard. So I'm learning, like this week when I leave here, I'm gonna prep for the week, but not everybody's gonna do that, but what I have learned is the Instant pot is like my best friend. I never had an Instant pot until my dad had his stroke. I was like look, I can't afford to give him crap, I don't wanna eat crap, we were doing well, we were eating well, and that's why I said, in five to ten years that would be good for the garden because stuff happens and I wasn't prepared, at all. If I had gone and had maybe a quick class, okay this takes ten, twenty, maybe thirty minutes max, quick meals, but they're good, they're healthy and they're fresh. So, like I said the Instant pot has become my best friend, because I can put stuff in there, real food, and it's done in twenty, thirty minutes. Even if I forget, I can still get a meal together. And that's what I'd like the garden to be--something to where if something like that happens to someone else, or they're a working mother, working father, grandmother, auntie, just old and tired, it's a meal you can put together, it's fresh, it's good for you, and you harvested it, you helped plant it. And again, even if you didn't help plant it, if you just helped harvest, or you just came and someone else harvested it, it doesn't matter, you're there. You still become a part of that garden no matter what part you are. Even like again, just standing there, you're there. And that's the biggest thing. Showing up. Just showing up is like the biggest obstacle for a lot of people. Show up, and we'll show you what this garden can be. Maybe in five or ten years we could also get something where there's maybe

once a week or once a quarter a shuttle or something to where we can get the population that needs to be there. Or kids, like they do little things for kids, maybe take a little demonstration to the children to get them interested and they could tell their parents. Just little things. Just because of where it is. And it's not their fault, it's just how the city was structured years ago.

I'd like to live in a community that has a community garden. That's my ideal place. I was at a KOA when we were on our way to Alaska, and the KOA had gardens. And you can eat from those gardens while you're camping there. It's in Montana, and I had never stayed in a KOA, I was like 'ehhh', but we were going, we were headed to Alaska, and we had decided we were camping all the way up there for affordability, and we could have our own food, but we stopped at this one KOA in Montana and they grow wheats and grains, and they grind their wheat to make you the pancakes they serve you on the weekend. They make the jelly and syrup that's poured on your pancakes from what they grow, and they have gardens, and you are welcome to the gardens, as long as you get what you can eat. You can eat fresh out of that KOA. I was blown away. And yes we ate their pancakes, I mean they cooked breakfast during the high season they cooked breakfast every weekend, and it's amazing. That is kinda what started me on thinking, okay, how would I like to live? I'd like to live like that. The community where there is access, but everybody contributes, but again, like I said, my dad--he wouldn't be able to fully contribute, but I can, and he shouldn't not be able to benefit because of the community, and that to me is community. You understand people's limitations and deficiencies, but you don't mind because everybody supports everyone else, regardless--there's no conditions on your support. If you truly are supporting somebody there are no conditions, you don't know, one day that might be you, it might not ever be you, but still. Community supports you wherever you are in your journey, and that's the kind of community I would like to live in. One where there is a community garden, where somebody who knows how to grind wheat makes my flour for my pancakes, and if she's a

jelly/jam person, she does the jellies and jams. I'm the garden person, I will dig, and I will plant, that kind of thing where it's truly a community, and I do know my neighbor. That has always bothered me, how do you not know your neighbor? What if something goes wrong? Where someone's always gonna check on you, and know when you're missing, or know something's wrong. But you all eat and live and work, and like I said, some of them work and some of them don't. I do, like I would work, but people are not what they do. I've noticed that's how society wants you to be built, and I am not built that way, so when people say 'so, what do you do?' Why do I have to do anything? And then they look at you like you're less if you don't give them a good answer. So I'm like 'I take care of my dad'. I don't think you need to know what I do, because you want to judge me by what I do, and I don't think that's fair. Communities shouldn't do that, communities should say, 'hey, how are you? Are things good with you? That's great!' I don't need to know what else you do, you could be doing some strange things, but that's you! Right now you're in front of me, you want some fresh veggies? Let's get some! I don't care what you do with 'em or where you take 'em. I just want you to enjoy them, and share the love that went into growing them, and that's me.

I think where the Farmacy Garden is located now is a great place, but I don't know. The problem with Christiansburg, which is why I don't live there, and I would prefer to live there, but I don't live there, is because of the transit system. There's no proper transit system. People can't get there unless they have a vehicle. Christiansburg is vehicle dependent, and that is not the Farmacy Garden's issue, that is not something they can address. If there was a transit system, I think that would be a place to be, because they would definitely put a stop by the Community Health Center. And even though there might be one there, it doesn't run that frequently, and that's why we had to move to Blacksburg, because my daughter can ride a transit to get places, and because Blacksburg is not really that big, you can walk. Christiansburg is not as easy to

walk, it's not set up for walking, or really biking, because the hotel we were staying in, there was no way for me to walk around town safely. I could've walked to the Farmacy Garden, but I could've been hit several times on the way, because there are no sidewalks. And then the Two Town Trolley, it doesn't really go in Christiansburg, that's not Christiansburg proper, that's the outskirts. It's really Blacksburg, it's really extra Blacksburg. It doesn't take you to places where you can get your fresh vegetables, so it's like a food desert that's being created when they know it's there, and they know the population that's utilizing those services, but that's a whole other conversation. But because as I said, if the transportation issue was addressed the Farmacy Garden would be more accessible to the population that needs it.

Also, the accessibility as far as wheelchairs--that is kind of our issue with things right now. The ground might have to be a different material, but it would have to be a material that's friendly. I mean I don't know what would be safe in there because you still have children, and gravel is hard, so and that's the only thing. I haven't tried the wheelchair in mulch, I've tried in gravel, but not mulch. Like I said, I've learned, and I'm learning that coming back from a stroke, it's a slow recovery. I didn't realize that. That's my fault, I had no idea, no experience with this. We're slowly getting back there, but we're getting there, so I haven't tried mulch. We did the first day hikes last year, that was hard. It was a little easier this year because we got new wheels, but those trails are paved. At Claytor Lake we did the first day hike and they do have a wheelchair accessible trail, it's uphill a lot, and they failed to tell me that last year. We did it again this year, and this time we spent the night, so the next morning I was rested so they were much easier this year. I planned this year. Again, learning curve. You learn a lot with handicap accessibility, and what some people think is handicap accessible. And you're like eh, not completely. So people don't think because we're an ableist society. But, you know, I'm learning.

I love the diversity of plants and people that are in the garden. Like I said, the garden is very welcoming and that meant a lot to me. I didn't feel like I was out of place, and that's why I say it's a place that anyone can come. It opens its arms to all without judgement, you know, like I said, it's dirt, and plants, and people, and you go in there and that's how you feel. You don't feel set apart, or different, and everybody talks to everybody, there is no hierarchy, there is no 'I've been here for twenty years', no it's like 'come on in! What you wanna do? Do you know how to do this? If not, we'll show you!' You know, everybody was just one. It was a place of oneness, everybody wanted you there. First of all, they wanted to be there, and they wanted you there. Cause sometimes that can happen--they don't wanna be there, and they don't care if you're there or not. But no, that was the best part of going there, was that you didn't feel like you didn't belong. You belonged the moment you walked through the gate, and everybody was like 'come on!' they embraced you and were like 'let's do this!' 'I'm so and so' and 'you wanna try this?' it's like, 'I don't know, what is that?' And there was no fighting over 'oh, this is my bed, don't touch it', no, 'this is growing over here, if you think of something you wanna grow, let us know!' It's like, 'really? Is that real?' For a while we didn't think it was real. Seriously, we thought we had walked into some Oz that was gonna go away when our concussion got better, you know? Seriously, the first day we went home, we were just like 'that can't be real. Nooo, they were just being nice because it was our first day. Right? Yeah. It'll be worse next time.' But it never was! Seriously, we thought we were in some kind of space. Maybe y'all had inhaled some stuff when we got there. We didn't know what you were growing in the back corner. I don't know....You never know. Don't inhale in that one corner! But no, it was just like, just open. I hate this word but I'm gonna say it, just so real. Like real people, not fake, put on, dressed up, made to eh hh. No, it was just like, 'look we're all here, this is the deal, jump in!' And we're like, 'yeah!', 'here's the list!' 'Like, ohhhh! This is real stuff!' But it was just like open, trusting, honest, there

was no fear, there was no hesitation, we weren't scared to be there, where certain places here...it's kinda shady. And I wasn't worried that once we left there we weren't gonna be welcomed back, or if we saw people in the streets they wouldn't know us, because that has happened since we've been here. They know you in these private spaces, but in public they won't talk to you. We've had those experiences since we've been in Southwest Virginia and so I expected, you know you expect the worst, cause that's what you've seen, and then people actually speak to you out in public, and it's like 'wow! They know me in public.' They might be real people. We can hang out with these people, we like these people. Yeah. It's happened there all the time. I'm a Master Naturalist now, but they don't talk to me in public. There are three people, I can count on my hand, that will speak to me out in public. And then if we're at an event, then of course they gotta know me, because I'm their diversity by the way. So, that was a whole other thing, but anyway, that's not a problem at the garden, cause we are every shade, we are all people, we do not care. We're all weirdos together, and I like that. So, I forgot to say that part--about the authenticity of humanity. We're all humans in that space. We are free to be human without worry of attack of judgement or being mistreated, that was never a worry. It was a worry when you leave the garden, cause the garden's like a bubble. A bubble, it's like a bubble of special space, and you walk out the bubble and get smacked in the face with reality, and mean people. You don't have that problem in the garden. So there you go, I forgot about that part. So I'm gonna try and be a master gardener now, and I don't know how that's gonna work, but we'll see. Cause I was like, let me try somebody new, cause the other people don't like me, let me try these people. I am a certified Master Naturalist and every year I've kept my hours up, I've done my volunteering, and I have yet to get pinned. I don't have a certificate, and I keep emailing and they're like, 'well, oh well.' Really? Yeah. Somebody's keeping my pin and certificate, and I'm like, you know what, I don't need it. I called the national database people, and she's like 'yeah,



you're certified', that's all I need to know, I don't need a piece of paper. As long as the national people know I'm certified, I don't care about you people not giving me my stuff. Do you now see why the garden means so much to me? This is why the garden...cause it's the one space that it doesn't matter what I do, what I don't do. It just matters that I'm there and that I want to be there, and that I play in the dirt, which you know, back to your youth.

I told you the garden is love. It's a special little bubble. Glenda the good witch puts us in a bubble and yeah, we are floating in our little bubble, 'cause all the little munchkins outside are all misbehaving, the lollipop kids, they're all outside. We go to the garden to be in our bubble. But it does, it just reminds us that there are good people in the world. You go to the garden just to be reminded that everyone's not hateful. There are good people. The garden is our happy place, and that's all that matters.

## **Appendix K: Neel's Story**

I'm from India and I was born in a small village of India and its name is Atul Village. Atul means nobody compares, that meaning is nobody compares with that town. It has natural beauty, and a chemical plant, a big chemical plant that keeps the surrounding environment very neat, and clean, and with pure oxygen. So we have lots of plants--trees, everything is surrounded in all its natural beauty. I was born there, I studied there, I got a job there also, in Atul, then after I got a chance to go to America and I came over here, and was just struggling, hard working, honest, cooperating with people, and I have reached this position now. So that's why I'm very thankful to everyone from my childhood to now in this stage.

My father liked gardening, and when I was living in the small town, my father was doing gardening always in backyard or my front yard and he was growing some flowers, plants, or small shrubs, and mint, indian tea, and cilantro, herbs, and as well as vegetables also--some kinds of indian gourd, bitter gourd, eggplant, tomatoes, so I got inspiration from my father, he motivated me and always I'm saying his thumb was very green. Everything he grew or planted in the garden, it definitely grew, and looked beautiful. I helped him sometimes. But as a child at that time I only watched that, and only watered, only, but then ten years after that, I helped. My father expired in 1986. At that time I was 24 years old. So, that's my starting story behind my gardening interest.

I saw the Farmacy Garden one day when we visited the New River Health Center because my doctor is there, so we park beside the garden, and I saw someone gardening, and I went there. The garden is in the center part of town, not away from town, not isolated area, surrounded by all the buildings there, so it's a good location for everyone. I talked with the garden coordinator, and I said I am also interested in participating in gardening, and the most

interesting part is the organic--that's very interesting for me. I did organic in my village because we had no other fertilizer--that's why we used the cow manure only, so I know about that, but this was a different way they make bedding, how and when we plant seeds, how to take care of plants, herbs, and all the things I learn from there. So that was the starting point and I contacted the garden coordinator, and she grew amazingly, so I say I have to make my contribution for this garden, and I try my best to come a couple or three times a week, and that's how I give a contribution towards this. This is my primary starting point, and how I give a contribution towards this. That's the way I was motivated and I gained inspiration, from the garden coordinator particularly.

Initially I only watch in the garden, how they are doing everything--how to take care, how to plant, then after I help to plant seeds, plant herbs, and give water, make beds, and soil. I started growing my indian beans, bitter gourd, cilantro, indian herbs, onion, the spring onion, and garlic, and the indian gourd--that's the first I started to grow the indian vegetables, and everybody liked that, and said it was very amazing, and they liked that, and they appreciated me.

Well first what motivated me was the organic farming, that's my interest in things--organic food, excluding the chemical fertilizer, no disease, that's why it motivates me. Also I see surrounding people over in our community, they are poor, homeless, they are not able to get that kind of organic food to stay fit, improve their health, and they are getting canned food, fast food, and this product has lots of fat, salt, and ultimately it has an adverse effect on their body. They are always going to New River Health Center or pre-medicine, or pre-doctor. So ultimately it's in the primary stage where this kind of disease is caused, and it's only because we eat fast food, and other canned food, so we tell them to participate in this garden as a way to help that. You also get a little exercise and stay fit, and whatever produce you can take with you, take it

home, and stay healthy, plus they get pure, organic food, so that's what motivates me to do that with people. And people say 'organic, oh, it's expensive, we cannot have that'--everybody, me, you also think 'this is only one dollar, and this is two dollars, no, we gonna buy that', it's a carrot, an organic carrot and that carrot, the organic carrot is double the price, and that's why we don't buy it, but the non-organic carrot has chemical fertilizer, so better to do organic. So that's why it motivates me and inspires me to connect with this Farmacy. Community health--that's where my contribution to community is and where I can help indirectly. Also the staff and the participants in the garden, the Virginia Tech students, youngsters, as well as community participant members, they are so happy to work in the garden, and very interested, so that's why also you guys inspire me to help in garden.

The only thing stopping me from coming is I am time-bounded. I'm time-bounded because I have a business, so in the summertime, I'm always busy here too. And so it's very hard to spare time for that, and I steal time, and go to the community garden. Otherwise everybody helps me--my wife, or my family, in whatever we produce here, and I give to our Indian community, twenty families, every year. In my garden, I grow for other families and my family here, in Luray, Harrisonburg, Stanton, Lexington, and here. It's too much for me alone. I grow more than 1000 tomatoes in my garden. I grow lots of chilis. I have lots of chili, my indian chili, so everybody I give to in our family. And bitter gourds, bitter gourd is very healthy, very healthy for diabetic people, and bitter gourd, and indian gourd is very, very helpful for cholesterol controlling, and artery unblocking, just take the juice of that and you don't need medicine for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or for diabetes. So every day I eat, and no diabetes. Some guests come here, and say 'what is this?' and I say 'it's a bitter gourd' 'how can you...' and I say it's a very anti-diabetic medicine, and they are interested. I sometimes cook, and they eat it, and I

harvest my bitter gourd, and they take it with them. This way, I am also connected with my guests, so that I can spread lots this way. I need more organic fertilizer, that's not available, it's hardly available--that's very important for things, more compost. So I think I get help from you guys through some compost or manure for that bed so I can also do some more at the hotel. This is the best activity.

I realized the garden had impact after couple months I worked there, watching, helping, whatever, then I saw that many people are coming, they are working unconditionally, willingly, happily, they changed their mood, they improve their health, they light up in their face, so I thought this is a good activity to join in this, and that way I get more, more, more motivation to work there. And I have in my blood too, because I'm from a village, and my father worked in the garden, and I saw that, and that also inspired me, it's in my blood. It also reminds me of my childhood time, memory of childhood, at the time I helped my father in the garden, and that always reminds me of my past experiences. After a couple months working in the Farmacy garden, I hoped I had the spare time to do something new, new, new. And I learned lots, different herbs, sweet potatoes, and watermelons, and different kinds of your squash, zucchini, that's interesting for me, those parts are new for me--the American vegetables--how to grow, and prepare, and harvest, and that's all the things I learned from the garden.

I had a small garden when I was in Lexington, at that time. There also I did lots of vegetables. But it was a small garden so I was limited in what I could do. But I did lots there too, same is bitter gourd, squash, indian gourd, beans, all the things I do here, but that was a limited space, but this here is a big area. But I never had this kind of organic Farmacy there. I never saw it there, but I came over here in 2017, and got more interested in gardening here.

So I was inspired to create my own garden from the organic Farmacy there. And I got a little experience and knowledge. That knowledge and experience I transfer here, contribute here. That's the way I start here--a lot of experiences from the Farmacy. What time to seed plants, what time to harvest, how to take care, everything. So I'm not doing only vegetables, I also do the flowers and other natural beauty. In March, when you come again, you'll see lots of tulips, all around is blubs, last year I grew blubs, and there's a lot of blubs now inside. Now in March, they'll all come up, and in April you come again, and then you can see lots of tulips, lots of plants, lots of other kinds of stuff. And rose, oh wow. So, all surrounding is full of flowers, and lots of marigolds in May, June, July and August. That's growing good.

Main part I learned at the garden was how to produce organic vegetables and stay fit and keeps community also healthy, and disease-free, and we give awareness to them, to come, participate, you get good exercise, and you stay fit, and if you feel loneliness, or some sadness or something, just come on, start, help, and you forget and change your mood. It helped with my loneliness too. So that's another advantage. If everyone was interested in that, we could make a big farm, and we could sell to all our community members to provide good organic food. Good nutrition, good healthy vegetables for a life that is long and fit. When people have arthritis, and frozen shoulder, that's all because of this fast food, and canned food, and ice water, and so I'm just telling them to start, the participants that work, 'it will be helpful to you and community'. That's my main goal of Farmacy is to serve nutrition, organic vegetables to our community, and stay healthy, and fit, and spend half an hour, one hour here, and you get a different experience and always you see light and not any stress or anything like that. Staying healthy. Motor exercise, mental exercise, some people also suffering from depression, it's an anti-depression

medicine. And that's how you do everything. And also, how to grow, how to harvest, how to participate, how to cooperate.

I worked there, I helped out, I cooperated with everyone, and they appreciate me and encourage me, there was no discrimination. I mean I am Indian, and they were American, and there was not discrimination. All together we were very honest, unconditionally, and innocent. But no discrimination, that's the main part of that. So that also motivates me to help, to work with everyone at the garden.

I get food from Kroger, or Walmart, or Aldi, all of those, but the taste, the way our vegetables taste is quite different. There's like a sweetness, freshness. This organic carrot for example, if I buy from Walmart or another place that's not organic, the taste is nothing, tasteless, and this way eat some sweetness and we get some energy, not junk-food like, it boost our energy, quality, and purity, without chemical fertilizer. So, the taste is different, plus whatever we eat we get some energy to boost our life and stay healthy, feeling healthy inside--some new blood circulation, new oxygen is moving and I have lots of energy, I have to work 12 hours, 16 hours, and that's the difference between that and this. We got the natural vitamins, not like the liquid juice, that V8 juice. My wife makes tomato juice every day and always that indian style, it's a little spicy, and always one glass every day I drink. Fresh tomatoes make a juice with onion and garlic, and whatever. Every day, one glass. That's the best vitamins. So with lots of tomatoes, my wife always makes that, and it's good. So I'm waiting for Spring to come, and Summer to come, and I'm gonna start gardening.

Participating in the Farmacy Garden is the way we change community thinking, the lifestyle of others, by encouraging others to work in this garden, and stay healthy with good food. That's the way, I think, we encourage them to come, work, and stay healthy and take fresh

vegetables. That's why I'm telling to community members--don't waste time, use your valuable time in this activity, is totally helpful to our community and other people, so we can grow more and more.

Yeah, so from working in the garden I now love nature, everywhere I'm going, I see new plants, new flowers, I take pictures. I spend time with them, 10-15 minutes, and stay beside them, and take a meditation. This pursuit has changed me totally, my cool, calmness, in my body, and that's the way I stay a cool person. No irritation, or no anxiety, I'm like a cool person, it makes me cool, nature does, so I stay with nature. I stay with these vegetables or plants, and I get lots of energy, new life. One scientist in India is a Doctor and he proved that trees, shrubs, have also life, they are also alive, they don't speak, they can't move, but they experience. They are conscious. He says plants have life, they are alive, same as we have life, but they do not speak. We put music beside plants and they can dance, dance, dance. They feel that music, so they are also dancing. Try it someday, you go beside the plant, and just put a little music on, or you play your guitar, or whatever, they are also dancing. I feel a very strong relation to the plants. They are my family members. Just like my kids. So if anybody hurts my plants, I feel sad so I put a sign over them so that people don't pick up or harvest flowers or that--I say 'no, gimme that'. I need that natural beauty, and plants are also life.

So the Farmacy Garden gave me inspiration, lots in my life, changed my life, changed my mood, changed my relation with nature, everything. I had arthritis here, frozen shoulder and it's gone without any medicine. In summertime I made 1000, dig hole here, 1000, for planting here, and taking care, and everything. Time to water, feeding fertilizer, all that. And it's gone.

Also from the garden, whatever produce we grow, and my wife makes different style eggplants, different style for tomato, also tomato and curry, tomato juice, tomato with beans, and



lots of varieties, and from the bitter gourd we cook indian style, and it's very healthy. She is a very good cook. The chutney, also chutneys from the bitter gourd, just like a cilantro chutney, chutney is a juice type. So she cooks, and the garden coordinator tasted too, and she liked it, it's very spicy and wonderful, and it's more healthy. So also I'm telling them to just cooperate and help the community, that's when we become a strong community. If you cooperate, honestly, unconditionally, willingly, that's where we make a strong community. So that's the one reason to participate in gardening so you get a little produce, and work for your community. It makes some welfare activity for this to help our community also. So this is the way, organic, it's organic, pure, healthy, so that's an awareness to have, and community members can use their spare time to participate in our garden and it's an interesting subject. The more and more you go into that, you get more interest, and then you will do something more in another place, and you give advice or inspiration to another place. The more and more gardening, the more inspired other people can become, all the surrounding people, it spreads and spreads, and this way we are spreading our knowledge, experience, and change their minds. It's the best activity to improve your lifestyle.

The garden gives me hope because it provides peace of mind, my inner core is very pure, and stays friendly, and gives me relief from loneliness. All of that. Soul to soul, we make contact from soul to soul, just like a pure soul to pure soul in the garden. We bring negative energy and gain positive energy. This is the reason we joined this organic Farmacy Garden. Pure soul to pure soul we meet and interact with that. This is the real life, we are starting the real life. Whatever obstacles in life are gone, positive energy. We collect positive energy, and store positive energy.

I'd never seen this kind of Farmacy Garden anywhere. I was in Texas one year, nine years in Lexington and I never saw this kind of Farmacy Garden. When I saw this garden here it

totally changed my lifestyle. I thought I had to help the community and work for that and myself, and for other benefits.

In the future if I build a house with surrounding land, I would like to build my own Farmacy Garden there, I want to build my own. I hope to have my own Farmacy Garden in the future if I buy a house and have lots of surrounding land, I will make this.

The Farmacy Garden needs more participants to help, because we have a lack of participants. We need more and more participants to help there and take interest so we can take care of it day to day. Only a couple people or some people are coming and working and it is very hard to maintain. It's a big garden, and needs more manpower to help. More people. But I'd like to keep participating, and keep it continuing. And we hope and we try for more and more community people to come and to help us so we can produce more vegetables and solve our community problems, or other people and help them have a healthy lifestyle, encourage them to stay healthy.

## **Appendix L: Lucy's Story**

I grew up on a farm. It was a small hobby farm but it was just big enough to feed the family. So like right behind my grandmother's house there was a half acre, and that was all growing vegetables, so all summer long, between Spring and Fall that's what we did, and that's what fed five families, and it was a necessity. So then, when I got married and moved, having a half acre of vegetables wasn't really practical. And I could see where that was really a necessity, to have all the children, to have the community all working together, but it was all just that one family working together so that they had that. So that's what led me down my path of let's find a way to grow our own, cause then I know what's in my food, cause you are what you eat—that works for plants too. If you put toxins in the soil, then your plants are toxic and they're giving you toxins, and then if your soil isn't the right consistency with the vitamins and the minerals, and the pH balances then your vegetables aren't really gonna grow a whole lot, and the fruit that they're producing is gonna be lacking in those vitamins and minerals. So what you thought, here I'm eating healthy, no, you're just eating something that's tomato flavored. It's not really having the vitamins and minerals, so then it really matters what we're doing to the soil, and how we're growing the vegetables. So when I finally moved to Blacksburg and I had small children, and I got introduced to the Farmacy through the WIC Department, I took my daughter down there so she could see it and check it out, and she was like 'yes!' and I was like oh finally I can teach my kids this is the importance of growing, and what's in your soil, and this is how you're taking care of the plants, and here are the plants, and then here is the fruit of your labor, and the continued fruit of your labor is good health, because now you're eating better. So, I was really excited that I could be a part of that, and that's how I got introduced to the Farmacy.

I was there for the first year it opened with the first garden coordinator. They had already set it up, but they were just beginning, which was really cool, because they didn't have a lot of people comin' in, but the second year, it picked up. With my own health issues I wasn't able to do as much as I wanted to, but there would be like little potlucks, teas, little things that we all did that was really fun. It brought everyone together so they could say hi--cause everyone's schedule is just so crazy, so it made it nice, and I really enjoyed that about the garden.

I did all of the garden activities. If I didn't do an activity it was because I was having health issues, or it was a scheduling conflict, or I didn't have the money for the gas to get down there. I mean those were the three reasons why I didn't show up--and it could've been all of them, and it could've been none of them--and if it was none of them, then I was there. Or I didn't know about it, you know? I loved the activities--that way my kids got to see, you know, it's not just us doing the work, 'cause everytime we showed up, nobody was there, because of our schedules, and they were like 'now we're the only ones taking care of the garden?' and I said 'that's not true--just because you only see five minutes of this garden, doesn't mean there's not 24 hours in a day. There are other people involved in this whole process, so you can't have all of the beans, because there are other people that need to share this. You can look at them, you can help pick all the debris out, you can kill bugs, you can pull the weeds out, you know, give them a drink of water, but that's all a process that everyone in the Farmacy is doing.' So then taking them to the potlucks, and then taking them to the different functions that they had where everyone was invited got them to be able to see that it wasn't just them. It was everyone. We were all involved, and that we all get to share all of that fruit and vegetables. So we're all doing our parts for our schedules, I mean, we're grown people and have schedules. Some people have two jobs, some people don't have a job at all, but they've got health issues. You know, just our

timing of day--maybe someone needs to work at 10 o'clock at night--that's their down time, and they wanna be in the garden in their down time. You know, it's not locked, have at it. Enjoy! And please don't steal the vegetables, and come to a potluck. You know? So, because our schedules are so hectic, it's nice to see who else is working in the garden, and say 'hey!' and talk about maybe the plants, or whatever floats your boat to talk about. Cause I tend to just talk about the plants, or wool, but more plants. Plants or wool. I eat and spin. Plants and wool!

I helped with the construction of the greenhouse at the garden. Constructing the greenhouse was fun. It was a community effort, you know? It wasn't just one person, and we had some volunteers that did come in and help, and it was a real learning experience for them on what construction is. It was a learning experience on how to read directions, and follow them. There was getting it all level. Because there were other people who couldn't work on the project, they would come in and they would ask questions, and it was neat trying to show them, you know, we gotta make sure this is all level, this has to be completely square, so that the whole thing sets right, and then doing the whole construction aspect. I love construction. But, doing that and being able to show them that this is the whole process that goes into putting this together, that was enjoyable as well. But we had some mishaps on that, and then some interesting days where I was like, you know, 'I'm done. I'm done on this project. I'm done with this project.' And we're putting it together. We're sliding these panels in. And painters tape was your friend 'cause that was the third hand ya needed. Just put some painter's tape on it, and stick it down, and then you can use your two hands to get it into the grooves and snap it back into place where it's supposed to be, so you could slide it down, but you needed that third hand. Third hand is painter's tape. 'Cause you got someone across the way trying to get the other panels in and it was just like, you know what, we gotta think smarter, not harder.

I was really lookin' forward to the greenhouse being set up, and then having the microgreens, and showing the kids about how to grow the microgreens, and then having them. And then, instead of buying our plants from the stores, we could actually harvest our own seeds, and then grow them in the Spring, and that way when it's time to put them in the ground we already had them. We didn't have to get donations, and we didn't have to buy plants that were not heirloom, that were genetically modified. I would like to have plants that are not genetically modified because they're going to be better for you. I don't need them to be resistant of anything. So, that excited me that the greenhouse would be there. I keep goin' back there and tinkering on it--making sure that the wind didn't blow it down. I put it back together 'cause the panel busted out--and that's just the growing process, from the heat and the cold, and doing it's moving and stretching and then the wind blowing, so it'll pop a panel out, and it's not hard to put it back in. I stop by when I'm up that way and I just pop it back in and I go on about my way. I still have the piece to fix the door. It's in my truck I just gotta stop by and do it.

I really liked the garden, because it showed that we have a community of like-minded individuals. People would just stop by, that didn't know anything about it, the doctors were saying 'we're giving you a prescription to go to the Farmacy', and we had all kinds of people walking there. And maybe it was just their one visit. Maybe they learned how to grow a tomato plant in their window, or even you could buy the herbs at the grocery store and have your little window plant. Even if they didn't have any of that, they now know that this exists, that there's a whole community that they could come to and they could play in the dirt, and make something that's going to feed their body. So, it meant a lot that that was available. Also the recognition that it's not all about medication, it's not all about, 'well here, let me isolate you, you're gonna go into this counseling session, and you're just you and me, and now you get to go home.' No, here,

let's talk about the issues and stuff, but let's get you involved with something bigger. And that's where the Farmacy Garden comes in. It's right there, why not? Come on over. Sit a spell. Watch me do something. I don't care what you do, just come on over--get your feet dirty, get your hands dirty, and just talk about it, and have a cucumber. Enjoy it. There was no 'oh you shouldn't be here', none of that judgement. It was 'oh, hey! Welcome!' And let me teach you something. Or let me show you something. Or let me offer you something. That's what it meant to me. It just showed that there was inclusion, and inclusion is important for any type of healing.

I really like the connection the garden had to healthcare, because everything you need God grows, and here it is. Here it is. Everything you need. God's growing. Right here. That's what an old Chinese scientist used to tell me. He used to work on how to cure cancer, or AIDs, and he came up with some ideas that we're working on mice. But everything he did involved what he was able to grow and pick here with no chemicals. I remember getting the flu one day, or strep throat--I always had strep throat. And I had to take my Aunt something--he lived in the basement of my Aunt. And I was walking up, I smelled like vicks, I had this scarf wrapped around my throat, and he goes 'what's wrong? What's wrong?' And I said, 'I just got strep.' And he said 'Ah, you smell bad. Ah, come here. I make you tea, I make you tea.' And I said 'I really don't want your tea, Chang, I really don't. It smells funny...' 'Cause you know I'm like nine. Nine or ten. 'It smells funny in here, but I'm supposed to respect my elders and my mom says I can trust you, so...man...' So I went in, he made me some tea, and I drank the tea and it was awful. But he was pulling roots that he was drying in the kitchen. He was just pulling roots and herbs down, and he had strings and strings or roots and vegetables, well herbs. They were herbs and roots. He had ginseng root, but he had some other roots that I do not identify--I do not know what they were. And he moved before I could really appreciate asking. But he pulled things

down, he stuck it in a pot, poured hot water over it, and talked to me about how doctors, ‘doctors, they’re all about pill. Pill here, pill here, pill here, pill here. And it’s all chemical, chemical, chemical. No, no, no, no, no. Everything, everything you need, God grow. God grow the root, and it makes you strong. Like a tree. And all this makes you beautiful. And all this, God grow. Everything you need, God grow.’ And I didn’t appreciate it at nine. I appreciate it now. I’m like, you know, that was a key factor of sinking in: everything you need, God grows. So, when it says, Pharmacy, and I have pills that I have to take for conditions that I have, I have heart problems and stuff, and that’s what the doctors tell me I have to take. So, ok, I have to go to the pharmacy, and it’s never a fun trip. But this is the Pharmacy, only it is a fun trip, and you’re getting better health. You’re actually curing what might be wrong with you, instead of putting a bandaid on it, and that’s the difference, that’s what I really, really, really, found. So, I loved it. I absolutely loved that.

I think it’s important for everyone to actually know where their food comes from. ‘Cause if you don’t appreciate the process, if you don’t appreciate that you have to tend to the dirt, you have to tend to the ground, you have to be mindful of the bugs, you have to be mindful because guess what? If you’re killing the bees, now you’re fruit and vegetables aren’t growing, ‘cause they have to pollinate. Which, we need some beehives, and I have some really great ideas for attracting mason bees. They pollinate better than bumblebees or honey bees, and they don’t make the whole hive thing. And, you could take that to the kids class and have them make the home, ‘cause you can do it with coffee cans, and rolled up paper. But we need to introduce those bees, we need to make sure we’re mindful of the bugs that are coming in there. You want the good, and the bad ones are gonna come. That’s just what it is. Like aphids. That’s what it is. But because it’s an organic garden, you don’t wanna spray your plants. You know, so let’s learn--



ladybugs eat aphids, so let's get some ladybugs and put them in the garden, and make sure our ladybugs are happy, so they stay in our garden, you know? So, you know, it's just problem solving without an instantaneous result. Cause there's a lot of times where, especially nowadays, where you know, 'I got a question--let me ask Google!', and it's an instantaneous response, whereas with the gardening, you have to have patience. You have to have some understanding, and then the appreciation of 'I grew this, and I'm gonna have a tomato sandwich.' You know, it took me three months to grow this tomato, so I could have a tomato sandwich. So, are you only gonna eat half the sandwich and then throw the other half away and be like 'ahhh, well...'. No. You're going to appreciate all the work that you've put into what you've done, and actually be mindful of what you're doing later on.

And growing up that's what I did, and because of the way my family is, it wasn't a 'oh, we're having a little garden, because we want some basil for our eggs, so we're doin' this and we're gonna go to the restaurant...' No, it was a necessity. We didn't make a lot of money. We had cows, we had horses, we had chickens. We processed all those, you know? We had a cow named Christmas--made me cry, because we ate Christmas. I know, I was like 'that was my pet!' Things I learned--I could never be an animal farmer. I could be a sheep farmer, we could have some sheep, only because they'd have wool. We could have rabbits, because they have wool. But if I had to kill the animals, I would be so vegetarian, it wouldn't be funny, because it's just not happening, because they're my friends. So yeah, I didn't eat the meat, but the vegetables, we had a huge variety. And then the crop rotation, I never understood the 'well we had corn up there last year, why are we puttin' the corn down here this year?' You know, when I was a kid I didn't quite understand that. I didn't care to ask, because you're a kid. But, no one explained it to me either. Nobody took the effort to try to give me that tidbit of information. Even though I wasn't

listening, I would have possibly retained that, and that's the way the kids are now. They may not really care to know, but it could be like that old chinaman telling you 'everything you need, God grow'--an offhand remark that has stuck with me. So, it could be an offhand remark that 'oh, yeah, when you plant corn over here, and green beans over here, you gotta swap them cause the green beans put the nitrogen in, and the corn takes the nitrogen out. They work together. They're a marrying thing.' And I mean, it's like the three sisters with the Native Americans. You've got the squash, the green beans, and the corn. The corn holds the green beans up, gives them something to grow up, and the squash keeps the weeds out. But all three feed off of each other, they all have their purpose, that way you are working smarter, not harder. You don't have to put up poles for the beans because the corn's doing it for you, and then they all work together so now all of the vegetables that are grown right there are getting bigger, getting stronger, and they have all the vitamins and minerals for you that are going to keep you strong and healthy throughout the year. And that's where the appreciation is. That tidbit of information, the rotation of the crops, I didn't understand it when I was a kid, and now we have these kids comin' in, and we can explain it to them. You know, so it's more of a teachable moment, it's not a situation where 'this is our absolute necessity. If we don't have these crops then we're not gonna have that food for the winter.' It's more of a, 'I'm teaching you, let's learn together, let's work together, let's do a cooperation.' So with a garden it wasn't such a stressful necessity, and in some cases it is. And if it's rained out and we've lost our crops then we're doomed. This is not a, 'if a dog got in and it tore up the whole bed', it was like 'well that's not gonna be good, you know what, let's see what plants we can grow in there, let's take care of this, you know, it's more of problem solving. 'Cause we have had that--not where a dog came in, but we've had issues where we've planted stuff, and it wasn't working out, it wasn't growing, it wasn't doing what it was supposed to. And

it was like, you know, 'let's do some problem solving. What would be good here? Let's test the pH of the soil, let's see what's going on. Can we improve the soil balance, the vitamins and minerals? Can we give them some compost tea? Can we do something to the soil so that the plants will thrive, or can we just plant a plant that's going to take what's already there, and be happy with it, and then put something else into the soil? So it gives problem solving skills. And that tied into the whole greenhouse, because now you can grow your microgreens, and you can grow the stuff that would be going into that plot of land. Because you're not gonna go, 'it's July, and my thing is ruined, I'm gonna go plant broccoli.' No, you're broccoli ain't gonna be happy with you, 'cause that's an August thing--not a mid-July. So, the garden just allowed for the problem-solving. It allowed for not a stressful environment. Not a, 'this is work' situation 'cause in my family if you were workin', you weren't askin' questions, if you did you got a whoopin', so you didn't ask questions, you didn't talk, you did what you were told. Children were seen not heard, it was a necessity. This is more learning, and it will allow for them to take that into the future, 'cause, you know, you always need food, and you always need to know where your food comes from. If you eat three times a day you gotta thank a farmer. And we're learning what the farmers are doing.

Just like if you wear a sweater, you still gotta thank a farmer, cause someone grew that wool, unless it is plastic. And then, really, are we wearing plastic? But we are! That's acrylic. And you've spinned it out of plastic. And the shredding process is amazing, but like, are we seriously taking our fossil fuels? Are we burning fossil fuels, to take fossil fuels out of the ground, so that we can make plastic and then shred it up to make it soft and then turn it into a fiber so we can wear it? I got some ideas about that. Why don't we have some sheep? Sheep is good. There's goats that grow some wool. Dogs! I met a woman in Russia on Facebook, that's

all she does--is brush some dogs, and spin it into yarn. And she uses all breeds, she separates the different breeds cause there's different textures, and she wants to maintain the integrity of that--this is this breed. Now, she will mix two of those breeds together if the colors and textures are good, because like where poodle hair is really curly, a collie hair is very straight and fine, so you wouldn't really wanna mix those two, but, oh my god, her stuff is gorgeous. I can't knit to save my life, I mean I can, but it looks like a five year old did it, so, and she knits, and it's all beautiful. But the colors are just amazing. I have a lead on some german shepherd hair, which is hilarious because it's my aunt, and she's just going to continue brushing her dogs and put it in a bag for me. She's got long haired German Shepherds. They're purebreds and the one is a wolf mix, so she's got a longer hair, and it's the same coloring, and all the fibers will work together, because I remember. I've pet all the dogs, and I remember. And then like, oh, how cool would that be. And one's aging, so he's not gonna be around much longer. I'm like, how cool would that be if I took and I made the yarn, and then crocheted her a shawl, something that she could put on and wear. And I thought it was hilarious, because I told her son 'save the wool, put it in a grocery bag and set it in the basement, ain't nobody gonna bother with it, and it's not like you're house ain't full of dog hair anyhow. So, just save it for me when they're shedding, 'cause it's comin'! Pluck it off, and stick it in the bag. Don't do nothing to it, just pluck it off, and stick it in the bag! I'll take care of the rest.' My aunt thought I was gonna make a sweater for her dogs. And I'm like, 'oh that's funny.' No, I'm making yarn for a shawl for her to wear. And she doesn't see the vision. And I'm like, but they're dogs. So here, you could have your sheep, you could have your dogs, you could have the dogs that take care of the sheep to protect them, you know? And all that makes you wool, so now you're warm. And you could grow your vegetables, and keep the sheep out of your vegetables 'cause they're gonna eat it down to the root--sheep are

really bad on the land, but you got your vegetables. Why do you need to have mass farming? We all need an acre of land with a lama. Or an alpaca. I got alpaca socks that go up to my knees. I was gonna wear them today but I was running late to everything. And they go up to my knees and they have a great big alpaca down the side. I love alpaca because you can say, 'are you hungry? Al-paca lunch for you.' How can you make life fun, without drugs or alcohol? 'Cause that's where everyone's at, and I'm like, really? I've got better things to do. Like gardening. 'You wanna get high? Greaaaaatttt! I got this Farmacy we can go to, we can get high all day long! It's a real high when you're being chased by a bee! That's a real high!'

You know, I've always known the garden was impactful, but I guess what really, really cinched it for me, we were doing a potluck type thing and we had a gentleman who had made a fire pit for pizzas. And he was local, which was really awesome, because now you're meeting more local crafters. And so he had this pizza oven, and he built a fire in there, and the kids were all mesmerized by that. And he brought dough, cause that's a whole process, so he brought dough, and he showed 'em 'this is what you do', and then all of the ingredients that were available really came from the garden, or could have come from the garden, 'cause, I mean, we weren't growing mushrooms, only because it's a whole process with the growing of mushrooms. And like making the tomato sauce, you know, we identified that it was from tomatoes. We could have made it, but it's a process. But we had spinach, we had sliced tomatoes, you could put cucumbers on there. Everything that we had was laid out, and it all came from a garden, and some of it was our garden. The kids got to create their own pizzas, and then it got cooked into that oven, and then they all got to enjoy their pizzas that they made, with the fruit and vegetables that they grew. You could see everyone mulling around and talking and then the guy teaching them about the whole fire pit that he made for the oven, and I was like, this really is a

community. This is like the farmers market on steroids. This is the community. This IS the community. This is how this worked 100 years ago. We had the barn raisings, and then we had the whole community that got together and they helped their neighbors, and then they were bringing their own food, and talking about the different things and then the bartering. 'I have peaches', 'well I have cucumbers', 'I'll trade you three cans of, two bushels of peaches for two bushels of cucumbers.' You know? You can't grow everything. So that's how it was so many years ago, and our society has pulled away from that, but should we? I mean really, should we? So, that really just cinched it all for me. Like right here, this is what it's about. And every potluck we've done--this is what it's about. I thought it was the cutest thing, we did a tea one time, and had the tea and the tea cups. My kids loved it, they love tea parties. I'm making them tea all the time, and I'm just doin' like holy basil, and there's your tea, 'cause that's the best tea. You can throw in some lavender, 'cause lavender's edible. You can make lavender sugar, just throw some lavender in the sugar, and I never knew it was edible. I was like 'you can eat that?' Who knew? And lavender's one of them super foods, so it has so many healing aspects. But the tea, you can have a princess tea party, but you're doing it in the garden, so now you're understanding where your stuff is coming from, and you can still be pretty, and dainty in the garden, you know, if you had a tea party IN the garden. My kids are all about fantasy, but mixed with the reality of this is the garden, this is where it came from, and enjoying, just a communal thing. Being with friends and neighbors, and enjoying some time with them. You know, maybe we all had a hard day at work, and enjoyed an evening thing. We may not have all been in the garden that day, but it's the same principle, and having those really, really cinched the whole community for me. And that pizza making thing was the cincher. We'd done potlucks before, but everyone brought their own things. And we had a nice meeting and talk, and even when we're

out in the garden we brought our own stuff, and we all talked and had a good time. But that was-- you had an outsider coming in, showing here's the cooking process, and then their ability to pull those vegetables that they grew on their pizza, and see that it all ties together. That was my cincher. That was the 'YES' moment.

Participating in the Farmacy Garden has shown me that we have a very rich community, a very diverse community, because there were people that had financial means that were volunteering and helping out, and those that didn't. And also people helping with everything, with every aspect, and we had people that had no idea, no clue what to do, that we're doin' it. People that put their kids in school, and that people that were homeschooling. It was so diverse, and there was not any one particular type that came to the garden. It was, everyone comes to the garden. Everyone eats, everyone comes to the garden. So there were realizations that there is a rich community of individuals, but being able to show my kids, and have them realize was even more important, because they're growing up in this community. Where I can be a loner, and I'm real good with that, you know, that may not be the road they choose. They may choose to be more involved in the community, and actually do other things, and not be such a loner. And I wanted them to have that realization, that there is a community, that there are other individuals that are gonna help and teach and wanna help participate, and there's common interests. And they were able to see that, so that was pretty awesome too.

I really don't think being part of the Farmacy Garden changed the way I see the world broadly-speaking, because I was a farmer to begin with. I mean it surprises me when people don't know how to farm. It's like, 'you didn't know that that was a root vegetable, like it grew in the dirt?' You know, I met a gentleman whose whole family got E. coli, and I'm like 'oh my god, what were you eating?' 'The vegetables from my garden--I don't understand how I got it.'

And I was like, ‘wow, what were you fertilizing with?’ ‘Well, my neighbor’s dog.’ ‘Ohhhhhhhh, yeah, you need to learn stewardship.’ I mean that’s a no-no. It’s one thing to eat rabbit or goat, but you don’t use a meat-eater, period. That’s a no-no. And then, I mean, you still gotta wash your vegetables and stuff. I mean, there’s some fertilizers that you don’t use, and that’s how he got E. coli. So, things like that, when I hear stories like that, it’s like ‘how do you not know? Like, how do you not know?’ So, the realization that there are people on this Earth that don’t know has been an eye opener. And, we’ve had some of the people at the Farmacy that had no clue. None. And I think to myself ‘how do you not know?’ If I didn’t know, what would I need to know to start? Because these are things that I grew up with that just is. And here they’re coming as an adult not knowing. So the garden would be a place for me to pass on knowledge. So that’s where that realization comes that we are diverse, that the world is diverse, and it takes all types to make it go round. I’m the clog that keeps on letting the water in the boat, and then I’ll plug it in every now and again. The pesky plug. The square peg in the round hole. That one.

Being part of the Farmacy Garden has changed my perception of my food system because where we were doin’ organic, there wasn’t pesticides being used. So, trying to find different organic methods on how to take care of the slugs. So doin’ the research on that, it was like, ‘whoaaaaa, wait a minute.’ And then, you know, you dive down that rabbit hole, that’s just how I am, and so I learn a little bit about these different pesticides, and then I’m like ‘ok, but those are chemicals, I don’t want chemicals, how do I do it naturally?’ But then there’s like an article off to the side about all these pesticides over here being used on these farms, and then there’s photographs and pictures of these mass farmings, and then you sit there on Netflix watching “Rotten.” And it’s like, ‘Ohhhh, my!’ I didn’t realize that we were putting that many chemicals into not only our plants, but our animals. And they’re selling it at the grocery store, and I’m



purchasing it and thinking, I'm eating salad...no, you're eating salad with a side order of botulism, and a side order of arsenic. I mean that's what you've ordered. Salad with arsenic.

I had a great uncle who died of arsenic poisoning. He was working in a tobacco field, and he was out there in the field and it was hot. They were picking the worms off, and they sprayed the field with arsenic, which wasn't unusual. He was in the field when they sprayed it, and he came home, continued working, cause that was not unusual, and we're talking like the 1940s, that was not unusual for them to do that. So he came home, but the hot water heater wasn't working, they didn't have hot water, so he took a cold shower, and he locked all of that in. Here you've been out all day in the heat, and now you've taken a cold shower and all your pores have closed up, so everything that was in the pores closed up. He ended up losing all his hair, and died of arsenic poisoning. So, I would like to not have that, and to kind of avoid that, because that was very traumatizing to my grandmother. I never met him, she was a kid when he died, but that story went through my whole house, 'cause if they were spraying anything, it was an absolute no-no and we're gonna use 7-dust because we're having a problem with these particular bugs, or, you know, if we have this tea, this will help with that.

My grandmother used to say to me 'when you catch a ladybug bring it to the garden', and I'd say, 'Why? I'll catch ya 100 ladybugs but why are we doing it? That sounds like fun.' I was like seven, and catching ladybugs, it's the best. So, they didn't like me catching the bees. Bees get mad when you catch them. But them bumblebees, you can catch them by the back of the wings and they'll never sting ya. You just gotta run like hell when you let them go, that's all. You know you can tie a string around a bee? I never did that. But they would be on the flower, and I'd be like 'I need you somewhere else', and I'd snatch them by the back of their wings, like right behind their body, and it didn't injure their wings, it didn't hurt them, they'd be mad, 'cause

now I'm moving them where they don't wanna be, okay? And I'd walk them over to the garden and put them on like the squash flower and I'd sit them there, and be like 'there you go!' But when you did that, sometimes they spun around and come right back. So, you'd kinda put your arm way out there and you'd set it down and run! Run like it already stung ya! And now there's a bee in your garden. Yayyyy! Pollinating! Although I didn't know it was pollinating, my grandmother just told me 'Oh! Don't touch them bees, they're doing their job, they're doing good!' So for me, I didn't learn why they were doing good, I learned they were doing good, and I needed them. So then I would just go catch them and bring them in and yay! I got in trouble, but yay! I put bees in the garden! 'Cause you know, I was, what? Seven? I was young, young, young. I remember being little. Little, little.

And catching ladybugs, praying mantis', I would catch them and let them walk all over my arms and stuff, and my grandmother would go, 'can you get that to the garden?' 'Yeah!' 'Go let that go', 'Sure!' And I'd go out on the porch to shake it off, and she'd say 'in the garden', 'oh, okay.' So I knew, anytime I caught a bug, take it to the garden, until I got into catching like slugs and stuff, then they'd be like 'kill that!' 'Well, I don't understand why, it's just leaving a slime trail. I mean I don't understand.' You know, I still didn't understand until I worked at the Farmacy that they actually climb up and eat your plant. Did not know that. I just thought they ate the dirt, 'cause they're all over the ground, just sliming it away, thought they lubed it up and ate it. I don't know. Things you didn't know, but things you learn at the Farmacy. And eggshells take care of that whole problem. Dry 'em up, crush 'em up, actually adds calcium to the soil too, so it's a win-win. You know? You could take the dried eggs, put them in the pummel, you know the stone bowl with the pummel, and get 'em really, really fine, and stick 'em into like a jar, and

shake ‘em, and it gives you calcium water, and then you can pour that onto your plants that are lacking calcium, ‘cause some plants really need it.

That aspect I’m still learning, about the soil, ‘cause I didn’t have that education, I just knew that some plants are hot, the tomatoes are hot, so they grow in the summer, and don’t try to put broccoli out in the summer, because you will kill it. Asparagus comes in the Spring--there are different seasons for different crops. I’m still learning, and part of the Farmacy showed me these are the seasons for that, because we didn’t grow that. We didn’t grow broccoli, gives you the farts, we didn’t grow broccoli. Didn’t grow beans either! But we had tomatoes, we had squash, we had some gourds, cucumbers--because we had pickles all winter long, cabbage, cabbage, cabbage, cabbage--because my grandmother made sauerkraut--she had her own crocks in the basement. We had a peach tree, we had peach jam, and down my house we had blackberries, so my grandfather had planted a couple blackberry bushes.

Well, that turned into a blackberry bush hedge for me, the birds and the turtles, turtles love blackberries. I would leave the bottom part just for the turtles. And the very top part, and the inside of the bush for the birds, and then I would kinda pick around. And I always thought, you know, I’m only gonna take what I’m gonna use. I’m not gonna strip the plant, because I wanna share with the wildlife, ‘cause they’re doing their part, and they need to live too. That was me thinking as a kid, that they need food too. I gotta share with them. But the reality is that they’re your pollinators. They’re spreading the seeds, they’re spreading the plants. The turtles eat the blackberries, they ingest it, they eat it up, and they walk half a mile, and they poop! Guess what? They’ve just planted you a new blackberry bush. Same with the birds--that’s how you get bushes everywhere. They get into that blackberry plant for nesting purposes, and give it a shake, and now they’re spreading pollen everywhere, you know? So those are your pollinators, those are

your distributors. That's how everything grows, and that's an adult realization, but as a kid I just thought I needed to share with my buddies. I still do. I'll be down picking black raspberries, wine berries, and blackberries, and I'll get a feeling and go 'ahhh okay, mr. bear, the rest is yours. And I will walk away. I'd leave a whole bunch--I'm walkin' away, because the bear needs to eat too, so he stays outta my garbage can, and he eats what he needs to eat, and he can go poop over there, and I'll have new bushes. Yay! So, I share with them all. Deer, the deer will come in, I'll see where the black bear comes in, and I thank him sometimes, because he wants to get way down into the middle of the bushes. Well, because they're plants that grew wild from the birds, they're kinda sporadic, everywhere. So I can't get into the center, I can only pick these scraggly ones that are off around the edge, and I can only reach so far in. That bear don't care. That bear makes a path for that juicy center. I'll pick off the sides, I'm good with that, but you made me a path, buddy-thanks! So I leave him the blackberries that I know he would reach and are really good. I don't pick 'em when they're just about ripe 'cause I want them to get fully ripe. So, even when that'll be ready tomorrow, it just needs another day of sunlight to be fully ripe, and if I don't pick it now, maybe the black bear will get it tonight, so it's a chance, but I fed the black bear and he's not in my garbage so I'm gonna go with that and it's a win-win. Either I get it tomorrow, or he's gotten it--it's all good. Or the deer. The deer fertilize everything, and they spread the seeds everywhere. They also get in your garden, so cover your stuff, put a fence up

Cubs are out. It's January. What's up with our weather? Australia is burning. Acres so big the size of Delaware. The size of Delaware. That's how big fires are. And I'm like, really? Are we gonna continue with the mass farming, and all the fossil fuel use, and the polluting of our oceans? Why can't we have 40-acres and mule? Come on man? This is where we're at. I mean, if you wanna be in the city that's fantastic, be in the city. The whole point behind being in the city

is so you don't have to own a vehicle and you'll be able to walk to various places. But you still need the hunters to keep the population of various animals down. That's why we have bear problems and deer problems. People aren't doing their conservation. Because a good hunter is a conservationist first. You don't go out and kill all the deer--then you don't have deer to eat. And you don't kill off the best buck, that makes no sense. So you gotta be a conservationist to be a hunter. You have to be a steward of the land in order to be a farmer, because you have to understand you are what you eat. The plants eat the vitamins and minerals out of the ground, and you're eating a plant. So you need to learn about the soils, and we teach that at the Farmacy, which is really cool. 'Cause I did not know there was manure tea, things I learned that I did not know that you could put it into a tea and it was actually more potent than just puttin' it on the ground and waiting for it to rain. You could rain it yourself and make it into a tea, and then you're using a lot less fertilizer to have a larger impact. Things I didn't understand and realize until the Farmacy. So, that was pretty cool.

The Farmacy Garden inspired me to reuse, reduce, and recycle more now, with like my scraps from the kitchen, my kitchen scraps, not with the meat, I put the meat somewhere else, but my vegetables, the eggshells, vegetable scraps, I have them set aside, and I have a whole pile of stuff off to the side of my house that I flip and turn. I do that because I have little pots of vegetables where I can place them. Because I live in the forest I can't really grow a whole lot, and I mean, if I'm growing a vegetable, it's being grown in a pot because even if I did improve the soil, I still wouldn't trust it, because the only sunny spot I have is next to the driveway, and it's the main driveway for a lot of people, so I'm still gonna get the road grime, and I really don't want your road grime, because it's mixed with antifreeze and oil, and I really don't want that on

my plants. However, I now have a pile to fertilize all my plants, and I really attract a lot of bees 'cause I have a lot of flowers, and herbs, cause I can do the herbs in pots and away from the road.

Our society has become so throw-away, like you get a grocery bag at the grocery store. You get a plastic bag to stick your food in, you take it home, and all the stuffs out and now you have this plastic bag that you're throwing away. And then you're driving down the road to the Farmacy, and you see that same plastic bag blowing in a tree, and it's stuck there for five years. Been there, five years, and it ain't goin nowhere. Ain't gonna go nowhere till that tree falls down, or some bird takes it, or gets stuck in it, or, you know, and that's the reality. So it's like, how can I really be wanting to be organic, and wanting to do better for myself, my family, the land, if I'm part of the throwaway society? Like, how can I change this? You know? No judgement or anything, this is how I was raised and that's what we always did--mixed an old way in with a new way, 'cause the new way was just comin' in. I mean this mass packaging, really? Really? With all the plastics and stuff, that really, really, really happened in my lifetime. 'Cause when I was a kid we had brown paper bags, and that's what you used, and then they went to the plastic bags and we were like 'oh, that's really cool, they got handles!' You know? And then, well, they work for your kitchen--you can throw your kitchen scraps in there, and you can throw your bathroom toiletries and stuff...I mean really? 'Cause they're not rotting--things we didn't know then. It takes 400 years for them to rot. So, I'm like, how can I be a steward of the land, I don't want plastic in my food, I want my animals to live so they can help me do my gardening and stuff, and so yeah, that's how it's impacted everything I do. It's more of like what can we do with what we have? I'm gonna get thirsty. The likelihood that I'm gonna get thirsty is very, very high. The likelihood that I'm gonna stop at the gas station and get a bottle of water--it's just as high, okay? But now I have this plastic bottle, now what? Am I just gonna throw it

away? Because I can come back in 400 years and come get it, because it's still gonna be there. So what can I do with that to improve what I've just done? I've now supported a mass marketer that now has made all these things, but can I cut it up and make little rings to put my plant in so it creates a water well, and holds the water in? Or can I just cut it up and make bracelets? I don't know, BUT, you know, now you've got an activity to do. Or you can cut the top off, put your gravel, your sand, and some dirt, put your plant, turn the whole thing upside down and you have your own greenhouse. Or you can just turn it right side and you just kinda push it together. We used to do that in girl scouts with the two liter bottles and have your own greenhouse, and it was so cool, 'cause you're growing in a greenhouse. So then you buy 100 bottles of 2-liter sodas just so you can make some greenhouses, and I was like 'why would you do that?' And I'm like 'wait a minute, let me pump some breaks here', cause I don't drink soda a whole lot so why would I purposefully buy a bunch of soda bottles, just so I can have empty soda bottles. Why don't I just invade some garbage can. I'll go dumpster diving. That way I'm saving the dumpster, I'm saving what has already been discarded, somebody else has drank it, lord knows a lot of people do. So, I can do it, I know dumpster diving. It's amazing what you can find in there. Clothing--like why did you just throw that away? Like, I can wash that, I can get that stain out. So, my husband would get so mad at me 'cause we had a wringer washer at the time, and I'd come home with a trunk full of clothes, and he's like 'what did you just do?' and I'm like 'I can wash this, I can dry this, and I can give it to people I know, or donate it, or make something else out of it.' Which I do, cause I mean you saw me and Etta come--we had matching skirts, and she had a skirt, but the bottom of her skirt was the bottom to the pants that I cut up, and I had the top of the pants for my skirt belt, and then the material that we used was old quilt pieces. Both articles were gonna be thrown away. The material was good, but I spilled bleach on them. Nobody was going to wear

them, they were brown pants. Well guess what? I cut the bleach out, and turned it into something else, and voila, I've saved the landfill. Yayyyyyy! And then I donated it, and someone bought it and I've seen her wearing it every now and again, and I'm like, 'hey, there's my skirt!'. I got too small for it, which is a yay for me, but I am so happy that someone else found beauty in that and it's just continuing on. I love that. I love love that. And being part of the garden really emphasized that you need to reduce, reuse and recycle because you are what you eat, and you're working with the soil, and you're improving the soil conditions.

I don't know if it was me, or someone else suggested it--using styrofoam balls to get the soil more loamy. And we're like, 'yeah, but that puts out a chemical and it's really bad for the environment, so maybe we can do something else, maybe add some sand to get it a little bit more loamy, or something. So then it got me thinking, well that was just styrofoam balls, and they put out a chemical, and they really do, so then I was like okay, if that's putting the chemical into the soil, then these treated 2x4s that we were using, what was it treated with, and is that getting into the soil? So then I'm like, rethinking, whoa, so I wanna have a raised garden, what do I build it out of? 'Cause right now I'm thinking just these blocks, cause the blocks are gonna be a good deal, but it got that whole process is what it got me down that hole, cause I was gonna grow, I was gonna grow potatoes in tires. You know, and I thought that that is really conserving a lot of space, cause you can grow vertical instead of horizontal. And yeah, it's a tire, that's a lot of chemicals--a used tire at that. And yes, it's a fantastic idea in theory, but what about the chemicals? That was where I was like 'waiiittt a minute, things seep in and then what has seeped into the potatoes that I could potentially eat?' And then the realization that I'm diabetic and I can't have the potatoes, I'm like 'you know what, I don't even need to think about it', just sweet potatoes. That's what I need to think about! Sweet potatoes! And they wouldn't do well in a tire



anyhow, because their tubular and they grow funkier. They're kinda long and I wouldn't put them in there anyhow because they're just not right. But, now when I am reusing I think about what effect it has and how I would dispose of it so it's not infecting more land, cause I mean, that's where it's at. You can be as thoughtful as you wanna be, and it's still gonna wind up in a landfill. And that's what I took away from the garden, that was the one life lesson. I guess I had a multitude of life lessons, but that was one lesson that is really sinkin' with me, and really changed a lot of things for me, was that. I mean I already reused with the girl scouts, but it was a craft, 'here's a pretty for you! I took your soda bottle and made it pretty, mommy!' 'I took your water bottle and made it a bracelet.' Nobody's gonna wear that. I don't care how pretty you've made it, you can paint it, and it's like 'oh yeah, I made that', but are you really gonna wear it a second time? I mean, you showed it, but now are you gonna wear it another time? I wouldn't. I can't say that someone else wouldn't, but I wouldn't. It'd be like my kids made that for me, so when I go out with my kids I'm gonna wear it, but, I mean, how much jewelry do you need? Now you're filling up your house with things, I mean you only have so much floor space. Nothing really increases that knowledge until you have a pet or a kid, or get a hobby. Then it's like, whoa, wait a minute...I just bought twenty pounds of wool, where am I putting it? Now I got trashbags in my house, and my husbands like, 'oh you got garbage', and I'm like 'don't you touch my wool! 'That's wool, that's not garbage, that's wool!' 'Well, it looks like garbage', 'that's because it's double bagged, because there's debris on that wool that has to be picked off, so that's why it's double bagged, over there, in the corner, leave it be, I haven't gotten to it, I'm still processing', you know? So, only so many pretties.

In five to ten years I would like to see more Farmacy Gardens. More and more and more of them. I would love to see the Farmacy Garden where there is public housing. I would love to

see the Farmacy Garden, like every block. That would be awesome, because the reality is, there's a lot of people, and sometimes they don't know where it's at. Sometimes they can't get to it. You know, the one woman she road busses, she road like, what? Three busses? Just to get to the Farmacy Garden. And then the scheduling--she would have to leave by a certain time, and so the potluck dinners weren't happening for her because she didn't have a ride home. There's some people that have disabilities that can't get there, so if we had more accessibility. And that doesn't mean, oh we need wheelchair ramps, no, no, no, we need to have more gardens so that more people can get involved where they're at. Cause I mean, if you think about public housing, a lot of people ride busses, you know, they don't get out. There are other issues, other underlying issues that are there that we can't even begin to address. But there's children, and children are teachable. So then you can have a garden there, and have someone showing, maybe they only come twice a week, for an hour or two--have it up to the people there. The first year I would make sure you were actually making sure something's fruitful, but give those people an opportunity to grow something. Maybe they wanna grow a tomato for their sandwich three months down the road. You know, give them the opportunity, give them the plot to be able to do that. We did something like that at a senior center, it was a senior high rise, so it wasn't assisted living or anything, but you had to be disabled or elderly to live there, and the residents really wanted to have a garden 'cause most of them were farmers. So they built raised beds, and that way they could stand there or have their walkers, because it wasn't wheelchair accessible, so if you were in a wheelchair you were kind of out the door. They didn't build the shorter one. But if you were in a walker, a cane, standing, you didn't have to be bent over, it was more chest level. It was built with wood, and then there was brick in there so that the dirt didn't really push down. You didn't have 200 pounds of dirt in one thing. And the seniors loved it. They absolutely loved

it, and there was only four or five beds. They took up two parking spots, that was it, we're not talking a huge amount of land, but it gave them so much pleasure, it gave them so much joy, and then it wasn't necessarily about learning anything, it was them getting in the dirt, and having that community time, that communal time, even if it's just grounding, 'cause they got their hands in the dirt. Nothing like playing in the dirt. That should be accessible to everyone. We should go to all the senior centers and have a Farmacy for everyone, that way you're only taking up a parking spot or two depending upon how many residents, and how many actually want to be a part of it, you can grow it from there, depending on the space. You can even put it in the parking lot, if you've got raised beds, put it wherever. So, I just think we should have more accessibility, there should be more of that. More and more and more of them. If they were on every corner I'd be happy. We'd be thrilled to death. We'd be like 'Yayyyyy! We have a world full of rebels. Yayyyy!' Wanna be a rebel? Grow your own food.

I want everyone in my community to know how to grow something, or at least how it was grown, 'cause I understand. Maybe a rocket scientist doesn't understand how to grow a tomato, maybe they don't, but they can still appreciate the process that went into making that tomato. Just like a lot of us buy apps on our phone and we're like, 'oh it's only 99 cents, no problem' 'oh, this is a cheesy app.' You know how much time and energy it took to get that cheesy app? Someone had to have a creative idea, and then they had to learn the math, and then they had to have the skill sets to create that program, and it's not just 'oh okay let me hit a few buttons', 'cause those few buttons, that was created by somebody else. Well, it's kind of like gardening, you know? I didn't just type in the computer that I want a tomato and then boom, now you have a tomato. Noooo, I kind of had to fix the dirt, I had to kinda put the plant in the dirt, and have that whole process, and I would love for everyone in my community to understand the process, if

not actually do it. At least understand and appreciate that that is the process, and that's why you pay three dollars a pound for tomatoes instead of going to the grocery store and 'oh look, I got it for 99 cents.' Well, that's good, but it's full of pesticides, but you eat that and enjoy. But I understand financial restraints as well, so eat as healthy as you can, I get that, you know, but just being more mindful, and having that knowledge and appreciation, and that's what I would love for the community. That's why I'm trying to set up at the farmers market and have drop spindles and do demonstrations. That way they can see and appreciate the fact that, yeah, it's selling for \$5 an ounce, but this is why. This is why. You wanna learn? Here's a drop spindle. Have at it, you can learn, it's that hard. I thought that would be awesome, and then maybe have little workshops for the kids. Find a way that I could make these cheaply and maybe out of recycled materials--maybe there's your plastic bottles. I'm thinking a straw. How many straws are we always complaining about that we can't use, and then a plastic bottle. I mean, it would be really light. That would be very, very, very light, but it has a little bit of movement. You know? I would've never thought about what recyclable materials could I use to do the demonstrations if I hadn't gone to the Farmacy Garden, because we got involved in the Market Kids and the kids were going out there, but we showed them how the growing of the food was, teaching them about that, and then all of a sudden now they're at the Blacksburg Farmers Market selling their stuff. So, that was a whole process. You know? So I would've never thought about spinning wool and then showing that as a demonstration or bothering with any of that if I hadn't of had that showing in the community, that whole process. Cause that's not how I grew up. I grew up with 'this is my farm, why are you on my land? This is my land!' You know? You work, don't ask questions, I mean we didn't have people comin' over, and we didn't have this whole community thing. We were isolated, this was our farm, and our sheet metal shop, and people

didn't come in the back and socialize with us. Like a hair salon, you get all kinds of people comin' in and you can talk to everybody. When you're raised in a sheet metal shop, you get to talk with contractors--those were my buddies. A lot of kids learn how to socialize, I learned how to take little pieces of metal triangles and throw them at walls, and how to farm, cause that's what you did. You worked all day in the sheet metal shop, and then you went home to work in the garden in the summer months. In the winter months you enjoyed your canned vegetables and stuff, and the sauerkraut.

They did that at the Farmacy one day, made sauerkraut. My kids loved it, they were like 'we made this! We made this!' And I'm like 'fantastic!' And you can make it in a jar, that was really easy, and just them all lit up and so excited that they made sauerkraut, which I took advantage of because I was raised with it. There wasn't a 'yay!', it was 'eat this.' It's on my plate, I gotta eat it, whether I like it or not I gotta eat it. But the Farmacy, it allowed for that whole 'YAY', and then that kind of sunk in for me that, it's their first, not mine and I need to have that much excitement for them so that they are like 'YAY' every time. You know? And that way they maintain that joy, and are and doing more growing and stuff, because if it's a chore, nobody wants to do it. Turn it into something fun, enjoyable, and now we're having a designer meal, with pizza that we made outside in a brick oven, I mean how cool is that? Or our tea party. Oh my god, we used the herbs out of our garden and we're making tea, man! This is cool, we got pretty little cups! Go to Goodwill and buy a hundred little cups, or garage sales, and even if you're just using paper cups, there you go. Or coffee cups, they're a dime a dozen everywhere. So, you're still in the garden, enjoying the fruits of your labor and having a good time, and then it makes it more enjoyable if it's not a chore. It's more of this is enjoyment, and I can get a great deal of enjoyment even if it was an acre. You can still have a great deal of enjoyment, it's just

your enjoyment lasts from sunup to sundown, but you're enjoying, you can enjoy it, I mean there's people that do.

I saw the coolest thing. They had a cart for strawberry pickin' 'cause strawberries are low growing, and to be bent over all day long, to be on your knees, all of that is just painful on your back, your knees, and as I'm getting older I'm looking at these things and now I understand why they said the kids can go and pick strawberries. I get it now. It'll ruin your back. Not mine, 'cause it's already ruined. So this contraption, they took like the wheelbarrow tires, had four of them, and they built a dolly cart. Only it was tall enough to go over plants, and big enough to hold a human being so it was like a massage table with a hole, and you could take and have your hands down and you could walk the whole thing. You lay on it on your belly, and you can walk, and diddle with your plants, and walk with your hand, and diddle with your plants, go forward, backwards, and I was like, mind blown. There's the purple smoke, I'm done. Yes. That would be so perfect if you're doin' spinach, any low growing vegetable. And you're having issues with getting down and bending over and things like that. Now, I mean, how long are your arms, how long are your legs, there were some design ideas that I had, like what's the reality of laying on your belly, you know? And can we put an umbrella above that? Maybe some little fans, so I'm not burning up. I don't want a sunburn on my backside. If I had a larger farm, like if you're driving down 81, come from Blacksburg going towards Pulaski, on the left there's farm, and it's fairly new, it's just a couple years old. And I saw spinach, it looked like spinach, coulda been a low growing bush beans, I wasn't sure 'cause you know, I'm doing 80 (70) 80 driving by, and you know, it's hard to identify a plant when you're zoomin' by. But it looked like it was a low growing--that's what mattered. It was low growing and they had fields and fields and fields of it. And I'm like wow, that little cart would be useful. I'm seeing all these people out in the field and

they're all hunched over and they got bags and baskets and I'm like, 'you should have a cart, man.' You could build it out of torn up old pallets. Why not? And did you know if you took a plastic bottle, and that was the functional use, and you can take two sticks, put them together, and then you'd have to use nails or screws to make them stay. No, no, cut the top and bottom off your plastic bottle, you could cut off the side, wrap it around wherever your joint is, and take a heat gun or blow dryer and heat it up, and it shrinks it, and it becomes like a glue. It's unbreakable. Once it cools off you can fling it, smash it around, it ain't goin nowhere. It has sucked that shut, and you're done. So I'm like 'what? Yes!' I mean they were doin' it with 1x1s, they built a chair, and the 1 piece was from the tree, and then they had a regular spindle and they slid it up the bottom, and kinda got it in there, and then they blow dried it, and took another piece and I was like 'what?' now I don't have to use all those nuts, and bolts, and screws while diverting plastic from the landfill, what? I saw another man make a whole boat out of plastic bottles. I was like, what? It was clearly plastic bottles. He had all the caps on, and it was all strung together with string. It was a little kayak, and I'm like, 'wow!, what? I'm not doing that, but whatttt?'

So it just makes you think of what other ways can you use these items, and the Farmacy is one of those places that does that because we repurpose everything. We had this donated to us. We have no use for it, but we can take it apart and use that over here, and that over here, and then yay! We do that all the time, you know? So, we need to have that everywhere. Everyone needs to be able to do that. Or learn that, or allow their children to learn those skills. We need some problem-solvers, because we've got some serious problems. Did I mention the polar caps are melting? We've got wildfires the size of Delaware in Australia, and it's January and baby

black bears are out. Like, literally, here, out. So, tell me about that global warming and what's contributing to it. It's not your cars. Have another burger. Enjoy it.



## **Appendix M: James' Story**

When I was five years old, the school had a garden program and they sent me home with seed packets, and I brought the packets home and told my parents I wanted to have a garden. My dad dug a plot of ground in the backyard for me, and I started, I planted the seeds. As it turned out, my neighbor, Mrs. Ivan from Russia was a master gardener in Russia, so over the years she gave me all kinds of tips on what to do, and what not to do when planting a garden. So, I just grew really fantastic vegetables, everything was really big and free of disease and critters eating them and whatever. I really liked the sunflowers the most, I used to plant these gigantic sunflowers, they would grow 12, 15 feet tall and have these humongous heads and then of course we'd have a fair at school at the end of the garden season, you could bring your stuff in, so I won a lot of blue ribbons and stuff like that. So, when I was at the NRV clinic and my doctor, said 'do you know about the Farmacy Garden?' I said no, I don't know what you're talking about, and he said 'oh, there's a garden out back here, gotta go check it out', so that's what I did, I checked it out, and the rest is history.

When I first started at the Farmacy Garden, I basically just got roped into watering, because that was what was really needed most, and fortunately that year I was still able to walk pretty well, and so that's what I did, was a lot of watering. Actually, almost all watering. And then some harvesting of course, but the next year my health issues around walking were severely restricted and I wasn't able to water hardly at all, so I was doing other things like planting, weeding, a lot of weeding, and harvesting, and tying things up or just cleaning areas up, all that kind of stuff. So I was still doing a lot, but I wasn't hardly watering at all. I still wanted to be a part of the garden, and I couldn't water, and watering is a big part of it. I would like to see something that is more user friendly then the way we have to carry water in either buckets or

sprinkling cans around to water the garden, it's just ridiculous. Anyway, yeah, I couldn't do that anymore because I had trouble with my knee and my hip, and I just couldn't do it, so I wanted to be a part of the garden so I just had to look at other things I could help with.

The Farmacy Garden is accessible, it's right between the clinic and the social services parking lot, so I mean, it's really accessible, there's plenty of parking. On both sides actually, and, yeah, it's a great location. I was able to park close on either end to get in the garden so that wasn't a problem. And as far as working goes, I would just take a bucket, turn it over and sit on it and weed, and then move my bucket. Basically just sit down and do a lot of weeding, so it doesn't require a lot of physical strength to do a lot of things. Just get creative, and I suppose if you had a wheelchair you could probably bring your wheelchair there and just work from your wheelchair, you know, whatever. Whatever works. There's a whole lot that can be done from all aspects.

I liked the idea that there was a garden that I could participate in, and as it turns out, the more I participated, the less I planted in my own garden because there was so much food that it was like a waste of time for me to plant my own garden, so I cut way back on my own garden, and I still have a very small garden of my own. I really prefer to work in the Farmacy Garden because in my own garden I'd be working there by myself, and in the Farmacy Garden there's other people coming in, I get to meet different people from different backgrounds.

The first year the garden didn't mean a lot to me other than vegetables, and of course I got to know the garden coordinator and a few other people, but mostly I was there in the morning early and I left before anyone else came, or maybe right as they came I left. So I didn't really have a lot of interaction with people, but when I couldn't do the watering anymore, I came in at a later time when there was more people there, and there was a picnic table there so we'd sit and

usually have a muffin and a cup of coffee or something before we got started. So it was, a social event. So that's what changed, and it was basically because I couldn't do the watering that that all happened. So it just opened up a new venue for me. And then, I was only going to volunteer one day a week, and when I say one day, I mean one two or three hour period a day, but since nobody was volunteering and coming in, I ended up coming in three days a week--Monday, Wednesday and Friday. So then it really became a really big part of my life basically.

The social aspect means everything, because I'm a very social person, I think people are social to begin with even though they don't know it. And, uh, the interesting thing is, all the young people that I met there, and I have to say all, because all of them expressed that they wanted to hear from me--things that I had to say, not just about gardening, but about life in general. So, yeah, I was wanted. So, it's a big deal. So when the garden ends in October, it's kind of, get back into my cave type of thing.

One of the values that drives me to participate is that I'm helping people. I've always been a helper so, how am I helping people? I'm raising these beautiful organic vegetables which there's so many of them. There's more than one person could eat, I'll tell you that. So, it gives me great satisfaction to know that I helped raise how many pounds of this or that that was given to those who were in need, and so that's basically what drives me is to do that. It's a big job, here's a lot to do there, it's too much for one person, it takes a community basically. It's a community garden and we need a lot of people there and the more people we have there, the more we can accomplish. Jesus says if you don't help the least of these, then you haven't helped me. So, at the garden all of the vegetables that the volunteers don't want or can't eat go to the social service building and they're given to the people that really, really need this type of food. Also, people from Virginia Tech come in and teach people how to use the different types of

vegetables, so it definitely fits into the Christian background, you know, love your neighbor as yourself. So I've always had this drive to help others. My Aunt Marge maybe could have been an influence for that, I don't know. When I was a very young child, my Aunt Marge would pick me up and take me to an orphanage in Cleveland in Parmadale, and she would pick me up every weekend and we'd go there and do community service. I don't know what I did, 'cause I was like three or four or five years old, but I remember being there with all of these orphans or whatever, and she would take me with her, so that could be where it all began. So I've always been a giver, basically, throughout my entire life, I've been a giver. I've helped start an organization called the Richfield JC's, which was based on helping people, I was the founder of that organization. I was the founder of the first Richfield clean-up day, and I was the founder of a recycling program in that area--nobody had even known about recycling, and so I've just always been a giver, I've always wanted to give back to the community.

I've always seen the gift of giving. I've always seen the gift, starting the JCs, starting the recycle program, starting the clean-up program, and doing all kinds of other programs that I was involved in as a young man, I guess I was just blessed by God to see that greater things are possible. I wasn't able to achieve much other than the few things I mentioned, but I've always known that there's a greater possibility.

By participating in the Farmacy Garden, I've learned what I've probably always known, which is that we are community minded people, and that we are part of a community whether we want to be or not, and working on a project together with people, and sharing, is highly rewarding. To see the fruits of your labors, I mean, I just I can't think of anything greater than that. And, one of the things that I think that it helps me to be there with is to be there with young people. This generation has a hard time speaking with people because nobody calls you anymore,

everyone wants to text, of course I don't text so therefore basically I'm out of the loop. So, I think I have an opportunity to speak with people and hopefully make an impact and let them know that calling people, and meeting them in person is a lot better than a text. But, I understand that their lives are a lot faster than my life is or was, and texting is a lot quicker than conversation. What is lost through text is the inference of the text, so you don't know if they are angry, or their happy or their sad. You can't tell that from the text, from the wording, unless they put in LOL and a funny face, then it's a happy thing, but if they don't put that in, then you don't really know. If you're getting something from somebody through an email or a text, the whole personal thing is lost. When you speak to somebody face to face, you have an inflection in your voice, you have an inflection when you're inspired by something, and it's hard to show an inflection in that texting, or that email, you just don't get it. So, when you're excited, then your voice reflects that, and the person sitting opposite of you gets it also. And then when you're sad or unhappy, that also is translated to them, whereas you miss all of that in a text, or whatever.

So participating in the Farmacy Garden I guess the realization was that young people don't like to talk. Of course I kind of knew that I guess, but I mean eventually people warmed up and did talk. It's not like they didn't talk, they did. But, in the beginning it was like everybody sitting at a picnic table texting one another. We're all sitting right there, it's like, okay, and little by little, we ended up having discussions, which was pretty cool. So there was definitely a culture shift, but once I'm gone, and by gone I mean once the garden shuts down and we don't meet there anymore, I'm sure they fall back into their texting, because their peers are all texting, their peers aren't speaking to one another. So I guess when we all meet again in May when we all come together to start the next garden season, it'll probably take a few moments to realize that I'm there and they're gonna have to talk to me. Gardening is wonderful in that way. Technology

is great, but to garden you need to communicate with people, and I guess you could just text one another and just say ‘there’s some weeds over there in the corner that need...’ whatever, but it’s a lot easier just to go over and say ‘would you help me pull these weeds out’, you know?

The other personal realization I had from the Farmacy Garden, and I didn’t even want to admit this, this one, was that people are basically lazy. I didn’t want to admit that realization because I’ve always been a defender of the poor. And, I still am a defender of the poor, because the Bible tells us to be a defender of the poor, and I still believe that the poor are taken advantage of in many ways, but one of the things that I came to realize is that there are a lot of lazy people out there, and I’ll qualify that. I’d be working in the garden in the early morning, and especially towards the end, where my knee was like totally blown out, and I can barely walk and I’m kind of limping along watering the garden, and somebody would stop by and say ‘oh, when are you giving away some free vegetables?’ and I’d say, ‘well, wouldn’t it be nice if you could just help out a little bit around here?’ I know that I needed the help, and the garden coordinator needed the help, and we needed help, and I said ‘just a half an hour, every once in a while’ and unequivocally, every person that asked me for free vegetables, every one of them said they weren’t interested in helping out at all. Zero. And that was an eye opener, and I didn’t want to believe that, but I have to believe it, because that’s the reality. I’m not saying they’re all lazy, I guess I was basing it on my own experience. I was like crippling around, so it was painful for me to water the garden, I was crippling around, and then I’d see somebody who was like 55 years old, I’m just guessing their age, sitting in a pickup truck, looking over the fence going, ‘can I have some free vegetables?’ And I’m saying, ‘hey, can you help out a little bit, I didn’t...’ You know? And they’re saying ‘no thanks’. So, that’s what I’m basing it on. Plus, we’ve put signs up in the social service building, we’ve put signs up at the clinic requesting people to come and

participate in the garden and help out, and I don't know what the statistics are, but very few came and helped. Not even for their own benefit, I mean it's going to benefit them. I mean, forget about the social interaction, let's just look at the food. I mean organic food in the stores is 2 or 3 times more expensive than the non-organic food in the stores, so here you can come to a Farmacy Garden and you can do a minimum of, let's say a half an hour a week of volunteer time, and walk home with all the tomatoes and kale and onions and whatever that you could possibly eat in one week for a half an hour of work. I mean, really? What a gift. It's a fantastic gift. And people just don't see the gift. They don't see the gift. I've talked to a lot of people that could benefit from the community garden. I've spoken to people at the library and told them about the program. Wherever I go I speak to people about the community garden, trying to let people know it's here. I've spoken to a lot of people personally about the community garden. I've spoken to a lot of my friends about the community garden, and even my friends will go, 'well, yeah, you can bring us some vegetables', but they're not interested in helping, they're not interested in lifting one finger to help for the community garden. I mean, I don't know, but obviously I don't bring them any vegetables because, really? You know? I'm generally an optimist I guess, I look at the world and I see hope, but working at the garden, I guess, and the fact that a lot of people, even my friends don't wanna come, I see it I guess as people are lost. I mean people are lost. I guess maybe I just realized that. People are just totally lost. I mean they just want things handed to them. And I'm not just talking about the poor, 'cause a lot of my friends aren't poor, and they don't want to work to get a tomato, they just want a tomato given to them. It's very sad.

Different than it was when I was growing up. When I was growing up, everybody loved working and doing things, creating things on their own. So, I can't speak about the world, but I can speak about the United States, and I can see a shift here that because of all that we have, we just really

don't want to work for it. We're just so used to having so much we just figure it should just be given to us I guess. Whereas, I have friends that live in India, I'm talking about friends, and people that are really, really poor that live in India and they work really, really hard, and they're full of so much joy. I Skype with them every once in a while, and they're just full of so much joy and happiness, and they work 6 days a week, 12 hours a day for \$2-3 bucks for the whole day. And yet, they're just full of all this joy and happiness because they created something. They went out and did something, worked in their yard or whatever, so that's what I see.

So the words that are coming up is that we were more human. We liked each other better, we loved each other better, we trusted each other more. When I grew up we never locked our house. A matter of fact, I don't even know if we had a key. When I was old enough to drive, I never locked my car, ever. I never locked my car. The only thing you needed a key for was to start the ignition, that was it. So, yeah, we've lost a lot, and so, yeah. Humanist. We were more human.

As far as the food system, participating in the Farmacy Garden has made me think more about things like the Romaine recalls that we constantly have. And now we just got the all clear again that the Romaine is good to eat. Well, guess what? I'm not buying any because this has been ongoing forever. At the garden I've never gotten sick off of eating anything from the garden. It's a small scale compared to the food systems that we're purchasing from. But, when they say organic? It's the organic romaine that's contaminated, so, yeah, everything's just gotten too big I guess. And, lost that human touch, and it's just gotten too, who knows what? And maybe there's no way around it because there's just more people now. I know when I first started driving and I drove out West to California, once you got West of the Mississippi River you could drive sometimes the whole day and never see another car. I doubt if that's the case in this world.



So there's just more people. There's more pollution because there's more people, and there's more everything because there's more people. And our food systems seem to be compromised on a weekly basis now. It's like we're always reading about something being taken off the shelf, and not just in small quantities--like 88,000 lbs of ground beef is pulled off the shelf, and then, anyway, I'm not exactly sure.

The Farmacy Garden fits into the food system really well. I mean what a great opportunity for everybody and they just don't understand it. What a great opportunity to have safe, organic foods produced right in your own community, and you could be a part of it, and it's free. Wow. I don't get what there's not to get about that. I mean, we can grow romaine and it's gonna be healthy, safe romaine. You don't have to worry about going to the grocery store and wondering if the romaine's gonna be contaminated this week or not. And everything we grow there is organic and it's very, very safe. And what a great, great way to eat healthy, safe food.

What I'd like to see is Farmacy Garden's popping up everywhere. Wherever there's a vacant lot. As a matter of fact, that was my dream many years ago. Was to start community gardens wherever there was a vacant lot--get permission, go in and make a garden, and have people take care of it. That was my vision for India at one time when I was younger. I never did it, obviously, but in India all of the land next to the rivers belongs to the people. It's government land, like BLM land here--Bureau of Land Management. But most of BLM land here is out West in the desert where it would be very hard to garden economically, because water would have to be brought in somehow. But, in India, all the rivers belong to the people, so my thought was to go over there and start like, garden clubs. I mean, I'm calling them garden clubs, but I mean start gardening for people. The reason they can't do the garden is because they can't afford the seed, and they can't afford the utensils--the hoes, the rakes to start the gardens. And the knowledge of

how to plant stuff and grow things. So that was always my big thing. So yeah, same thing could happen here in the United States. I mean there's a lot of vacant land around everywhere. And so my thought would be to develop these parcels of land into gardens and have people in the community, and eventually in most communities you'd probably be able to grow enough produce to supply almost the entire community, not just the poor people in the community, but everybody. I mean it'd be wonderful, and what an opportunity being missed. Take the food production into our own hands, and then we don't have to rely on the mega producer that isn't necessarily doing everything properly, and therefore contaminating our food. It's a great vision and it would be really simple to do, but you'd have to have participation, obviously one person couldn't do it all. And as far as getting the land goes, let's take my property as an example. I've got just under an acre, and half of it is level and pretty good soil. I'd be willing to let people come and farm my entire piece of property. I'm sure there's other people that'd be willing to do that. I mean, if people wanted to come here and grow a garden, I'd say hallelujah, let's do it, and then I wouldn't have to mow it. I mean just think about it, I wouldn't have to even own a lawnmower. There's a lot of benefits, and then the lawnmower wouldn't be a combustion engine pushing all of that carbon into our atmosphere, and heating up our atmosphere, and it'd just be really wonderful. But it's kind of an utopian thought, because people are people, and people think that their land belongs to them, but then, of course, there's people like me. I'm sure there's more than one of me here, but you'd have to find those people. There'd have to be some effort made, you know?

If we had more Farmacy Gardens everywhere, and we had less mowing, and, I mean, grass is green, and I guess that makes it nice to look at, but other than that it's not really doing much for us, so if we had more gardens, and we produced more of our own food, then like I said,

we wouldn't have to be mowing it. And a lot of people say, what's a half an acre of ground being mowed. Well it's not just that half acre, it's like a half acre and a half acre and a half acre and a half acre and a half acre and a half acre and a half acre and a half acre, and before you know it you've got 100,000 acres around the world that are being mowed that could be used in food production, organic food production, and then that would be making a huge impact. So, it's like that story about the starfish. I used to walk along the seashore, and I would actually do this, I'd pitch that starfish that got washed up and throw it back in, and my uncle or somebody, an adult would say 'you can't throw them all in', and I'd say, 'yeah, but that one that I just threw in is very happy'. That's not the punchline, I can't remember the punchline, but anyway, that's the reality of it. That one that I pitched in that got washed up in a storm or whatever is extremely happy that it's gonna be living.

I don't know if the Farmacy Garden changed the way I live my life. I mean, obviously it changes my Monday and Wednesday and Friday life because I spend time at the community garden, so it does change that, but it doesn't actually reflect on the rest of my life. I still live my life trying to be in service of others, and I've always done that, so it hasn't really changed that, but yeah, my Monday and Wednesday and Friday life it's changed drastically during the garden hours in the summer. I can't say it's inspiring me to act differently. I can't really say that, because I haven't really changed. The Farmacy Garden is a place that I can be an influence. Yeah, so the Farmacy Garden is a place where I can have some impact. Albeit, not much impact, but some impact, and it goes back to planting a seed, you know? In more ways than one. I can only plant the seed, God can only make the seed grow. So, I can plant thoughts into minds at the community garden, and those thoughts of helping others may or may not grow, but at least I have an opportunity to plant the thought. I have a venue. I'm not on Twitter, and I don't have a

Twitter account, and I don't have a following, and I don't get involved that way with social media, so it's an outlet for me, I guess. A small outlet but better than nothing.

To date, I would say there isn't much of a sense of hope with the garden. Because I've only been there two years, and after two seasons of preaching to my friends and all kinds of people about coming out to the garden, it really hasn't affected anybody from what I can tell. Time will tell, I have one friend who said maybe he can come out half an hour, but I think he was just kind of appeasing me, basically. When I say I speak to numerous people, I speak to a lot of people about the community garden. I mean my waitress at O'Charley's, I'd say 'oh, great, you're off Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday, come out to the community garden!' and she said 'oh, I didn't know we had...' 'yeah, come out...' and so, I'm telling everybody, it doesn't matter where I'm at, I'm always talking about the community garden. Yet, I haven't really seen the fruits of my labors yet, I haven't seen people responding. I have a lot of people say, 'oh yeah, great!' but then I don't seem them so there's a disconnect between people's perceptions and what they actually do. Without getting into a spiritual type thing, I see this all the time in churches. People say 'I'll pray for you', and what that means is for most of the people, is what they just told you is all you're gonna get from them--'I'll pray for you.' That's it. It's kind of like they're saying it because they want to seem like they're legitimate and they're going to pray for you, but they're really not going to pray for you, they're just saying they're going to pray for you. So the people that I ask to come to the garden say the very same thing: 'oh, we'll come, we'll come.' Or some of them: 'I'll think about it..,' or this or that or whatever. But, basically, instead of just coming out and telling you they're not gonna do anything, they don't wanna say that necessarily, so they just basically, let's just call it what it is, they basically just lie to you to make you feel

good, so that's the bottom line. That's where it all comes down. They don't want to say 'no, I don't want to do that,' so they just say 'yeah, okay, maybe.'

In five to ten years, if the Farmacy Garden had funding, and I've said that I would donate like a 1-2 panels, I would love to see trellis' put up. One of the cheapest ways to do trellising is cow panels--not my idea, I saw it on the internet, and, you take a cow panel that's 20 feet long, and you put it in the ground over here to this bed, and you put it in the ground over here to this bed, and you make a trellis out of it. So I'd love to see the entire garden trellised, and all of our crops like our squashes, and cucumbers, and all that kind of stuff that takes up a lot of space could be trellised in such a way that you would be walking through everything like a tunnel. Even certain types of green beans could be done that way, and I did that that way in one of my gardens, and of course I didn't buy a cattle thing, but I had like a 12-foot tall silver queen growing, and I had the beans growing up over the top of the 12-foot high and you'd walk down the rows of the corn, and just pick all the beans from the inside. And so I'd love to see that at the community garden. That would increase the space probably three-fold, just build it up. Amazing. But, we'd have to have the funding for that, and I hear there isn't much funding, and this and that and whatever. But, I would be willing to donate like \$100 worth of panels per year. That would be five panels. So I'm sure other people would be willing to kick-in and do something. So that's what I'd like to see.

What kind of community do I want to live in? Obviously, I'd love to live in a community that would love God with all of their heart, mind, soul and strength, and love their neighbor as themselves. I mean I can't think of a nicer place to live than one where everybody loves you. And I don't mean American love, or the world's love, but I'm talking really, a caring community that really cared about you. And, I'd love to live in a community that basically grew all of its own

produce. And here's the thing: I wouldn't want to be selling the produce. See, that's the problem, everything turns into money in the world, and I would like to just grow all the produce and let everybody eat good decent produce, and not pay for it. And then you say 'how would you pay for the seeds and do the...?' People like me and other people could donate a little bit, I mean it doesn't cost a lot to buy seeds. A matter of fact, a lot of these seed companies give us all their seeds that don't sell at the end of the year, so I mean there wouldn't be that much cost, especially after the initial start-up of getting everything and whatever. There wouldn't be much cost, and that's the type of community that I would love to live in. Absolutely. And we could have our own chickens. And again, maybe eventually we could have our own cows, but then again, who would kill them and all that, butcher them. It just gets gruesome, but at least with chickens, and eggs, and vegetables, we could definitely do that as a community. That's the kind of community I'd like to live in. Where people speak to one another, care about one another, and aren't afraid to express how they feel about things, but in a loving way.

I don't think my personal involvement with the Farmacy Garden is going to help build and sustain that community other than talking about it and inspiring people, because in my day when I was a lot younger, I did a lot of challenging things, things that I haven't even mentioned here, but I've been a ramrod for good, I mean I've done a lot of things, but it takes a lot of energy to start all these projects, and I don't have that type of energy at the present time. It takes a lot to get things going, and you have to be a whirlwind, and you have to be persistent, you have to go out there and I just don't have that. I had that when I was younger, and like I said, I did a lot of projects that were really innovative and new at the time, but like I said, it takes a lot to get projects off the ground like that. I don't want to say I'm at the end of my rope, 'cause I'm not, I can inspire, but because of a lot of physical disabilities that have crept in over the years, I just

don't have the energy, what it takes, to really put something together like that. You need somebody like the Farmacy Garden coordinators, that's what you need, you need young people. But then, it has to be your calling, because it isn't your calling, you can't force yourself to do stuff, it has to be a calling.

## **Appendix N: Paul's Story**

My history with gardening actually started when I was a kid. My dad always had a garden and in the wintertime, and one of the things I remember was that I would be knee deep in poop, in horse poop, shoveling poop onto his pickup truck, and I always reflect on the fact that, most middle class kids didn't do that, and I felt underprivileged, but I would shovel nonetheless, and it was a great experience for me to shovel shit. But yeah, he is a really good gardener. He still has a wonderful intensive garden. He's a really, really good gardener, and I've learned a lot from him as well.

The Farmacy Garden has allowed me to work in community to learn about gardening, so that I can garden on my own, and that was my main point in participating, to learn gardening skills, and also to be in community and talk with people. I got involved two years ago. The garden coordinator spoke at a food bank session, and I was interested and so I came and had my first meeting at the Farmacy Garden. It was perfect, I was really happy--it was really good. Yeah, the Farmacy Garden has been very enriching for my knowledge of gardening, and I really appreciated it. I was motivated to participate because of my interest in gardening as a way to be more self-sufficient. Knowing how to garden I think is a good tool for self-sufficiency for anyone in the community. I'm an activist and I need to be able to teach others how to be self-sufficient, people that are poor, and most people already know how to garden and farm that I teach, so I'm actually behind the 8-ball in those regards. For example, in the developing world 70% of the population are farmers, so they already know how to farm, so I was really just catching up to learn what little I know about gardening and farming, but I needed to know something, I needed to know what I was doing. And in this country, many poor already know how to garden and farm themselves, so mostly I was doing catch up to learn what I needed to



know in order to be able to teach, or just to be on par with what's going on. I think that many people that are poor already know how because it's a matter of survival. Being able to grow your own food makes it less expensive than going to the grocery store. And in the developing world--I do developing world poverty relief over the internet, and like I say, 70% of the population grows their own food, so I'm preaching to the choir when I explain how to. Probably already a lot of people know how to do drip irrigation, which is something that I advocate on my website. But, they may not, I don't know, but that's a farming technique that I add on my website. Composting is something that I have on my website, that may or may not be something that someone knows in the developing world. I don't know what someone knows or doesn't know, so I add what I do know, and if you already know it, you just skip it. Every single person is different. There's no way to tell. And I have my own set of skill sets, so I know what I know, and I just add what I know.

In the Farmacy Garden I mostly did weeding and watering. That was a big job, and that helps you to think about gardening and farming in general. A lot of effort goes into weeding and watering for any garden, and that's very labor intensive. I guess that helps me frame my perspective on gardening in general for my self-sufficiency. I mean that's a lot of what you do, you water and you weed. That's a lot of what a garden is about.

To me, the garden means life. It's the wonder of starting out with a seed, and finding out something beautiful comes out of it. It's incredible. It's really incredible. And also, the interesting thing about gardens is that you don't have to hunt. You have your entire basic needs for your sustenance in the garden. You've got beans, you've got corn, you've got squash--the three sisters right there in the garden, and you've got everything that you need. It's magic.

I hung out with Native Americans in 1999 and they instilled in me the value of living close to the earth, and I felt like it was my obligation to learn how to be close to the earth, and at least know how to do that, and so that was one of my main impetuses for getting involved. I was motivated to stay involved with the Farmacy Garden because of the garden coordinator. It was good working with her, and it was also a good learning experience. She was a good teacher, and I really wanted to learn from her, and I did. And when she was gone, I was like, okay, that's what I needed, and now it's time for me to work on my own.

I realized the garden was impactful so many times when it bore fruit, and I brought things home, it was like wow, I was part of that. That was impactful. That was just amazing. I mean, you know the work that I did helped support growing food. And that's, you know, pretty amazing. That's really a phenomenal event. You didn't go to a grocery store, you actually did it yourself. That's very empowering. That's impactful. Your refrigerator is full of food, and all of a sudden you can eat. I feel very empowered that I can take care of myself. I would need to know a lot more, but I feel like, I feel comfortable that I could live off the land now. There's still lots and lots to learn, but there's always lots and lots to learn. But I don't feel scared about growing plants. You know, I feel comfortable that I could do that.

Being part of the Farmacy Garden I've learned about growing plants from seed to fruition. I've learned a lot about being in community with lots of different kinds of people. Everybody's there for the same purpose, which is to grow food, but we all have come from all different kinds of backgrounds, and we all wanna have fun, and we did. It was quite an experience. You know, you meet all different kinds of folks and we had fun. I also learned it's hard work in the hot sun, but it's valuable work. I thought the squash were really funny--the ones that climbed up into the trees. One of the gardeners planted some renegade squash and they

climbed up into the trees, like a good 20 feet into the trees, and it was so funny, and they bore fruit. And yeah those were a hoot. I really loved that. The garden really took over, it was great.

One thing I learned that the garden coordinator taught me was that if you're in doubt, Google. That always, when you're not sure about something, that Googling is the key to figuring out the answer to the next problem. Having a cell phone with Google on it is an invaluable tool to figuring out the answer to the next problem. So that's a very empowering thing right there. I actually talk about this in my website for poverty relief. In my website I suggest that people Google and Youtube anything they have a problem with, and I give an example of rebuilding your tractor carburetor. I give a little blurb that you can look up and Youtube how to rebuild your tractor carburetor. So if you do that, they look it up and then in Youtube, and you have this incredible Youtube video on how to do that, and you can go back and, you know, fix any tractor carburetor, and that's an example. And you can do that for anything.

The website that I just described is called Safeshare, and it's for developing world poverty relief. It's a list of books, that are self-help books, and keyword searches for low-technology such as pot-in-pot refrigerators, or solar tire cookers, or biosand filters--things that you can make through found materials in your village or neighborhood that are low-technology and make use of items you can find in your neighborhood that are sustainable and use recycled materials, and help you become empowered through found materials. Googling is definitely one way to get yourself out of a jam, and I was spellbound by the amount of ways that the garden coordinator had navigated through problems in the Farmacy Garden. And I said 'how do you do that?' And she said, 'well, I Google.' And I was like 'I'll be damned.' So, that helped me a lot because I can do that too.

I am motivated to help others by the relief I feel. As an activist, coming out of college, what I knew as an activist was that there were big problems. Big, major, planetary problems. I didn't know how to solve them, I had no idea what to do. I wasn't an engineer, I wasn't a lawyer, I didn't have the skills to do any of that. But the internet held the tools for overcoming a lot of those problems, and I became skilled in finding engineering answers in low-technology and in books to figure out how to solve those problems. So I could share that information with people that were struggling, to figure out how to solve them. I contacted USAID and said I've got this document that shows you how to solve those problems, and the guy that I talked to said 'what's stopping someone in Zimbabwe from typing in pot-in-pot refrigerator?' Well, the obvious point is that they don't know what a pot-in-pot refrigerator is to begin with, they need somebody to show them that you can type that into Google, and they can figure it out from there, right? Well that's where I come in. I happen to know that you can type that in, and you can learn how to refrigerate fruits and vegetables for 23 days, and once you have that technology then you can go and do that, but you need someone to tell you to do that. If you don't know what a pot-in-pot refrigerator is, you can't type that into Google--you don't know. You don't have the notion to do that, you wouldn't have any idea. So that's what I did, was fill in that gap of the list of technologies that are available. There are books, there are whole books of low technology that I tried to find, and I couldn't find them. I don't know where they are--I don't know what those texts are, but there are whole textbooks on low technology, and if I could find them I'd throw it in there, in a second. But I've got lists of low technology on my website that are designed for people in a position where they can help themselves, and so that's what I collected and shared with NGOs, and to some extent directly with people in the developing world. The problem was that I came out of college just basically feeling guilty. I mean, I was like, I know that there is

something really bad going on, and I don't know how to stop it. And so I, fortunately through a lot of finding things on the internet, had a hand in helping stop the problem, and it felt, oh so good. I mean it cleansed my soul. You know? Being able to actually do something to stop this problem. It helped me more than anything, I think.

The Farmacy Garden has made me feel more comfortable. I feel empowered. I don't feel like I'm estranged from the gardening technique anymore. I feel like I can grow things, and that helps me feel more comfortable. Gardening is more approachable. I feel like anybody could do it, and I feel like I can teach someone how to do it. Which is really cool. I feel like gardening is for anyone. And, we have a problem in the world--a third of the world's food sources are thrown away, and people starve to death in the world, and teaching people how to grow food is life preserving. So, yeah, my values have changed. I feel like anybody can learn how to grow food, and from that, no one should be in a position to starve. So gardening is a survival tool. I have--the three sisters garden is on my website for poverty relief. Yeah, survival tool.

The Farmacy Garden has not really changed my perception of the food system. The Farmers Market is too expensive for me, but sometimes I do buy Organic from Kroger. For people that are poor, you can't buy into the local farming system, because the farming system requires a certain wage level to pay their workers, and that's a higher wage than the industrial process costs for Kroger or Walmart or wherever you buy your groceries. And the prices are higher, so for the middle class, yes, you can buy food at the farmers market, and pay a little bit more and get better food, but in my circumstance, and I think if you're making less than \$25,000 per year, it's out of reach. Now the garden is a whole different thing, but that has to do with being able to have time to do it. If you're working and you make less than \$25,000 per year, the Farmacy Garden is again out of reach because you don't have time to do it. I'm on disability, so

I've got time. Now that made sense to me. But it's gotta work for people. That's why I wanted to get people in my mental health program to do it, because they have the time and the need, but I was disappointed that they didn't become involved because of the convenience factor. They just didn't wanna go, because it was inconvenient.

It hasn't changed my perception of my community, but I've got a pretty broad perception of community. If that were my first experience with community it would have, it would have opened my eyes. My feeling is most of community is broad-minded and loving, and can-do kinds of people, and I've worked with a lot of people, and most people are really good, can-do kinds of folks, and I saw that in the garden, and I thought that was great. But it didn't broaden mine, because I already had it. I'd seen a lot of people do a lot of good in the world. But the garden space itself gave a sense that there was a sense of community, whereas, oftentimes we don't have a community center in the cities, there is no place to go for people to get together, besides like a bar. I mean, the Farmacy Garden provided people with a place to get together and hang out with a focal point of the garden, which is a wonderful experience and that was a really good thing.

As far as the natural world, the nature tours that we took for the natural medicinal plants definitely changed my perspective. It's been a long time, so I have forgotten a lot of that stuff, but it was very good to see that virtually every plant that was out there was a natural medicine, and that definitely changed my perception of the world. All the weeds just growin' in the backyard were all natural medicines and that was pretty incredible.

So again, participating in the garden helped me be more comfortable, more self-sufficient, self-reliant. I'm interested in doing an herb garden. I haven't done that yet, but that is an interest of mine. I'd like to put up some urns out front, and do some herbs out front.

Well the garden coordinator gives me a sense of hope. It makes me happy that there are projects like that going on. That there's a cost-free community center for learning how to do something that's self-sufficient like that. I think that that's an invaluable tool for our community--for people that are in need, for people that are poor, for people that are elderly, for the young to learn those lessons at an early age. I think for all those reasons, and probably a ton more, that's a very important asset of the community. Very, very useful.

I think it would be good if schoolkids were involved in the Farmacy Garden because the young should know about it. It's good for children to learn. It would be nice for people with disabilities to learn, for the elderly to learn, for people that are poor, for working poor to have access to that--in a minimal amount of work and a maximum amount of food, because they don't have a lot of time, and they're working as much as they can. That's what I think--I think that would be the vision.

As far as my ideal community, the community I live in now, this community, is a really good community. And one of the things that's neat about it is that it's African American and European American and Native American, and it is, I think, a good combination of all of the above. And otherness just drops away, and it feels really good. The community feel here is really good, it feels great, and I really like that sense of community. Similarly, one thing that's true is that when you're in the Farmacy Garden, you're not a doctor, you're not a nurse, you're not an academician, you're not a factory worker, you're not a disabled person, you're someone working in the garden, and consequently, you're equal to that person. And that's what makes community so valuable, is that we're all just here together, working in the garden weeding and watering, and putting phosphorus on plants, and that makes for great community.

There are so many things--a garden can teach so much, like there's a garden in Vermont that they use as a teaching tool for every class in the grade school--for history, for science, for mathematics, for english, for art, for everything. The garden is the focal tool for the whole curriculum, and you can teach for business. You can have a Farmacy Garden in the middle of a skyscraper highrise, on the ground floor you can have a Farmacy Garden. You can have a Farmacy Garden in the town square, in the middle of the town to serve homeless people. That would be a great place for a Farmacy Garden. You can have a Farmacy Garden at the middle schools and high schools for teaching tools and for growing food for the cafeteria. You can do a Farmacy Garden in the median strips of our highways, and areas that are public places in the public works areas that can feed homeless shelters and soup kitchens. There's virtually unlimited places for a Farmacy Garden, and they will help solve lots and lots of problems. Now, I had suggested to the Blacksburg Mayor's office that we have a garden for the homeless, and the problem was that it would be untended, and the fruit of the garden would just rot, and it wouldn't go to serve the right purpose. But to have a Farmacy Garden where people tended to it, and the fruits of the labor went to the homeless, and those who are disabled and in need, I mean the sky is the limit, I mean that would be fantastic, you know? I mean that would be brilliant. It would be absolutely brilliant.

Well, what I learned over time is that information gathering and the internet has really catapulted my ability to be able to learn for myself and to help others. And so the Farmacy Garden helped in that regard, because it helped me get hands on knowledge about how to be self-sustainable. And while it didn't help a lot in terms of the work I did, because I did other things that the Farmacy Garden didn't do, it gave me the feeling of being empowered. I knew what to do around the garden in terms of my own self-sufficiency, but it also helped me to feel



comfortable about suggesting to others, because I knew it was common sense--like how to build a drip irrigation system, or how to harvest rainwater from your room--these were things that were not involved in the Farmacy Garden, but I could imagine how you could harvest rainwater from your roof, it wasn't too complicated, but I realized that that's something that I could suggest and I could draw a light to through the internet--someone could do that, it wasn't complicated. So, you know, much of farming is not complicated--it's just a matter of information and where to look and how to empower yourself through Googling, which is what the garden coordinator does, and that notion--once she said that, that I Google for the next step, that opened up a lot of doors, that was a seminal moment, that really was.

## **Appendix O: Evelyn's Story**

I was the youngest of five children. I grew up in Dublin, Virginia. My mom was a stay-at-home-mom for most of my life, and my father was a construction worker, so he worked out of town a lot. Growing up, we lived right inside the town limits, so we had a garden growing up, and we grew corn and beans and potatoes, lots of potatoes. And, so, I had that experience growing up with that. So when I got in this position of the Family Nutrition Program, and had the opportunity to work in the Farmacy Garden, I thought it would be really beneficial to teach our participants because I see more and more people are not doing gardens, even small gardens when they have the opportunity, so I think it's a good thing to teach people this day and age.

I think I worked with the garden for two years, and it was 2018, thinkin' back, countin' backwards, so it was 2018 when I started working with the WIC office. I go to the WIC office, not on set days, but on days when I don't have other programs in the counties, and help them with their nutrition education. So, I had an opportunity to give them some nutrition education, and also take them out for a tour of the Farmacy Garden. During the two years I was there, the last year my days were Mondays, and I think that was a very nice way to start out my week--going to the garden on Mondays, so I would start out there from nine and work till noon in the garden. We were left a list of tasks, which included planting things, harvesting things, and watering, and working with the participants that came to the garden. So, my job was mainly not to do those things, but to guide the participants in doing those, so they would have the learning experience with that, and along with that, also provide them with recipes and general information about how to cook and preserve what we were harvesting from the garden.

I think a lot of our participants with the Family Nutrition Program don't have a lot of grocery money, and even if they're receiving SNAP, or especially in the WIC office, they don't

get a lot of money for fresh fruits and vegetables so that was a wonderful opportunity for them to try new things, along with getting fresh fruits and vegetables. I think that's one thing that's really important--for them to be able to not just have access to it, but to also see where it comes from and what it takes to get those--I think you appreciate it more.

I see a lot of families struggle, and I just wanna do what I can to help them be able to take care of their families better because it's hard when you're on a budget to be able to feed your family in a healthy way. And I think if you don't feed your kids healthy, or not that you don't do, that you can't feed your kids healthy foods, it's harder on them, and I see it a lot in schools it's--they have a harder time paying attention when they're hungry, and that's sad, but that's what motivates me the most--I like to help those young families get the most out of the resources they do have.

The first thing that drew me to the Farmacy Garden was that I see a lot of people these days not gardening, even small gardens, like patio gardens, when they can have fresh fruits and vegetables that way, and they're just dependent on getting it from the grocery store. When you don't have a lot of funds and fruits and vegetables are more expensive, they're more likely to buy unhealthy foods than they are healthy foods, so that was my concern. The garden was a way to introduce them to, being able to have a lot of produce coming out of a small area, and then also showing them how they can do patio gardens too. It was a tool for me to use to help people see that even with a small piece of property, or if they just had three buckets that they could put on their patio, they could add more nutrients to their families diets and do it, it's not really a lot of work, not a lot of planning, you know? And it does add a lot of benefit to their diet.

The whole time I was growin' up, and still--my mom has dementia now, and when I was growin' up, if we got somethin', she would make a way to share a part of it with somebody else.

If we went out and got apples from the apple orchard--if we picked apples, she would make sure the neighbor across the road got a bag, or somebody from our church got a bag, so I grew up seeing her share, and I didn't realize why, until I grew up, that she was sharing with people that didn't have. We didn't have a lot, but she was makin' sure that she was spreading that around. So I think that was kind of embedded in me, and then now, I see her still doin' that when she finds things out in the store and she'll say 'well, we can use one more', or 'so-and-so can use it', and then she gets home and forgets what it's for, but she's still doin' that. So, I think that's just one of those values that she's put in there, that we're not supposed to, we're not put on this earth just for ourselves, we're put here to help other people, and I think that's very important. So, uh, and I'm havin' a little sensitive day because yesterday, when I was comin' back to work for my late class, and this is totally off topic but, I was goin' by the community action, and the homeless people were gathering there for their trip to overnight housing, and you just don't realize until you see that they're all gathered in one place how many homeless people are here in Christiansburg, and then you think about...they don't have a place to sleep, what are they eating? You know, they're not getting fresh fruits and vegetables, and who's worrying about what they get? I'm thinkin' well, you know, that's not my job to worry about that, shouldn't the town of Christiansburg, and then I'm thinkin' well, probably everybody in Christiansburg is thinkin' that that's somebody else's job. So that's what I was thinkin' about, you know, comin' by there this morning again when I came to work I was wondering how they made it through the night, and what're they gonna do today? You know? They're not gonna be able to sit on their couch this evenin' when they get off from work, and be warm, so, I guess those are the kinds of things that my parents instilled in me. So when I come to work and I meet people that don't have a whole lot, and they say 'I don't have fresh fruits and vegetables to feed my family', I just tell them, you

know, 'you feed them what you have, but when you have choices these are the things that you choose.' So those are the kinds of things that I try to do in my job. I can't always make them, you know....you put back that huge bag of pasta because it's 99 cents and you need to buy this three dollar bag of apples instead. You know, if they have to buy something that's unhealthy because it's all the money they have, that's okay. Just when they have the opportunity to make better choices, I try to teach them what choices they can make. And I think that the Farmacy Garden being there is a blessing, not just to them, that I can take them to it, but to keep me aware that not all of us have things, and access to things. So I'm not sayin' I had wonderful values, but I'm sayin' my parents did give me those values growing up, and I think the Farmacy Garden just added to that, of, you know, we're not here to just take care of ourselves, we're here to take care of other people in the community. I think it's our responsibility so it does show me that the garden is there, and I really should be introducing that to as many people as I can.

There have been several times that I realized the Farmacy Garden was impactful. When the garden coordinator did the end of the year report, and they showed us just how many pounds of produce actually came out of there, that was kind of an eye opener. But, one of the things, as far as participant-wise was when I was doin' the nutrition education in the WIC office, and I had one of the grandmothers ask me when they were startin' the garden back up--that she had been comin' there and how it impacted her family--how much that she got to take home with. It wasn't a huge amount, but what it had did help, and that she was able to do some tomato plants in buckets, even though she lived in an apartment, she was able to do that. So, I think that just reminded me, you know, in the cold weather, that people were still thinking about it, and that it did have an impact on her, and it was beneficial. Sometimes you go to work and you think, 'I have another class today, I have got to get through this class', and you forget that you're seeing

real people that are havin' struggles and that it's nice to hear somebody say that what you did, and what you're doin' is having an impact, and it does matter if you don't come to work today because you might miss having an impact on more than one person's life. Sometimes I feel like if I have a series of eight classes, and somebody only takes one thing away, that's one thing they didn't have, so, you know, I can live with that just one thing. Maybe I'll plant a seed with them-- maybe they'll be thinkin' about a change and not necessarily make it, but then they'll come across somebody later on, and you know, they'll process that into something bigger, you know? You know, sometimes just mentioning the garden to people, they'll say, well 'my grandma had a garden when I was little, but my kids don't know anything about it, they don't even know where food comes from', you know, I can say 'well the garden's gonna start up soon', or if it's running now, 'they're out there right now, do you wanna walk down there?' So I think it's real important in teaching our kids especially where food comes from. And it helps them also, I think, if they realize what it takes to get it here, and not to waste, and I think that's really important. It has also reminded me of how hard it is for some people to get access to those fresh fruits and vegetables, and how important it is for our kids--not just their physical well-being, but their mental well-being as well, because it is so hard for them to pay attention in school if they're hungry.

Working in the Farmacy Garden I learned a lot. I learned how to make homemade fertilizers, and that was really interesting--that doesn't have a lot of chemicals in it. Like when I grew up we planted, you know, beans and potatoes and corn and cucumbers, so I learned how to grow okra, and watermelons, and how to plant crops that were gonna refurbish the soil, and things like that. And during the summer, a couple of days I even got to bring my kids with me when I was workin' in the garden, so that's something I want to show them that's important. And I know this is a weird off the subject thing, sort of, but I don't have a lawnmower right now,

because my dog ate parts of my lawnmower a couple years ago, which is really weird, I know, but she was a puppy, so my neighbor started mowing my yard. So he doesn't like for me to plant things in my yard anymore, 'cause it's just one thing for him to mow around, so that was another thing that I enjoyed about goin' to the garden--that I could garden there, and I didn't have to garden at home. Plus I got to garden during work hours, you know? You can't beat that. And I didn't aggravate him, because, you know, he mows my yard for free, and I can't, aggravate him very much. So, we don't get to garden at home, so that was a way for my girls to get to see just what you can do with the small amount of space, and different things that I never would've thought about planning, they got to see. And they found it really interesting too. They got to pick bugs off plants, and see how it's important to take care of a garden daily, just like you get up to brush your teeth and take care of your body, you know, you take care of the garden the same way. So I think it was important for them to learn just where their food does come from, and I think that's real important for this generation, because we don't have as many big farms in this country as we used to, and I think we need more Farmacy Gardens, if we're not gonna have big farms, we need to have small farms again. We need to have those yard gardens, so I think it's very important to show people you don't have to have a big space and you can be doing some of this at home yourself, and get those fresh fruits and vegetables without havin' to use your SNAP dollars on there, or your WIC money is not gonna cover those fresh fruits and vegetables so you can get 'em this way.

It's such a computer generation that a lot of kids are not goin' outside. They don't go outside and play anymore. Even one of the apartment complexes I went to took out their playground equipment because they said people, the older people were goin' there and doin' drug deals and stuff. So instead of dealing with that and having the police come, they just took

the playground equipment out. So that was even less incentive for the kids in that complex to go outside. So, with video games and cell phones and things. And even sittin' at the WIC office I noticed, I looked around yesterday, there was seven adults sittin' there--every one of them was on their phone. So, it's just such a technical generation that people aren't goin' outside and doin' things as much anymore. So, not only is it a way to get people, especially kids outside being active in some way, being productive in seein' just what it takes, just what it takes to get our food here. So, as I said, the Farmacy Garden helped me realize just how much my kids are not goin' outside. Except in school related sports, they don't really go outside and get much activity. When I was young, during the day, when school was out for the summer, I was outside after breakfast until it was dinner time. We would even sit outside and eat lunch. We'd work in the garden, pullin' weeds, it wasn't my favorite thing, but my mom said 'you can go play when you get this bucket full of weeds', and then I'd get my bucket full and then she'd mash 'em down and I was like 'oh! It was full till you mashed 'em down!' But, you know, it made me appreciate things. It made me appreciate what she was doin'. She was doin' a lot more than I was, even though I was pullin' weeds. So, my kids don't have to do that, 'cause I don't have a garden--and I shouldn't say have to do that, they don't get to do that. So, with the Farmacy Garden, especially being right in the middle of so much here in the town, it's easy access to people, especially at the social services office, and then behind the clinic, and they're near a bus stop, the transit, so there's a lot goin' on right there where it's at, it's easy access. It's just such a good opportunity for people to get their kids out and show them just where our food does come from. So, if I can, in my classes, tell them how important it is to get those nutrients from those fruits and vegetables, then the Farmacy Garden is a way to expand on how they could do it themselves.



The Farmacy Garden has made me more sensitive to our food situation and the lack of small gardens that I do see in residential areas. I even live in Elliston where it's kind of rural, and you just don't see those small gardens anymore, and I think a lot of it is generational where people are not goin' outside as much, and I worry about that with our kids. Like I said, I don't have a garden right now, and I know I should, so what are my kids gonna do? Are my kids gonna do that? So, if I can introduce that to as many people as I can that are in my program--that's gonna give more people an opportunity to come to that realization that it is important, because, you know, fruits and vegetables can be expensive when we get them at the grocery store, 'cause they have to go through so many pathways to get there. So, if they are gettin' seeds, or starts from plants, and doin' it in their own garden, they're gettin' it at such a low cost for their family.

I think the Farmacy Garden has changed my perception of my community. When I first started I didn't know the garden was there. You know, it's kind of hidden in a sense, but, even though it's hidden it's connected to so many other things in the community, and I think the more people that knew about it would benefit so many more people. And when I go out, I try and tell people, especially at the low-income housing complexes, where they could potentially get people to go over on the transit together as a group, because they have a lot of group activities, I encourage them to do that. So, I think it does show me that there are people in the community that are concerned about the welfare of the residents, that they do want them to have access to better quality foods, and to be able to do, not just get them food there, but also realize that they can do that at home too.

I think the Farmacy Garden is very effective because it's not just the garden, there's other things that came along with it, like the Glean Team. I don't know if it was connected with the Glean Team when it first started out, but the Glean Team started bringing produce there, so there

was things donated to us by the Glean Team that we wouldn't have had access to otherwise. And then we were able to share it with people at the Community Health Center, and people at the WIC office, and not just share that with them, but share the information about the garden too. So I think it's important with that. And I think in the bigger picture it's important that we showed other communities that you could do the garden right in the middle of town, where so many people have access to it, and to give them, not just the information, but the inspiration to go home and do it, and go home to their counties and do the same thing. You know, if they had an apartment complex, why can't you find a plot on that apartment complex to do this, 'cause we're doin' it right in the middle of Town of Christiansburg, so if you have another county, and it's a little rural, why can't you have a garden this size, or a garden bigger? You know? We're doin' it right in the middle of Christiansburg. Come on you guys.

It changed my perception of the environment too, like, I talked about the homemade fertilizer. I never thought about that when I was growin' up, when my parents were putting stuff on our plants, you know, to get rid of the potato bugs, and things on the grapevines, because the japanese beetles would get on there, and they would put stuff on there. And I never thought about that, so it did make me aware of what we're putting pesticide-wise on our food, and what's possibly on our food that we're getting from the grocery store. And that's another thing that I talk to my clients about, is, if you don't raise it or grow it, you aren't really 100% sure what you're getting, so if you're raising your own fruits and vegetables then you can be sure at least that much of your food is safe. And it showed me that there's other ways that you can keep the insects from overtaking your garden, besides using chemicals. The crops that we planted afterwards to re-fertilize the soil, I didn't realize how important that was, so that was a really good learning experience for me, 'cause when I was growing up we planted the same things in

the same patch of land, and I didn't realize how important it was to add nutrients back to the ground, so that was real important.

On a personal level the Farmacy Garden does make me more aware of the fruits and vegetables that I buy. I try not to take a large amount home, I try to buy them in smaller batches to make sure I don't have food waste at home. If I see things goin' bad, like if I've got potatoes and they're gettin' kind of soft, I try and chop them up and cook 'em or freeze 'em or go ahead and put them in a soup and freeze 'em. I just try and make sure there's not as much waste goin' on in our house, and I think that needs to happen in a lot of places because I think if, you know, that old saying 'waste not, want not', is really true. As I've gotten older I think about that a lot more when I'm eating, and when I'm preparing foods too. You know, I remember my parents used to say 'you need to clean your plate', and I think about that a lot, especially with our curriculum we're supposed to tell our parents not to make their kids clean their plate--to eat until their full, and not overeat too, because that can be a problem. But, you know, we really shouldn't fix more than we can eat, and that we can preserve. And also, it worries me a little bit that people aren't canning as much. So I think that's another thing that we need to start promoting more. And I got an Instantpot, and I'm anxious to learn how to do canning in there, because I heard you can do it, so it's my goal to get this generation canning in an Instantpot. That's my goal for next year.

This is a very sweet story. I cried a lot the last couple weeks, but I had a class at the Library, at Shawsville Library, and I have a lot of programs there. And we were gettin' ready for the program, and we talk about the different classes that I could do there, and what people have been askin' for, and we had been talkin' about the Instantpot classes--that people wanna know how to cook in those. And I told them 'well, I don't have an Instantpot', 'cause if I had one at

home, you know, I would. And I've done Crockpot classes there, even though I don't have a Crockpot here. So the lady, Cindy, she asked me, 'cause I said maybe Santa Claus would bring me one, and she said 'well, did Santa Claus bring you an Instantpot?' and I said 'no, I guess I wasn't good this year, Santa Claus didn't bring me one'. So she called me the next day after we did the program, and she told me, you know, 'the program was good. I'm glad you came.' She said, 'what time do you get off work today?' and I told her, and she said 'can you stop by the library? Santa Claus left you something here.' So I went, and she said, 'can you come out to my car?' And she had bought me an Instantpot. So I stood in the parking lot and cried. And it was the sweetest thing. It was the sweetest thing ever. And so yeah, I stood out in the parking lot and cried, because she said 'you're just really good about doin' whatever we ask you', so yeah, she bought me an Instantpot, and I got an Instantpot last week! So, we're gonna do those cookin' classes. We're gonna learn how to can in the Instantpot. It was so sweet. We run across a lot of caring people, we really do.

I think the garden being there, like I said, in the middle of town, it shows people that you don't have to have a lot of room to do that, so when I do go out into the communities I try and let everybody know where it is, and, you know, if they're on the transit system close by I try and let them know that they can get there and what they can do at the Farmacy Garden. I remind them, the kids are gonna be in, and I'll say, 'in under your feet all summer, don't you wanna get them out and doin' something?' Try and present it to them that way, so they'll say 'yeah, they are gonna be in the house', you know, giving them the idea that they can get them out and get them active, I think that's so important. Not that it's just a way to get them access to healthy foods, it's also a way to get them to be active, because any exercise they do is gonna be a benefit to them. I think every time somebody new gets out there, it's that one more person that knows that it's

there, that they're gonna have access to produce while they're goin', and then hopefully it'll help them to learn the tools they can use to do that at home too.

In five to ten years, I want the Farmacy Garden to still be there. I want it to maybe have more promotion so more people know about it, and can access it, just have more people involved in the garden. And have more counties aware of what's goin' on there--not just promotion with people that can come to the Farmacy Garden and work there, volunteer there, but more counties to see it, to know that they can do the same thing in their county.

More broadly, I wanna live and work in a community that does have a Farmacy Garden and that is making sure that the homeless people are goin' to the homeless shelter. I just want the Farmacy Garden to keep on doin' the same thing, and then adding to it. And I see the Farmacy Garden is adding to it, and that's awesome. They're not just staying the same size, they've added the berry bushes up on the hill, and they've added the fruit trees, and hopefully that can keep growin' that way--not just growin' in size, but growin' in volunteers and participants. I'm just gonna keep on harpin' on the community housing managers, sayin' 'you could get your group to go down here', and 'wouldn't that be nice?' And then the moms that are gonna be home with the kids, I'm just gonna keep reminding them--'wouldn't it be nice, you know, on Fridays or Thursdays you go down to the garden? That could be your weekly thing.' I think it would be awesome. I'm just gonna keep on spreadin' the word.

## **Appendix P: Sara's Story**

I came to the Farmacy Garden because I wanted to teach my then three year old some of the basics of just our food systems, plant life cycle, sort of our just dependence on the environment for our survival. We lived in an apartment at the time, so we didn't have the ability to garden where we lived. We found out about the Farmacy Garden because we had visited DSS when we had first moved to Blacksburg and we saw that it was there. When I was in seminary I lived on a farm that was an environmental learning property with my partner at the time. He was majoring in Natural Resources and Environmental Management, so it was something that was sort of important to us as a family--that we live in a way that is responsible to the earth. It was something that we very much wanted to instill in our child, and teach to our child--that we have a dependence on the earth for our sustenance, that we are part of this. So that was probably why I showed up to the Farmacy Garden. But prior to college I didn't have as much experience gardening--my mom kept a summer garden, but it wasn't sort of like the farming or subsistence type level of farming that many of my colleagues, or many of my ex's colleagues had.

Earth stewardship was always very important to me. Like, I don't think I became quite aware of food sources and the impact of food sources on humanity until I was a young adult. My ex-husband, when we met, we were about twenty, we were both horribly unhealthy--we were in our twenties, we were dumb. To explain my involvement in food issues, is to explain his involvement, cause he started as a cook, and as he got an apprenticeship and started rising in his cook career he became very interested in local foods, and farm to table type stuff, and so my interest kind of developed along his. He ended up going from being a cook, to being involved in natural resources and environmental management. He went back to college as an adult, so his undergrad was kind of a big deal when Joel Salatin was making the circuit, and probably still is,

so he was doing that from a culinary perspective, but his culinary interest kind of evolved into water and soil quality for him. He became very aware of food quality being affected by soil pollutants, water pollutants, and that's actually his career now--he's an environmental consultant in Roanoke. He's not dealing with food anymore, but he basically tries to keep companies in compliance with EPA regulations. So, that's how we got to Blacksburg, because his Master's in that was here. I, on the other hand was around the same people, but I had a religious background. I was studying religion in grad school, and my tradition is very much like the Amish and the Mennonite, so they were agricultural sort of, 'let's go live off the land and be with...', almost separatist types. I didn't grow up like that, but I did grow up, from a very young age I was very concerned about animals, like I remember when I was young reading that dolphins were being caught in tuna nets, like, I was very concerned about pollution of water from an animal rights perspective. So I was more, sort of 'don't kill fluffy!' you know? So I was kinda always like that, and then it just kind of evolved. His parents were more like the tree hugger, hippie types that always grew stuff in the backyard. My family was not--I was in a military family that moved around a lot, and so my parents weren't those kind of people. But I always had more of an ethics issue. Mine was more of a, you know, kind of a 'do unto others...' I don't know how to explain it, it was a spiritual thing. But mine was less focused on the direct impact it had on me, more sort of a, 'man, we're really cruel people to animals, and to plants', and so, I always had that ethical bend, I just didn't have it quite as directly related to gardening.

As far as my engagement in the Farmacy Garden, the activities that I was involved in were limited, because my son was three at the time, so we had to do sort of very short-term activities. We helped harvest a little bit, we helped plant seeds, we could do a community potluck--so things that we could do quickly that could have an impact. I guess I did come to a

workday or two by myself on the weekends when he wasn't there, and I just did whatever kind of needed to be done. You know, so the limit for me was my child's age and my child's attention span.

To me the Farmacy Garden means that someone cares. When I think of it, I think of someone who has put intentional effort into putting a visible reminder that there is a direct relationship between our health and the earth's health. You know, I don't know how other people who walk by the garden on a day see it. If I try to remove my own sort of background and knowledge, and I grew up actually, well partly...my dad has always lived in Williamsburg, and so I remember walking in Colonial Williamsburg, they had these gardens, and so from a very shallow perspective I remember as a kid walking by and going 'Oh, that's nice!' So I imagine maybe community members who walk by it might have that experience and go 'oh, that's so nice!' For me it's just a visual reminder that someone is willing to put effort into saying 'hey, what we're doing matters for our own health, and for the earth's health.'

So the first value that I think of when I think of my involvement with the Farmacy Garden is what I would call earth stewardship or creation care. I'm gonna say earth stewardship, because creation care is sort of this in house terms that we talk about in religious circles to get people to care about the earth. I'll say earth stewardship. So that would be the first one. The second one would be a community spirit. And that it has an element of drawing people together to do something. It's an activity that is a reflection of, you get what you put into it, but I don't think that's necessarily the case, because if you have a strong leader doing a lot of the work then people are benefitting from a strong leader doing it. So, I would say more that there is this place where the community can come in and do this thing together and say this matters, from almost a ritual standpoint. It's not like it's a small-scale farm, so the scope is kind of limited, but that



there are people who came from various walks of life, and said 'hey, this thing we're doing matters'. You know? So, I would say community spirit. Those are the two things that I think-- earth stewardship, community spirit.

As far as realizing the garden's impact, two things that I thought of immediately were seeing people who were choosing to come, and I had the sense that they were there because they needed to be there for themselves, so it was therapeutic for them. Like, I didn't know why they were there, I just knew they wanted to be there, and they were there because they got something from it, and it was an intangible internal thing. And I know that I had that sense before I was aware that doctors could prescribe going to the garden to do work. Like, just looking at them it was like--this person wants to be here because it makes them feel better. So that's a first experience--was just getting to know a few of the volunteers who were choosing to show up. And the second one was, I think there was a couple of potlucks one of which was when the garden coordinator was leaving, but seeing how many people had come, and they made an effort in the food that they brought to either be local or sensitive to people with food needs. Like the people there were intentional about the food they brought, but they were also intentional about being there. There were people who brought vegetarian food, and I'm vegetarian, so I was really happy about that. There were people who specifically tried to use produce that was in season, and they talked about it, you know, they talked about what they brought and why. I can't remember any of the dishes, except that there was vegetarian food, and that there were people who were using produce. I'm going off a little bit, but when I was in seminary we had potlucks all the time, it was something that we did. And one of the potlucks I was involved in was the 100-mile radius. Have you ever heard of these? It was a challenge, we had these monthly dinners, and it was in the midwest so no one had anywhere to go, like, even if we wanted to go

out to dinner it was like to a steak and shake, so this was sort of our way of coping with it. And what we would do is whatever you brought, all the ingredients, most of the ingredients had to be procured within a 100-mile radius, is sort of a focus on shopping local, which got to be a challenge in the Winter in the midwest--there got to be a lot of quiche. So, I guess I was kind of primed to look for that when I came to the potluck. I was actually kind of looking to see if people were using, like food from farmers market and stuff, and some people actually did, like they were proud to say it. Not everyone did, and if they didn't I wouldn't care, like it was food, and I'm still gonna eat it, but I noticed because of that prior experience. It was a lot of fun, so if you're into local food it's a fun thing to do. I think here it could be done very easily. Especially because we have a good farmers market, we didn't have a huge farmers market, so people either had to grow it or have it themselves, or find someone who did, so it could be challenging at times. And there's some volunteers that I met, and I can't remember their names, but I know that there are some volunteers that are very heavy gardeners on their own, and have a lot of regional knowledge. So, I'm kinda coming back to your question--I know from that potluck that there were people that are sort of more, Appalachian experts, like they know this land, and so they'll talk to you about that stuff they're doing because they're proud of it. If that makes sense? So that's what I felt at the potluck--is that people were very intentional about sharing that, and wanting to share that. And seeing that...my first reaction is pure personal enjoyment. I enjoy it when people are passionate about stuff, so it makes me happy seeing someone be passionate about something. I couldn't care less about what it is, just seeing someone happy about sharing their story, or sharing like, if you're into matchbook houses, and you're really into it, I'm genuinely happy to see someone enjoy something like that. So, that's the really shallow answer. I choose to live an intentional lifestyle according to what I believe is right. It's kind of one of

those 'be the change' things? You know? Like you can't really control other people and make them do what you want them to do, or what you think is healthy. The only thing you can do is try to be healthy for yourself. So I kinda see that as a reflection of someone saying, 'hey this is a thing that is really important, and it's so important that I'm willing to live by it'. You know? So, I see that, and I value that in people, I think it's important too, so I guess that's why we're all together and working on this. But I appreciate people who are willing to do the hard work of doing what they think is right, and being proud of it. So, seeing that the garden had brought together people from very different walks of life who shared this idea or this belief, or they were there because they thought it was important--those are kind of the two times. And I guess maybe from a third perspective, which is totally selfish, but it totally accomplished the goal I had of teaching my child the basic life cycle of a plant. We came because I wanted to teach my child about plants, about food systems, so from that very basic need that I walked in with, that was met, because we started seedlings, we brought the seedlings, planted the seedlings, he learned about a greenhouse, he helped water the plants, he got to do to the things that I was hoping he would get to do, so from a third and very selfish perspective it worked.

One thing I would like to see is a similar garden here. I talked to the current garden coordinator and said, 'hey, it would be really great if we could have something like this in our apartment community because we're section 8 here, and a lot of the people here don't have cars.' And I basically looked at her and said 'I could get kids in the garden.' I might not be able to get parents in the garden, but I could probably get kids, because kids are curious and they'd just wander in, and if you pay them two minutes of attention, they're hooked. A lot of the kids around this apartment community are kind of free range but not, like, in a great way. They're free range in like they're looking for a safe place to go. So, what I learned is that it has a lot of

great potential, community gardens have a lot of great potential to get kids and elderly folks who might be interested, or folks who might be interested involved. I understand the placement of why the Farmacy Garden is where it has to be, but being there, being at the Farmacy Garden and having that experience, and then living here, and knowing this particular community, because we're all on medicaid, we're all on food stamps, all of that. Saying, I could help support something like that here if we could get something like that here. I know there are logistical difficulties with that, and funding, like I understand the bureaucracy of making something like that happen. But, what I learned from the Farmacy Garden, and I'm learning because I live in a section 8 public housing project, is that there are kids who would be interested, there are kids who could be caught and brought in, if someone is here to mentor them, if the resources are here to help. I think it could be a really beneficial thing, and I think that actually happens at the Farmacy Garden, but because of my son's age, and because of where we're located we can't make it. And I think, unfortunately, the reality is that a lot of the parents here, even if the kids were interested, the parents aren't gonna bring them, and that sucks. This is not something the Farmacy Garden coordinator, or most folks at DSS are unaware of. So, community gardens in general have so much potential to really captivate and really interest young people, if in the right place, with the right support network. They're also very therapeutic for the people that want to be there. I think the people that want to be there get a lot out of it. So it really depends on what the goal of the community garden is. My experience of the Farmacy Garden in particular is that it was very therapeutic to the people that came, and it met the needs of the people who made the effort to come, if that makes sense. Even now, if we have to go to DSS, Otto wants to go in it, and he wants to look at what's there. And I'm hoping, because we're homeschooling now, I'm actually hoping we'll go over more because we're not on a schedule, and we can take the bus and

make a day out of it. So we are gonna try and make an effort to do that. So let me get to the thesis of it: the Farmacy Garden meets the needs of the people who make it there, who choose to go there, who get there for some reason. Community gardening as a whole, can, but it has to be strategically done well.

With DSS as a whole most people are not there because of happy circumstances, and I speak as someone who goes to DSS and tries to make it flawless. Like, I try to dot all my ts and dot all my is. I go with a backpack full of paperwork, and I would say that most folks that go don't have all their paperwork, and so it means you're gonna have to go to DSS ten or twenty times, and it's not really DSS's fault, and it's not really the recipients fault either, because they don't really know what they need until they get there. It's a tedious process, and no one's happy, going to DSS, no one is, I mean, not even the social workers. You can try and make it as pleasant as possible. I would say for the most part, I've had very pleasant, neutral experiences, but that's because I make sure that I have everything they could possibly need and more, and I keep pretty darn good records, like, I'm anal about keeping records for this reason. I don't know how that really affects the Farmacy Garden. I guess I could comment on the placement of the garden--the garden is a little far back in the parking lot, so you might not know it's there. Like, if you park like right in the front door where everybody parks, because everybody wants to walk in the front door, then you might not know it's there. I don't remember exactly how we found it, except that we were probably walking my son around, because why not? So, but like I understand, I'm trying to be kind 'cause I wasn't involved in decision making processes of the placement, and I wouldn't really have any input, so I understand that it was probably that you guys had the land, it was the best you can do. That's my guess about what happened.

It would be interesting from a DSS standpoint, if someone's having an issue, to tell them to go for a walk, like by the fruit trees, across the street where the pavilion is, or even in the garden. I mean for my son and I, it's very therapeutic to take a walk--it's a nice transition space. We've actually had some negative experiences at the Community Health Center, and we've gone for a walk in the garden afterwards to calm down, so I think there's absolutely benefit to doing that, but that's because we know to, I know to do that. I don't know how you would tell DSS recipients 'hey, maybe you should go take a walk.' It's a valid idea, you know? And there's enough of a walk through the parking lot that maybe the rage subsides so they don't destroy the crops when they get in, you know?

So as I mentioned, my involvement with the garden made me realize I wish we had something like that in our apartment community. I felt that way at the Christiansburg property too, simply because section 8 properties have people on disability that can't walk or have mobility issues so even taking the bus is a pain for them, but walking downstairs and being able to go garden would be really nice. The idea of community gardening is not a new concept to me, but it's a new involvement for me, so I don't really know how to enact that in our community and it's very challenging. I did some precursory reading on how to do that, and I've learned that many property managers can be very resistant to it, they start griping about things like pests. So the short answer is, I want a community garden in my complex, not necessarily for me, but for folks who might enjoy it who can't get to a community garden. And, you know, I don't have a mobility issue, but I have a car issue. There are community gardens in Blacksburg, but they're as equally challenging for me to get to because I have a child and I can't get to Blacksburg's community gardens easily with him because he's not at a stage where he's riding his bike, or willing to walk long distances. So, in that way, the Farmacy Garden is actually more accessible,

simply from a walking standpoint for a five year old, because the bus stop is very close, but for me it also means an hour bus ride, and it's not that long, it's just I gotta be willing to sit on a bus for an hour with a five year old to get there, work for an hour, and then take an hour bus ride home, or find someone willing to drive us. And the garden coordinator is willing to drive me, so I could probably do that in the future. My limitations are I have a five year old, and he drives the way I do things. All of this landscape changes when you've got a healthy single person. But are healthy single people the ones showing up at Farmacy Gardens? So that's the challenge organizers have, which is why I say, wouldn't it be great if we just had a community garden here and I've been like, I need to organize that, or find somebody, but then we're facing property managers who are resistant to it. So I have learned about the value of community gardens that I want to duplicate, you know. The thing that's nice about going with a DSS emphasis is there's a special emphasis that one could place on working with people in poverty. I'm gonna try to say this much more colloquially--I'm really poor and so I can share poor person tips. When you have sort of the DSS stamp on it, there's a lot of win-wins for the DSS being involved, which is you can kind of give them a pat on the back and say 'hey, these are DSS recipients that are trying to be healthy, who value this. We're not all the same, we're not the stereotype, you know, free-loaders, whatever.' But, from an idea of, okay, if DSS recipients are involved, and we all know that, we can actually just share, like I said, poor people tips. Like, I wash my laundry in the bathtub. My house is subsidized and they pay for water, so the way I do laundry is, I do laundry every night in the sink, 'cause I don't have money for laundry, but like, it's manageable if you do your clothes every day, you know? And it's really nothing to be ashamed off, because if you travel a lot and you're in China or India, people don't have washing machines in their homes, they don't have laundromats--in other places in the world this is how everyone lives. It's not a

shame thing, so there is some benefit to having like, a DSS community garden in a DSS public home. You know, like, if we're actually saying, from a section 8 or subsidized housing property standpoint, saying this is healthy space, healthy living for vulnerable communities, let's make it that. Let's say we're actually trying to do it, you know. Anyway, so if we want poor people to live, why don't we actually teach them to live. So, I'm gonna bring this back to the Farmacy Garden. The Farmacy Garden showed me what could be in places like this where I'm living now. So there is that benefit.

I don't know if the Farmacy Garden has shaped my values, but it is hopeful. Talking about this today has been particularly hopeful for me today to remember there are other people out there who are dedicated to trying to make things better. It reminds me to really keep trying, even when I don't feel like it, because our health is at stake. And it's one of those--it might be a losing battle, and we might not be able to get a bunch of people interested, but at least at the end of it all we can say I didn't give up, if that makes sense. And I'm saying this smelling my neighbor who is smoking, and like my nose is burning, and I'm like drafting a letter trying to get community involvement to make section 8 non-smoking because there's actually regulation out there saying section 8 is supposed to be non-smoking. So, anyway, it's a reminder to me that there are people out there actually trying to make things better, and to keep trying to be one of those people even when it's really hard. Yeah, so I guess that's sort of the hope of it. The other thing I thought is that it's very nice to see other people working together on a project. That's not very deep, but it's true. Because my professional and educational background is more of an ethics and a therapy standpoint, I know I'm sort of answering these questions from an ethical and spiritual standpoint instead of a very environmental place, but it is, it's nice to see sort of a microcosm of the world coming together and saying 'this is something we need to do.' It's a



collaboration point where other values may be completely different, and people may be very disagreed, like I've had the sense that there may be some gun-tottin farmers, people who are peacenik types who are probably like, you know, would much rather go trip in the forest, like a broad range of personalities and values can collaborate on this one project, this one issue that they think is important, and that's very hopeful to me too.

Participating in the garden hasn't changed my perception of my food system only because I was pretty left. I had a lot of exposure to like, organic, and way off the grid farms, so I would say probably not. But that's just because I had a lot of experience before. I'm vegetarian, I care about animal rights, you know, so... One of the things I didn't realize, and this is so small, but just being familiar. You know, I think every piece of land, and every gardening, farming plot, whatever, has got different problems to solve. So one of the things I hadn't been aware of, or hadn't seen before I came to the Farmacy Garden is the way they had the water tanks filled. So I mean, it's kind of silly, but I hadn't seen that before, 'cause everywhere I'd seen, like, in my mind that's a new irrigation system I hadn't seen before. Of course, I mean, it makes perfect sense, but just seeing how they tackled with the watering problem was interesting. You know, where we, on the environmental property I lived on, we used rain barrels and a hose. We tried to use the rain barrels when we could, and so yeah, that piece of land is an unusual place. I don't come from a gardening background, so it helped develop an increased awareness of challenges-- topographical, environmental challenges of gardens. Like, when the garden coordinator was here, 'cause I actually invited her here to tell her the ideas about this property, I showed her a couple pieces of land, and I'm like, 'this is what we've got', and she was able to say 'yeah, it would be a challenge because of the trees', and I'm like, 'yeah, of course it would.' You know, there are challenges to this property, like they spray for pests. Like, I got this garden bed, and I

grew ornamental squash because I like the squash flowers, but we were never gonna eat them, because they spray for pests, because it's an apartment, so it's kind of one of those things. I credit the Farmacy Garden for giving me experience with another piece of land and how you solved the environmental challenges in order to get what you hoped for. So, you know, it's kind of one of those things where I hadn't really thought about it until I saw it, and then I was like 'oh yeah, that makes sense, that's a great solution'.

The Farmacy Garden hasn't really changed my perception of my community. I already knew that Blacksburg, Christiansburg, this area was fairly diverse, so, as far as the people, no not really, but I think it might for some people. I'm just gonna say from my social location, no, but I think it might be from other social locations. Sort of a recognition of how diverse the people are in this area. Like, I can recognize the diversity of people here, but I already knew it was here.

It also hasn't really changed my perception of the natural world. Not really. Like, there were a couple of volunteers who were sort of regional folklore experts, so I learned things from them about this area, that were unique to this area, but it really hasn't changed, sort of, that that exists to me, like I knew that was the case, I just didn't know it about this area. You know?

As I've said, I think that I want something like the Farmacy Garden in my own community, and I know it's here, I know it's here in Blacksburg--I know there's a lot of interest in community gardening in Blacksburg, but I don't think it's geared towards young people, and I don't think it's geared toward people that don't have cars. Like, it's geared toward Blacksburg people, and I don't want to be unfair, let me get this right...I don't know how those spaces can accommodate people who are in my situation. But, I haven't actually been, I've been to one other community garden and it didn't work out for us. I don't know the others, so I wanna be careful not to bash them except for when I look at their websites they're not appealing for low-

income people or people who don't have cars. People who have mobility issues, so, yeah, I want to have that. So if I should be lucky enough to be in my own home in the future, (I don't know if that's lucky, there's challenges to that), then I'll have sort of my own space. But there's also part of the whole community aspect that I wanna support. Like even though I want to have my own space, there's this voice in the back of my head going 'yeah, but you also want to teach your son the value of participating in community'--that what you put in, you get out. One of the things I really appreciate about the Farmacy Garden is, when I've gone to the Community Health Center, when I've gone to the DSS, you guys share excess veggies and fruits, just leave them out there, and we've actually taken it sometime. Like, I want my son to understand the value of generosity, 'cause I see that's an ethic that resonates strongly with me that I want him to have. So, that's something that's important to me. So, if I ever get out of this community and have my own home, having this idea of I'll have a little patch for myself, but I also wanna teach my son that we need to share and give to the community just because. That's it. That is something I want my son to know, so that would be the benefit. So I should say, thank you for always sharing. For me that's very meaningful, on the ethics, that's something that's very meaningful to me. I noticed, I saw it. You know, I don't know what other people thought, but I saw it and thought 'that's awesome, thank you.' So, that's what I want my son to know, and in the future, to do for people.

Thanks also for the children's artwork. The Farmacy Garden is a pleasant space. There was intentionality in making it a pleasant space. I don't think anyone's ever gonna walk in and go this doesn't feel friendly, you know? Even when all the plants are dead and it's winter there's like artwork on it, and, so that is friendly. And it's one of those things where...well here's another thing, I helped plant some of the fruit trees. Because I was there and saw it happening, I know it was intentionally done, and I know why it was done, and I understand where it was

done. So, because I know it's there, and I was involved, if I had to go to DSS or the Health Clinic, or whatever, I know that the berries are there, and I can go sit under there, and I know that I can calm down there and just take a snack. The thing that's helpful is that I know someone thought to do that. That someone did that purposefully to bring joy, and to bring beauty, and to bring awareness. I don't know that visitors to DSS in five years are gonna sit and think about that, but maybe they will see it and they'll go 'well that's nice, wow those are berries!', you know? So, for me, having been involved in it, and knowing someone was intentional about doing that for a reason, is very hopeful. 'Cause it's just like 'wow, that's awesome, someone did that! Someone did that for people they are not ever gonna see, they are not ever gonna know.' It's kind of like, the person behind the scenes making things good for people. So, for me, I find enjoyment in other people who do that kind of thing for other people. Because that's love to me. That's an expression of love that never gets credit. You're not gonna get a medal for it, you're not gonna get the big bucks for it, but it's still loving. Hopefully other people in the future will look at it and think, 'wow, somebody did that, that's cool.' So, that's hopeful.

In five to ten years I would like the Farmacy Garden itself to stay as sort of a display garden, like I don't know that I would change it's existence, because it's very valuable--it's been very valuable for my son and I, when we have to visit the Health Clinic, 'cause, like I said we were patients at the New River Community Health. I think there's value in having it there for that reason. I don't know if you'll get more participants from having it there, but you'll get more foot traffic and just from a therapeutic standpoint, having it there for patients who've had crappy appointments is really handy, so I wouldn't change that. I think having it at the Health Department actually says something, or DSS, 'cause the Health Department is there too. If you think from a hospital standpoint, having a garden in a hospital is just a really good idea, you

know? It's not particularly deep, it's giving people a space to walk away from all the crap. So I think I would like that to stay. What I would love to see happen is properties that are section 8 or that DSS serves, to have satellite versions. They don't have to be as intense or pretty, they can be functional. Like, I would be happy with a functional tomato patch, just to have here, 'cause what ends up happening over here is we have some neighbor girls who end up at our house like every other day, 'cause they don't have anywhere else to go that's really safe or appropriate for them, and we have lots of kids in this neighborhood, when they get home from school they're just out wandering around, so if we just had grape tomatoes forever, you know, it doesn't have to be pretty, it doesn't have to be great, it doesn't have to be a showcase. So, maybe having like non-showcase type gardens in places where it's feasible. I think, actually, there are people in this complex who...like the lady upstairs is Egyptian, her husband is a computer scientist at Tech, and she grows stuff on her patio, so she and I have actually seed swapped and stuff. So, there are adults here who grow stuff on their porches, so there are mentors. That's what I'd really like to see happen is having more gardens. They don't have to be as nice looking, they don't have to have a full range of what could be. Or it could even be a different model, it could be more like traditional community gardens, not like where you rent a plot, but there could be residential plots. Like, I am not an expert, I would not know how to make something like that work here, but I would love to live in an apartment community that had residents get their own plot, that would be so cool. Of course, there's just challenges--most apartments don't have enough land to be able to do something like that, but, you know, that's what I would love to see. I understand you'd have to have the funding, and it gets complicated, and a lot of times, government looks at sort of your model and goes 'how successful was that?', but you gotta understand the nature of the garden would be different, you know? So another idea I have is one of the things that DSS

does is that we can pay for seeds using food stamps, which is one of the things they told me when I first moved here and I was like ‘oh my god that’s awesome.’ But maybe even having something through DSS that would allow you to make garden planter boxes or something per recipient. Like I’m thinking from a DSS standpoint, if they’re worried about people actually using it, if you link it to the recipient then they only take it if they’re interested, ‘cause like, if you’re not interested in buying seeds, you don’t.

As far as my ideal community, Blacksburg has some nice attributes, like there are a lot of traits that I really like about this area. I would prefer to live around people who are conscientious, and who are intentional, and who are respectful of others. And I say that because, you know, I live in an apartment community, and I don’t mind living in an apartment community, it’s only a problem when those bad habits bleed into your home. Right? I have fairly high standards, I think, of what is healthy. So, it would be nice to live in a like community in that way, but it’s also not reality. I was very unhealthy for a very long time, and I knew it, meaning diet-wise, I should talk about food. But the minute I had a son and I started realizing my practices were gonna start affecting someone else and my relationship with them it became a whole different story for me. You know, I lost a lot of weight and got real healthy, and you know, I would say believe it or not food was actually my main vice, ‘cause I was a junk-food junkie, I went out to eat all the time. So I actually changed quite a bit, but the way that relates to this is when I think about what kind of community I would want to live in, I want to live in a diverse community. One of the things I actually do love about Blacksburg is that for the most part, people here are fairly progressive, and it’s very diverse. And that’s actually very different than Christiansburg and Radford. Because of the college we have a lot of different people here, so I actually really like that. You know? We have a lot of good things going for us in

Blacksburg--I don't have a car because I can walk everywhere, and because I have public transportation. So those are nice attributes, and I don't actually mind communal living, as long as everyone's really devoted. Like, you really have to be very devoted to caring about other people if you're gonna live in a communal situation, you have to be intentional. In section 8 a lot of folks aren't intentional, because that's not what they grew up with, and they don't have any exposure. So, in Blacksburg we're doing a lot of things right, you know?

It's hard to pull off this level of diversity and have, like, a strong agricultural community too. I recognize that I can't have it all, like, if I were to live on a small-scale farm, I'd have to live in a place where there was enough space for small-scale farms. In that kind of space you don't get a ton of diversity because of the cost of land, in our nation especially, in order to be a small-scale farmer. I'm trying to envision what my ideal community would be, and I don't quite know. I'm pretty close here in some ways, but also really not. It'd be nicer to have a garden here in this apartment complex, like, I'm trying to make this complex better, because I'm stuck here, so I'm like, okay well I gotta make the best out of it. It would be great to have a garden here, it would be great if my upstairs neighbor would stop smoking. You know, all the other stuff for the most part I can handle, like I can personally handle loud music, 'cause my kid is loud. I can live with some of the stuff that happens in living in an apartment. One of the things that's nice about Blacksburg is you can buy renewable energy credits, so with my electricity I actually match with 100% solar power, renewable energy credits. Ideally, what I would love to have, just from a personal standpoint, is living in a little tiny--I'm like a tiny home enthusiast. I never need a space bigger than this apartment, and the only reason I need this much space is 'cause I have a son who's gonna be giant who's gonna be a teenager and I don't wanna live in the same room with him. So, I really only need a space that's half as big as this apartment. Like, having like a tiny

house that's half the size of this apartment that I could put solar panels on, I can have a little garden on the side. Like, I really don't need more than an acre, but I need the money to have an acre. So my ideal community would be kind of like Blacksburg. I would be on an acre with my little tiny house with my little tiny garden, and I'm sure I'd find something to be miserable about, but for the most part I don't think I would ever need more. We're talking about need, you know?

So thinking about my ideal community, I realize that community is actually all about the people. I already lived in my ideal community and I miss it every day of my life. My ideal community was the two seminaries and Earlham college in Richmond, Indiana. I didn't like the climate, it was way too cold, but what I loved about it was that I knew without a doubt that the people I studied and lived with were loving people. To clarify, I went to school with Quakers, Buddhists, Pagans, Atheists, progressive Christians, a variety of religious outliers. The thing that drew us together was that we weren't there for the money or the glory of an illustrious career. All of us were dirt poor. We all cared deeply for human rights, earth stewardship, pacifism. Sure, we had moments of interpersonal drama, but for the most part we all trusted that we were doing a lot of self-work, we didn't want to hurt others, and we valued healing and wholeness. We had a level of trust in what we were all doing there that allowed us to have really difficult conversations and address hard problems in a growth-oriented way.

My ideal community is built on trust and love, wanting to live in abundance of spirit, with a shared vision of doing our best to leave the world better than it was (or at least not worse) than when we were here. On a really shallow level, though, I'd pick my seminary community in a warmer community than Indiana or Blacksburg. Unfortunately when you graduate from seminary you have to move on. We got to Blacksburg because it was my ex-husband's turn to go to grad school. The same people I loved aren't really in Indiana anymore, so there's not really a



going back to that space. Here in Blacksburg I try to take joy in the individuals I run across who seem to care. They are not nearly as congregated for me as they were in seminary.

So as far as how the Farmacy Garden fits into this vision, I think if something like it were to happen in this apartment complex I would definitely take a part in it. Like, I'm not just gonna recommend the idea and not participate. I'm very happy to be behind the scenes helping make things happen, but I know that I'm not agriculturally aware enough to be the leader. I can't, I don't know enough. But I actually do carry over some of the lessons that I've learned from the Farmacy Garden. So I purposely plant stuff in the garden beds so people see it. It was kind of ad hoc this last season 'cause I hadn't lived here before, so I didn't know what would grow, so I planted some squash and I planted wildflowers and echinacea, and marigolds, just kind of random stuff. It's really bare here, my apartment is the only thing that has anything in front of it, so I was just like, screw it, I'm gonna make this place look happy. And the little girls next door actually started planting stuff in their bed. I don't know if they did it because of us, but I used the opportunity to show them, like one of the squashes started falling off, we bashed it in, and looked at, so I'm kinda doin' some of this stuff that's kind of inspired by the Farmacy Garden. It wasn't intentional, it's just these kids were over at my house and I had to do something with them, so they thought it was great fun to smash squashes open so let's go do that, let's talk about seeds. So, you know, I'm bringing some of the lessons over. And then also, now that my son is getting a little bit older, and now that we're homeschooling and we're around, my hope is that we'll actually be more involved in the Christiansburg property because it'll give us a field trip, it'll give us a homeschool thing to do. We'll be outside, and my son is able to focus a little more now, so I'm hoping that now that he's older we'll be able to have just a little bit more sustained involvement. It'll give us something to do in the summer. And I was actually trying to think

about how I might make his homeschool studies sort of more seasonal, 'cause that's sort of how it would've been before public school started, because like public school kind of started because of the agricultural cycles. So kind of getting him in this mindset of this is the season where we're outside doing stuff. He kind of already has that a little bit, 'cause just naturally when it's warmer out we make the kids go outside, so if we're gonna make the kids go outside let's make the kids do some. And he's actually helped me, he actually does help me plant the garden beds. For him that's actually exciting. Like I put a seed in the ground, and it comes up and that's awesome. So we do actually plant flower seeds in our flower bed. He's likes it. He's got a little rake. He enjoys it. He's happy to see it. He helps me water, he enjoys watering a lot. And that's another thing I'm realizing, having a garden bed in front of our house is really nice. The way we water, is I have this big feeding trough, like an animal feeding thing that I fill up with water in the bathtub, and bring it out and just use a pitcher. So we end up watering basically the way they do in the Farmacy Garden.

## **Appendix Q: Sandra's Story**

I went to school at Virginia Tech to become a dietitian, and ended up doing my masters in public health, and the emphasis was on community education and program planning. So I spent a lot of time at Virginia Tech, and in Christiansburg and in the New River Valley in general. And now, fast forward, I am doing nutrition counseling so I still work with people on a daily basis--working with clients as the practitioner. That's a little bit about me; I went to school for nutrition to further my education on how to communicate well with people, and how to talk them through goal setting and other topics related to their health. Talking about health with people, specifically their own health and experiences is something that I love to do; I did a lot of schooling for this, and do this for my job now.

I was always interested in nutrition, since being a Freshman at Virginia Tech, I knew I wanted to do nutrition. The more I learned about nutrition, the more classes I took, and experiences I gained, the more I realized that nutrition is so much more than just tracking calories, or what we eat, but it's also where food comes from. And that has really been something still to this day I'm interested in, and there's a lot of information that common knowledge doesn't really cover as far as nutrition including where food comes from. I took a couple of food policy classes, and really started to get more involved in that. And then my interests, personally in nutrition went from not just: 'eat this, don't eat that' or 'eat this, and also eat that' or 'follow a diet that looks like this', it was more about being mindful of where food comes from--local food system vs. big box grocery store food system, and teaching people how to eat, or just being more mindful about what they're eating and where it's coming from, and supporting not only local businesses, because of local farmers and things like that, but also, you know, just eating healthy with that. Sustainable nutrition, I guess, is kind of the buzz word, and

that's where eating healthy and nutrition are important, but so is the sustainability related toward where the food comes from. This is still a really new thing, I feel like, just as far as day to day. I do nutrition counseling now, and that's not something that comes up in a lot of conversations, because people still need help in like 'what should I eat, or not eat', and 'I have this condition, help me get better', and so unfortunately in day-to-day, sustainability and food systems doesn't always come up, but I do try to bring it up by saying 'get to the market', 'see where food comes from', 'support a local farmer', 'try something local or try yourself--make your own garden' or 'visit a community garden'. I have seen more community gardens kind of pop-up, so I feel like that is also endorsing the local food systems movement, and I think the Farmacy Garden is really a big part of that. So my personal interests in nutrition, and then learning more about sustainability and local food systems, and what does that mean, and how do people in urban areas do that, that was what was a really big draw to the Farmacy Garden project, for me as a student for my practicum in the first place. I was thinking, this is where there's so much potential. Hopefully I'll get to really move forward with that in my own personal career, also I hope places like the Farmacy Garden will be a resource for people to obtain this knowledge and understanding.

I've always been interested in working with people in the community to improve their health, so it's great to work with other professionals to make this happen. I also love working with participants, patients and clients, or others in the community; this drove my interest in working in communities. I got all the way to the Farmacy Garden specifically because I stayed at Virginia Tech post-undergrad to do my master's, and I was originally in my master's of science in nutrition, it wasn't working out for me because I knew I wanted to be where people are, be in their settings. I then pretty quickly realized the M.S. wasn't for me and was able to seamlessly

switch to an MPH program. A part of the Master's of Public Health is to do a practicum project and I quickly found out the Farmacy Garden took practicum students. I was able to work with the garden coordinator who was an employee at the Virginia Department of Health at the time, and work with her to reestablish a program called Market Kids at the Farmacy Garden. Together we revamped the program, developed a new curriculum and implemented it during summer 2017. I also volunteered at the garden throughout all of this, you know, got involved in garden operations things that you need to do every day to run a garden, and then also work with the community with this program. It was perfect for me. I went from being in a graduate degree I didn't really like to suddenly being in one I really enjoyed, and then getting this awesome project put in my lap, and I felt really fortunate for that. That was my path to being a part of the Farmacy Garden.

I started in the Spring of 2017. The garden wasn't quite open yet, and I started meeting with the garden coordinator and then with my advisor at the time. We had just started planning the program, Market Kids. In the Spring before the garden was really open we were thinking through what it was gonna look like, and that's a lot of what I was doing--planning, a lot of meetings, figuring out how we're gonna get this program up and running because we wanted it to start right after kids got out of school. And so a lot of planning with that, and then once the garden opened up, I think we had a couple of weeks where it was just like being in the garden, like getting the garden open for general volunteers to be able to come in and do things, so getting some of the seedlings started, getting different things planted in the garden beds, cleaning up the garden beds, working with the coordinator to make sure we had all the materials we needed. Shortly after, Market Kids started. It was crunch time to get the kids recruited to participate and get a pre-program survey out. The program was for kids aged 6-12. There was a lot happening in

May, early June time of that summer. The volunteers were people who worked in the garden in exchange produce, whatever was ready to be harvested that day. Some days there was more to harvest than others. That was really cool to work with volunteers and see them bring in information about gardening that they had in the past, or maybe their own personal garden, and learn from each other. I think it was a really good place to meet people with similar interests, whether they had the resources at home to garden, or whether they just wanted to come and volunteer for enjoyment, or fun, because they didn't have that at all at home. They were able to come to the garden and learn more about where vegetables come from, how the food that we eat is grown, and you know, how to take care of it so it doesn't die or anything like that. It takes a lot of work, especially with those smaller plants. So that's kinda a long answer, but that's what I did--part volunteer, volunteering to help volunteers, but also helping with the Market Kids program at the same time.

Market Kids had been around before a little bit in Blacksburg, and then it moved to Christiansburg in the garden. That year that I got to help out, in 2017, we were trying to redevelop it in a way that it was expanded on from the year before. The year before it was at the Farmacy Garden, so we expanded on that so we didn't have repeat lessons or anything, but also worked just to make it more established, more structured. It was a program meant for kids ages 6-12, to basically come to the garden to get an experience where they were not only having fun, it was kind of a summer event for kids to learn more about horticulture, entrepreneurship, and nutrition all related to gardening or farming, and every week there was a different lesson. Sometimes it was about planting, and harvesting, and looking for the weeds and watering, more horticulture focused, and other weeks we focused on nutrition, like trying a tomato salsa with the tomatoes we grew. Each week we tried to touch on each of the three components; horticulture,

nutrition and entrepreneurship. We told the kids from the beginning that they were going to grow their own vegetables, so they also had to take care of their own little plant, and then we were going to farmers markets at the end of the program. We went to two, the Blacksburg and Christiansburg farmers markets to sell produce they had been working hard to grow all summer. It was important to us to teach them about entrepreneurship related to food and food systems, especially in that area, in the rural Appalachian area. We did a lesson on logo development, and they got to create their own logo. We talked about how you have to sell your stuff, and how people need to know who you are, and the marketing aspect of it, and then the kids got to go on field trips. We got to go to a market, and visit a farmers market before selling there, and we also got to go to two different farms, so the kids got to see the bigger picture, a professional farmer. The kids were able to recognize that a farm or garden can be someones livelihood and this also ties into eating and nutrition and growing the vegetables that we need to survive. They also learned about the business aspect of farming to help them realize 'this is something that you could do one day if you wanted', or 'you can support people who are selling their produce at the markets by going and buying their stuff, or visiting their farms'. So just giving kids exposure to things that are in their backyard that they may have never even known existed, and parents too, because parents went on all those field trips with us, so they got to visit places. At the end of the program, like I said, kids got to go to two markets and sell their produce, and then their earnings were actually split amongst them, so the kids got something out of it too--they got the lessons and this education, and then we turned around and actually gave them the money that they earned from selling their produce back to them. I think that that is when they realized, selling it, they made the connection that, 'oh, we have to sell it, get our name out there and get people to come to stand'. So, it was a lot of different things all tied into one program, and I feel like it was

a lot of great lessons to get from the Market Kids. And again, I feel like it was things that they may not always talk about at school, at least not to this extent. Again, the program focused on nutrition, horticulture and entrepreneurship.

When I started, before the program or working at the garden, I knew this was an interest, and then being there and seeing the kids be like ‘Wow! That’s a cucumber!’ or ‘that’s a tomato!’ A lot of times, especially with kids, they don’t always want try new vegetables or maybe they don’t have access at home to trying vegetables, and then they grow up to be adults who don’t like vegetables. So, for me as a dietician that is something important to me; people need to be exposed to vegetables in order to like them and eat them regularly. A big pivotal moment was seeing kids make these connections between gardening, vegetables and food. As the program went on during the summer, more and more produce was being ready for harvest at the garden, and then the kids also had their own plants that they were finally starting to see, ‘oh, this green plant actually produced a tomato’ or, you know, like, ‘we can try it right now’. I feel like that was a big moment for me to realize like this, this is important because when kids get this exposure, they’re more likely to try foods. Like ‘I grew this, I’ll eat it’, as opposed to it being put on their plate at lunch or dinner or something like that, or being forced to stay at the table until it’s all gone. I think getting kids involved is really important for their nutrition, but also for their community, to build relationships with others in their community who are doing the same things, and for parents also, to sit there and see their kids trying this. We’d have parents say something like, ‘oh, they don’t like cucumbers’, but they tried it there, and the parents are shocked that the kid really liked this. A specific example--we put chard in a smoothie once and the kids, you know, a couple of kids are like ‘ew, gross!’, but all it takes is a couple of kids to actually try it, then everyone else does. And then parents are sitting there watching their kids drink a smoothie



with chard in it, and they're like, 'never would have thought that my kid would try something like that'. Then the kid goes to their parent, and they're like 'try this!', so I think seeing that connection with the kids like--dirt, water, fun garden stuff, grows food, and oh now I'll try the food, and the parents see the kids trying the food and then in turn maybe they'll buy it, or maybe they'll get their kids involved with things with food at home. Because I'm a dietician that's where my mind goes with it, to me it was pivotal to be a part of helping kids try foods they'd never had before, try foods that were from the garden. We had them try ground cherries, right then and there. They thought it was the coolest thing, that was huge to me. I really felt the program was worthwhile for the participants. Most of the parents would stay the entire hour and a half session and they were watching their kids do this too, so it was just a big learning moment for me, the garden coordinator, and the volunteers who helped us manage these 18 kids, cause that got a little crazy. Thank goodness we had a lot of people so we wouldn't get flustered--we still did, don't get me wrong, but having that help, all of us got to watch these kids do this, and parents got to watch their kids learn new things. I don't know, that was a big pivotal moment of like--this garden is a good space, it's a good community gathering place, good learning place, it doesn't always have to be in a classroom, it can be outside. It might be rainy or thundering in the distance, or we might get soaked, who knows, but that can still be a really good space for kids to be, but also parents and other adult volunteers.

Beyond Market Kids, I also worked inside VDH with the WIC Department, to get WIC recipients to visit the garden and participate in food demos. This was another form of outreach to get more people in the garden. The food demos were difficult to implement but I think this is a great idea that could be followed through with in the future. I did lead a demo at one point in time, it was a small group, but we did a garden tour, and a food demo I believe, I wanna say it was a

basil/tomato salad or something like that. The garden, it's a little far away from the main entrance, so the WIC classes got people who had never ventured that far in the parking lot to get over there. And the summer I was there, I'm pretty sure that clinic, where people would get their prescription for the garden, it was either closed or there was construction, so we weren't getting as much exposure that year with volunteers, or people that wanted to come check it out from the clinic, I didn't have much experience with that, but we still had great volunteers. I even got a couple of friends who hadn't heard about it to come and garden for a little bit. I think it was a fun place for people to come and just take a break from their day and go outside and do a little bit of physical activity. Just kind of get their minds off of other things, so I think that was a big part of it for me in addition to Market Kids.

I think my motivation in this work is both personal and professional as far as having an interest in helping people, especially low-income populations have more access to fruits and vegetables, especially local produce--that's even more exciting for people to understand where it comes from and how hard it can be to grow this food. I think just interest in sharing that knowledge with people, and then helping both children and adults know where vegetables come from, and fruits, and to try them. And my interest in wanting to foster community engagement and support that, because it's like a little baby--it needs to be nurtured a little bit, so that's something that's really interesting to me, just being involved in the community in general. Being involved in this place, but other places within the community was always a big interest of mine personally and hopefully will become my professional thing one day as well. So being interested in, not just helping people, but helping them help themselves. I love helping people make the connections and hearing them reflect, saying something like 'oh, wow, that's not so bad, I could do that' or 'let me try something new;' these small wins, or successes, are so important to me.

With nutrition as my career and public health being a big interest to me, I think it is important to have healthy gathering places for people to go to for educational purposes and for recreational activity. That was what was so cool about the garden--is like, it's an activity, you can bring your kids, or you can come yourself, anybody. And it's something to do, but it's also a place to learn, so I think it's such a good spot for improving communities, and that's a big interest of mine, making places better for people. I think both specifically and broadly, there's a need for a place for people to go and learn about food and nutrition, and learn about their health. I know the garden isn't necessarily health related, in the sense that it's not a community clinic, but it was tied to the clinic, so I feel like it's a place for work sites that are trying to improve the health of others, like VDH and that clinic to also work together. There needs to be more collaboration amongst the community businesses or the community health sites specifically, even like grocery stores. I have food and nutrition on my mind, but it doesn't have to be that, it could be a place for kids. I think communities need more places for kids to play, and safe environments, and I feel like a garden is a constructive playing place where not only are they learning things, but they're also having fun. So I think that there's a need for more places for kids to go and have more opportunities to learn and develop life skills. I also think like there's a need for adults to be able to go and continue to learn. For example, adults may live their whole life and may not know anything about, let's say, carbohydrates, and then they develop diabetes, they need to have a place where they can learn more about nutrition. I also think of someone who may not have a big social circle, places like the Farmacy Garden exist for them to be able to get out and feel good about themselves because of the work they're doing, and also leave an impact for others. There's a need for more spaces where people work together, and they put some work in, and they get something out, or maybe someone else gets something out down the

road--kind of like creates this domino effect. I feel like in Christiansburg or in the New River Valley area, gardens like this, it can be the same thing. I guess it is a little more like a rural area, it's not like a big city by any means, and so there might be more gardens, or people might have their own places like that, but I still think in terms of the community involvement, if someone gets involved in their community in a garden, that might trickle down into getting involved in the community in other places where there is a need as well.

I really felt the impact of the Farmacy Garden by meeting the volunteers, we see those same regular volunteers every week, and we had one volunteer that always wanted to come and was really helpful and wanted to grow his own stuff, he was really, really involved in the garden. And one day he invited myself and some other volunteers to come to his house and see his home garden, and meet his wife, and just be invited in basically open door, come in, and let us make you food. Him and his wife made us dinner, they treated us like family, it was amazing, and I thought that that was a really big moment, I don't know why I forgot to bring this up. The community garden is becoming a place where people make connections and then they take those connections and do something with them outside of the garden too. So that was really cool, and you know, that was someone that, who knows, I may have never met if I hadn't been involved in the garden, and I may have never worked with the others that were there on a regular basis that he also invited. And I think that's also kind of back to the humanistic side of things, like people want to share what they have with others, and I think that's so important, and like there's all this chaos going on in the world, but still there's people who want to make connections and they want to share what they have with others. So, that was a really impactful experience, and that happened a lot later in the season, but it felt so great to be welcomed by someone I didn't really know that well. He even brought food to the garden in the summer when we were working there.

He always would be willing to share--'look what I made in my garden', or 'look what I got at this garden', what we made, and so that was a big moment too, seeing someone get so excited about it, and then sharing that excitement.

Also, I touched on this a little bit but another moment when I realized the garden was impactful was seeing the kids try a new vegetable. They came once a week and they would come on Thursday, and maybe their tomato plant had a little green tomato, and then they'd come a week later and be like 'it's red!' or be like 'it's less green more red'...whatever it was. And they got to see that growth so I feel like it was impactful for them because they got to see that change happen. They were not just doing something and never visiting it again, they got to week by week come back and see changes that were happening in the garden because of work they were putting in, and other volunteers too, and myself and the coordinator, and another volunteer that we had. And so I think that, yeah, seeing the kids get so excited about something, like a cherry tomato is very impactful to me. Like, oh, the work we're putting in to plan this program is working, the work we're putting in in the garden all the other days of the week is working, the kids are getting something out of this program, so it was just kind of like that time where everything just clicked.

That experience affected me personally in realizing that hard work put in and planning and several meetings or later nights or super early mornings, it all pays off. Even though this was a program for, I'm pretty sure eighteen kids, maybe like nineteen, twenty, it wasn't like it was for a ton and ton of people, but it worked and all that work we put in paid off for the kids, and not just the kids, but also the parents. I think that was, for me, realizing like when you put a lot of work into something that you really care about, even if it is exhausting, it can still make a really big difference, because I mean we had some really long days. We had some days where it was

hot out, it was summer, July and August, and trying to make sure we have all the things we'll need, and go through all the logistics, and it would be a little overwhelming at times, but I feel like it always worked out. That was also having a lot of help, that wasn't just having a couple of people, that was having three or four people coming together to help make this program happen for these kids. So, I think seeing the hard work pay off, and seeing the kids and the parents just be really pleased with the program. I mean there were days when we were planning and we were like 'this could go either way, this could be a disaster, or this could be really perfect' and it always worked out. I think we were a lot more prepared than we always thought we were going into every week. And it was an eleven week program with 13 sessions, so it was a lot with that many kids and the parents there. The garden is a pretty tight space so like if there were strollers or anything like that, it got pretty cramped in there, so definitely an environment where you could get flustered or overwhelmed, but knowing that, for me, working in chaos is the best way to learn and work. I feel like that is a really good lesson I learned from being there, and that affected me personally and then just thriving off the energy of other people. I feel like I was really impacted every Thursday night after we were done for the week. It was just like 'yeah!' on a high, working with other people and seeing them excited made me more excited to keep working with people. Now, fast forward, I guess like almost three years later, I'm doing this similar kind of work, it's not in a group setting, but an individual setting, and could be a day when I personally feel discouraged or maybe don't feel like I'm making a big difference, and then someone comes in and they're super ecstatic about it--'I tried eating more vegetables, and I feel great'. I think getting that feedback from people is really how I feel impacted by this kind of work, community work, so the garden, I mean, I got to do that that whole summer, so that was like a really big thing for me. I feel like I still use experiences learned from that summer to this

day--how to manage a more hectic situation, or how to manage like a last minute thunderstorm and it's pouring--how to be quick on your feet. And there's a lot of personal growth and experiences I gained out of the entire experience at the garden as well.

I guess this does relate to when I was talking about how I think the Farmacy Garden has impacted me, but again, I can say that it's just, it's a great gathering place. I mean, Virginia Tech is right there, so it's great for doing partnerships. It's a great place for community members to just come and try something they may have never done before, or maybe they did in the past, but just don't have a place to do it. And so, I think it, bigger picture, made me realize that community centers, community gardens, community programming is just so important. And people will come out, they want these kinds of things, they will come out and they wanna learn, they wanna have a place to go, and they also want their kids to have a place to go, with something like the kids program.

Working in a field where I'm working with people all the time has really made me realize that being patient with people is so important. We're all just people, nobody is perfect, we all mess up, and maybe you had a big event planned and they don't show up, and things happen in life, so I think being patient is something that the Farmacy Garden further instilled in me. I mean that's something I don't think any of us could learn enough, is how to be patient. So, I think that just continued to, like, hammer down on the nail with like, don't let your ego get in the way because something else is gonna test it. That's a big thing I think with the garden, being patient, and that hard work really does pay off, that's another one. Putting the work in for this really fun, awesome program for the kids, all that work paid off, and it's something that I still think about all the time. And with that, a little bit is like, the creativity that came with creating all the lessons, like I loved doing that and working together with the coordinator. We'd be just sitting in the

office and going together with some ideas, and trying to put things together really takes you out of that corporate or technology box for a few hours. I think as we go with more and more technology in the future, that's important too--to have goals and tasks that help you focus in on creativity, and planning and logistics, and I enjoy doing all that stuff so the Farmacy Garden made me realize that's important in the work environment too, and that people appreciate it. The work environment, having the creativity aspect is really great, and then knowing that people, they appreciate it, it's appreciated, but then again, back to the patience. So I don't know, I'm kind of swimming circles in my mind where there's a lot of things like expectations and then reality.

I feel like I've always been a pretty adaptable person, but this was a summer where we definitely had to be ready, like have a plan, have the logistics down, because if kids get bored it's crazy, but like also be ready to change the plan within seconds, or to go with the flow. We were also trying to do some evaluation/data collection, and it was really hard and so, just go with the flow and be like 'alright, well maybe we didn't get the best evaluation out of the kids, but we'll try it again next year', you know? So I think adaptability is a huge component from my experience participating at the Farmacy Garden. And being quick on your feet, embracing the chaos, like all that kind of stuff. It's sometimes easy to forget about that kind of thing, so it's good to be humbled by it again.

I think the Farmacy Garden has shaped my values in the sense of seeing people as just people, and not as just like a number. When you're thinking about working with people, it's easy to just get caught up in what you have to do, and then forget that they have feelings as well, so I think, again, more of the humbling experience, and the patience are ways that it's kind of shaped my values. And then remembering that we're all just trying to do the best we can, and so giving



people that. And I feel like I like to give people the benefit of the doubt, or give them the chance and so I think that this just really further emphasizes that. Like me and the coordinator would be planning and like you get caught up in the planning, you get caught up in the to-do list, like anything, and it's grounding to remember that we're just working with people and things change, things happen, or the weather. Fortunately we didn't have any injuries, but that could've happened at any moment in time, like a kid tripping and falling, and so I think that there is this whole aspect that is really hard to plan for in the heat of the moment. And so, working at the garden kind of brought it back down, the reality, like, okay, you can plan all you want, but you just don't know how things might go when they're happening. And not to say that planning is bad, cause I think planning is really important, and having this thing that we're ready to do, and keeping people on task, but knowing that if it doesn't happen the way we wanted it, it's not the end of the world, so that's like the human aspect of it for me. Working with people is hard, but it's really rewarding, and I guess that's kind of how it's shaped my values.

As far as my food system goes, I'd already had a lot of experience working at a Farmers' Market, so that was a big food systems eye opening experience. Being at the Farmacy Garden made me realize that the food system is important, but people may not always know where their food is gonna come from next, so although this is a great thing, it's not on everybody's mind in the same way it is on mine, so I guess that's a little bit of my perception towards it. Buying local, supporting local farmers, all of that is great, but like some people just aren't at that stage, or that's not the first thing they think of with food, so I think remembering that is really important, as far as making up a food system. And food access, like access to vegetables and fresh foods, and some people may not feel like they have good access to things like that, and so, I feel like having something like the garden, and I've noticed this in other stuff I've done, like working

with kids and maybe they'd never tried spinach before, or like lettuce straight from the garden, I think that kids may not always have that same exposure at home as they do in a place like this, so that kind of made me think about the food system, and the bigger picture, again, like the human aspect, like that's a big part of it as well. And I think it's important for people to learn where food comes from, and learn that it is kind of hard to grow a tomato, especially in a box. So I think there's that too, for people to realize this is where the food comes from. I think something like a garden helps people make more connections about that kind of stuff.

I feel like the Farmacy Garden has changed my perception of my community in the sense that I feel like I got to be more involved. I lived in the area to go to school as a student, and this summer when I worked at the garden and I met people who live in this area that aren't just there for school that kind of changed my perception of the community. And I'd had other exposures, and other jobs that kind of gave me a different perception of the community, but this was like week by week, working with other people who just live in the area, and most of my undergrad had been so undergrad focused, just so Virginia Tech, so just getting out and seeing that there is more to that in the area. When I think of what my perception of the community in Blacksburg in Christiansburg looked like in 2012 compared to in 2017, and when I was there a little bit after that, I think the garden really put the hammer on the nail with that one too, in the sense that there's a lot more to that area. I think there's a lot in that area. I think this makes me sound like I only focus on Virginia Tech, and I was really involved in other things during undergrad and other places in grad school, but I think that this garden specifically, and spending time there the entire summer, and really in the Spring a little before that, having built that relationship in the community, that was like kind of different then what the community is probably more often known for, the university, and so I do feel like it changed my perception of the community to get

involved with people who just live in the community, which is always what I wanted to do. Growing up I moved a lot, every 9-18 months, so I'd never actually been able to get involved in the community, so when I started at Tech, I was like 'alright, four years, I'm probably gonna be out of here', but I had no clue and that was clearly not what happened. But I think every year I stayed in the Blacksburg area, it became more and more of my own home, and being at the garden really made that even more apparent, made me more aware of what is in my community, and who is in my community, and what things exist for people who live there. I think it did also change in the sense, like, I don't have kids, I wasn't involved in the school system, like the public school system or anything like that, so, I was able to get to know a different population within the same community better, so it was great.

Working at the Farmacy Garden also made me realize that community gardens, or if someone has their own garden, can be really environmentally friendly in the sense that if more people went to community gardens on a regular basis, or if they had their own garden, then maybe people would get more into composting and then we might see a reduction in food waste and other organic waste because it could be repurposed. So I think the garden gives people an opportunity to learn more about compost and repurposing things, reducing waste, and then also if somebody grows their own food I feel like they are less likely to let it go bad in their fridge, cause they're like 'no! I put all of this effort into it, I gotta eat it!' So I think as far as environmental changes, I do think it makes people realize there's a lot of work that's involved in growing food, growing produce, and so we should make sure it doesn't go to waste. So I think there's that aspect, and then the compost. If somebody didn't have compost at their home, or didn't have a garden, then they could go here and take it, or create like a system--that could be a way to improve the environment in that region. And then the water that we had, I'm pretty sure it

was donated from the fire station in Christiansburg, and I don't know much about where the water came from itself, but it made me think about reusing rainwater, and use that in a garden, and maybe that's something that could start happening if it hasn't already in the garden. So I guess a little garden can be like a little ecosystem in itself where people can think about how much waste they're actually giving off. This is probably ambitious for me to say, but maybe people will start to realize the impact of waste, and how reducing that does make a difference for them. So I guess that's where I go as far as the perception on the environment on the food waste, packaging waste that comes with food, but also the possibility of composting and making that more of a thing in the community.

Participating in the Farmacy Garden made me realize that one day I want to have a garden of my own, because I got to get a lot more knowledge of gardening while being there, working there, and talking to people about it. I couldn't talk to people about it if I didn't know about it, so I was able to learn on my feet, kind of thing. I don't have a garden now because I live in an apartment, but I do have plants, and I feel like I moved a lot, in college especially, so I feel like I wasn't able to have these things, but now that I feel a little more stable I feel like I could think about either joining a community garden in this area, maybe in the springtime, or just having some of my own little plants, as much as I can. Like, it makes me want to have that more often, and one day maybe have a bigger outside garden with several garden beds and things. Because it's like, I like the idea that you put in the work and you get the produce out, or flowers, or whatever you may be growing--you get something out. I think that that's a pretty nice feeling to have, so I hope that one day I do have my own garden, and like I said earlier, join a community garden and maybe even talk to other people where I live now about starting a

program like Market Kids, spreading the word about that kind of thing, getting more people exposed to things like that.

The hope I feel from the Farmacy Garden kinda all ties back to seeing the kids try the food, and the parents being like, 'this is awesome'. I think it gives me hope that maybe those kids will remember that summer experience, some of them were pretty young, but maybe they will be able to take that forward in their life, and think more about where food comes from, or how much they enjoyed gardening, or how much they enjoyed getting out there and doing a program with other kids and stuff. So I think the sense of hope comes from the exposure the garden gets from other people and how they use that, like how they use their experiences there. And hopefully they use it to tell more people about it, and like I said, get involved in their own garden, or keep coming back every year. It's also usually such a positive experience for people. Sometimes there's bugs so maybe that's not so positive, you know mosquitos or whatever, but I think that besides that it is such a positive place for people to go and relieve stress or to try something new. So I think that it's a really healthy place for people to go to when they need something. And so as far as giving a sense of hope, I think it's that. If people, I'm thinking of someone that may be really stressed, or just have a harder home life or something going on that's really personal for them, being able to have a place to get away from that, and just work in a garden, work with other volunteers, like volunteer for the kid program, like who knows what it is, but I think that it can be a good safe space for people. You know, learning stuff and the educational, but also just like a place to go when they need something.

In five to ten years, I hope the Farmacy Garden has a structure. I don't know if it does now, but hopefully it has a structure, a little gazebo or something for people, if they go there and need to sit down for a minute. I know that there are picnic tables, but I know the structure was a

vision a while ago. Maybe also seeing it a little bit more self-sustaining. There was always a volunteer, either through Cooperative Extension, VDH, or MPH practicum students, and I think that's good because that gives people in those fields an opportunity to be there, but it would be great to see it more self-sustaining where volunteers just come, they know what to do because they go regularly, and they know how to welcome volunteers. And I know we had certain hours that it was open, but maybe if more and more people learn what they need to do, what needs to be done every day, then they could start coming a little bit more on their own. I don't know, I feel like it does still need to have some management, but I think if it felt more open, then maybe it would get even bigger. I don't know where it would expand into, but I'd love to see it grow, like literally grow and get double its size, or if not double its size, inspire another community garden somewhere else in Christiansburg or in the county. And so maybe it would be close to the Blacksburg High School at St. Michael's Lutheran Church. Something like that where that can get more kids exposed to gardening and to horticulture or other aspects related to that. And so hopefully seeing little gardens pop up everywhere but also the Farmacy Garden being the big hub where people can always go. Hopefully it's still thriving in five to ten years.

The community I'd want to live and work in is one that's always trying to improve it's built environment for the community members. That's kind of the bigger picture of public health--safe gathering places for kids, safe parks, sidewalks, like all these perfect things, if we are getting more visionary with it, having a community where people can feel involved, and maybe there's also great public transportation. I guess I'd love to live and work there, but I also feel like I would love to work and live in a place that needs that, that still doesn't have it, and make change happen, so, that's tricky. I think the Farmacy Garden could help with one that's already thriving, in the sense that getting more community gardens out there, especially when

you think of like urban areas, where there may not be space, but there could be parks, there could be rooftop gardens, things like that. That could get people who live in an urban setting, help them understand more about horticulture, and the agriculture world that sometimes I think people are really disconnected from. So I think it could be great in this perfect world where the built environment's all set up and everyone's healthy and thriving, who has clean air, like perfect right, but I also think it could help in places where they're not there at all, and maybe not even close, and need some extra support--they can be a good starting point. You think of a really low-income rural community in the midwest let's say, maybe this could be the first thing that gets people out their door, and involved in the community, and gets them caring about something within their community that would also benefit them. So I think the Farmacy Garden concept could be and should be implemented more in places. The Farmacy Garden is wedged out by the parking lot, it can be in places that originally people didn't think could work. It doesn't have to be a perfect thing, it can be a couple of garden beds, you know? So I think that that could be a way that the Farmacy Garden could build and/or sustain a community.

## **Appendix R: June's Story**

Growing up I always gardened with my grandparents and it was just a special thing that we shared, and even though they lived pretty close, they were kind of an hour/hour and a half away from us so that was something that I could bring back to my house and still practice and think of them. And they still garden, to this day, so that's kind of another thing--I get to send them seeds and kind of connect with them still. But, I guess as I went through college, I was an environmental studies major and I just kind of gravitated towards the idea of the inequalities surrounding food. With that, I mean, community gardens kind of fall straight into that, being able to share such an empowering practice, and how you can kind of just grow your own food, and have the freshness, and seeing that seed grow into something is quite beautiful, and it kind of relates to a lot of different aspects of life too, so I guess that's what kind of brought me to this space.

So my role in the garden is to coordinate, and to make sure everything gets planted, everything gets harvested and taken care of, but also to offer a structure and education to people that do come to the garden. We did a couple workshops, and a couple different other activities in the garden as well, like kids cooking classes. For example, a Monday at the garden starts with garden hours from seven o'clock to eleven. I would get up super early, I live a half an hour away, so I would usually get up around 4:30 or 5, so I could practice yoga before I left my house, and get my life together a little bit, and I would leave at 6:30. I would get to the garden, and it's so nice out there at that time, because you know the sun is still rising over those trees, and it's really quiet, so it's kinda that safe little haven back there. And then, you know, I would start my little list of tasks and kind of write down the three main things I wanted to focus on. Of course, people didn't necessarily start showing up until about 8:30 or 9, so I would kinda go around and do



maybe more of the stuff like organizing the shed and stuff that might not be as fun for participants. Then when people got there that's when I would kind of save the harvesting and the planting if we had planting that day, and save those kinds of things that were a little more tactile in the garden, in the sense that I could share and teach them in that way. Or I guess organization is helpful in that way, but I didn't want to have to teach them how to organize the shed. Then, at 11 I would head up to Floyd, so that was fun. Floyd was very quiet, and it's really hot, especially from that like 12 to four time, and right at four the sun starts to go behind the building, and you're like, ah, you have like two feet of shade, and you're like 'yessss.' But yeah, Floyd is nice, just because again, it's quiet and you're kind of tucked in the corner there. On the Monday's when there were clinics in Floyd it was also really cool to be able to kind of walk in and harvest just chat with people about gardening. I always remember bringing in fresh Basil and that's usually a hot topic starter, 'cause everyone's like 'can I please have some fresh basil!' cause it's just so aromatic, and it smells delicious. That was really a good Monday for me. So kind of a long day in two different gardens, but definitely good stuff.

I guess to talk about intentions surrounding this work, and I guess just what I try to live every day is just what I can do to support the community around me, and how I can contribute. So again, gardening has always been something that I liked to participate in, and I think it is really empowering and grounding to dig into the dirt, and just kind of be outside and watch something grow, so I've always wanted to share that. But then another thing that motivates me, is again, going back to that empowerment factor--that people can learn this skill and then have it with them for the rest of their lives. So, I guess that's what motivates me.

The garden to me is a space for curiosity and exploration. I really love it when kids come out there and, you know, maybe their parents are kind of dragging them out there, to say the

least, and at first they might be a little bit resistant, but once they can play around, and look at things, and taste things, and smell the different smells, and look at all the different colors that live in the garden, it just kind of brings...it's just a space...and you know I've seen adults that way too, that they step into the garden, and maybe their grandparents taught them how to garden, so it's just a space for connection, whether that's really in the present moment, or that's connection to past times that were with loved ones that might not be around now, but it's just like connection through the present and the past, and I think future too, in a way. That's kind of what it means to me.

The way that I feel in the garden depends on the day. Some days, you know, when you have a big list, and it's like alright, we gotta build this, we gotta move this, and scoop the compost around, and we're gonna mulch today, some of those days, I mean I really do like to work, and I thrive off of physical activity, but when it's like 95 degrees, sometimes it's like 'oooohh, wow, this is gonna be challenging'. But again, I'm very much a morning person, so that 7am time before the 95 degree day hits is something that I feel is a really special time, and I love being able to be in the quiet space of the garden, and see the shift from the morning to the afternoon like, the inactivity and the rest before the heat and that time of the day.

The values that drive me to do this work is, like I kind of touched on already, the connection, and that's kind of always a value for me that shows up. I do a lot of work with the needs and values assessments--I don't know if you're familiar with non-violent communication, but connection is one that always stays in my top five values, and I guess, that can mean a lot of different things. It can mean a connection to yourself, and getting to better understand yourself and the environment that you're in. It could mean a connection to maybe a higher power, and just being able to see, like 'wow, this is life right in front of me growing'. Maybe it's a

connection to other people that you are able to meet. But, I guess in simpler terms, a value is just nourishment. We take care of our space, and we take care of the garden, and we nourish it, and then it nourishes us, so it's like this constant cycle. I guess also collaboration, which is a little bit different from connection, because it's more active, but the collaboration piece is really cool because you're a gardener so there's never a time when you're not thinking on how to improve, or how to shift, or how we can kind of grow or better the garden. I just don't think that that's the nature of it. Like I don't think I'll ever reflect in December and January and think 'oh yeah, there's nothing that needs to change.' You know? You'll never be like that. So the collaboration and growth is just another really wonderful value that we can share with everyone involved.

An instance where I realized the garden was impactful was during one of the cooking classes where the garden intern, she is just wonderful with kids, she was doing a cooking class. We had about, I wanna say there was about eight kids there that day. There were all different ages, you know, anywhere from two to about thirteen, so there was a lot of different energies, a lot of different attention span lengths, which is hard when you're working with that kind of different shifts in ages there. But I just remember I was kind of the management of all those little personalities running around, and trying to escape out of the garden, and the garden intern is just leading this wonderful salsa cooking lesson, and I remember, like it's really nice to always have your toolbox of different activities and different tools and books maybe that you can read, or music, because we all learn in different ways, and I remember I pulled out a couple yoga mats, and I put on my favorite kid yoga artist, Kiera Wiley, and there's this little two year old girl that has four older sisters and brothers, and her mom was there too. And this little two year old runs that family, I swear, she is the boss of everyone, and she does what she wants--there's no telling her what to do. And she's two, again, let me repeat that, she's two years old. And, so I remember

putting these yoga mats out, and she was really curious about it, so she came over and I put Kiera Wiley on and I saw her take a deep breath, and she instantly relaxed and sat on the mat, and was kind of humming along, and it was just this little wild creature was finally tamed and sitting on a yoga mat. There was a cooking demo going on just fine, no one's trying to escape anymore, and it was just a really nice moment to share, and a couple other kids came over and also practiced, I think it was the sun salutations song and was nice to do some sun salutations with them. But yeah, all of this, it kind of relates back to the garden and how we can kind of use our toolbox to adjust to the changes, and adapt to the changes that come with life. I think kids provide such a wonderful space for practice when it comes to that kind of stuff.

I've learned a lot working with the Farmacy Garden. I guess specifically, the structure of this garden, and how special it is. You know, when people think of community gardens they think of having their own plot, and having to pay, or maybe they can apply and just apply for a plot, and maybe the garden has funding, but just in conversation with other people when I'm talking about what I do, they're like 'oh that's an interesting model, I've never heard of that', so I guess one thing this garden has really taught me is the importance of this model, like it almost stirs up questions on why there aren't more gardens like this. And yeah, I've also learned that even though you have a space, and you have something that you might think is really wonderful and really cool, it still takes a lot of energy, and it still takes a lot of, kind of that marketing piece to get the word out there and to let people know, 'hey, this is here', so that's another thing that I've learned and have been working on in the off-season. How we can kind of bring more people to the garden, or bring the garden to the people if it's not accessible for them to come out to the garden.

So I guess the Pharmacy Garden model, it's nice in the way that there's no huge commitment to it. You can choose to come when it works for you, and there isn't the stress of 'oh, I have to go water, I have to do this', or 'financially I'm tied to this', or whatever. It's a space where you can come and you can learn and participate when it works for you, because a lot of people that do come to the garden kind of have hectic schedules. Yeah, so it takes the pressure off and allows people to learn and grow in a space, where maybe they wouldn't be able to participate otherwise. Whereas like other community garden models, you're responsible for watering your plot every day. You're responsible typically for supplies, unless you have a grant or donations given, and typically you do have to pay for the plot too, so that's kind of different. So as far as community, I know other gardens do have workshops for their gardeners, and they might have mentorship programs and stuff, but I've actually never participated, but I have a couple friends that have kind of mentioned to me that it's kind of challenging because they were expecting more of a community and they don't necessarily get to see those people, because everyone's coming to the garden at different times. So I think the idea of having the structured garden hours, it creates that space where people can come at the same time, and meet up and see each other.

I wasn't ever thinking that this job was gonna be by any means easy, but it's been a lot, I guess it's been pretty challenging for me. It's been challenging definitely in the fact of thinking about participation and getting people out there, and trying to work with other community partners. You know, everyone that's doing this isn't doing this kind of work to make money, so we're all, everyone's a little bit thin on their time and everything, so sometimes it can be challenging to bring people together in this kind of work, because we're all doing so many different things, so that's been a challenge. It's sometimes challenging to stay motivated, like

when the participation is not there, and just knowing that this is a good thing, and everything comes in waves, so sometimes there's things that are going on in people's lives and they just can't get out to the garden. Like unfortunately, one of my most regular participants, I guess she was there pretty much every day, and then her van broke down for like three weeks so she couldn't come, and she was really bummed about it. But, yeah, it's just things like that that happen in life, so just knowing that, and that's okay, and sometimes our participation is gonna drop off and that's okay.

Participating in the Farmacy Garden has kind of allowed me to better get to know the health department and social services through working with both of these departments. So that has been interesting, and it's been a really good experience to understand the workings of both of these organizations. On a larger scale, I knew about these organizations before, but being able to really work in them and see has been helpful. But also, working with Community Health Center too, and being over there has been a really great experience too, working with them as well.

I wouldn't say that working in this position has shaped my values, because I think my values, they'll kind of change on a quarterly basis with the seasons, but I think essentially, the Farmacy Garden has really enhanced and strengthened those values even more. So like the idea of connection and collaboration--just being able to work out in the garden has kind of made me realize that was almost a part where I was lacking before, where I thought that I was pretty connected and participated in things, but being able to actually...I taught yoga and I would do a lot of things like that, but not necessarily in the gardening sense, so I think it's cool to be able to be out there and really feel that connection. And now it's the off-season, well, I used to walk dogs before, but now I'm reaching out to one of the shelters that I know, and I teach a couple of yoga for cancer classes, and I teach a few other community classes, and it's like how else can I

contribute. So I guess it's really like helped to reframe the way that I look at contribution and community and how I can continue to contribute when it's not necessarily the season of the garden.

I've always tried to grow as much of my own stuff as I can with the space that I have, and it's kind of funny, this year when I've had the biggest garden that I've ever had in my life is when I have two other gardens to take care of too, so it's kind of funny how that worked. But yeah, I think that parallel of me having the biggest garden I've ever had, and having these gardens has just really, again, enforced that--like how important it is to grow your own food, and everything that comes along with that. And once you eat out of a garden for a whole summer, and then it turns to winter and you go to the grocery store and you look at the produce that might be in there, especially if it's just a normal grocery store, it's like alright, I don't think I can eat tomatoes until next Spring. I haven't bought tomatoes since they stopped being harvested. So there's little things like that within the food system. I think you also start to question, like with that taste, it's like 'why doesn't this taste as good?' and 'what's going on?' and 'how far did this travel?' Whereas I didn't have that experience necessarily because I was in college and I had really small spaces to work with, I guess that this year being in the garden, having my own personal garden, has really, there's a lot of questions about food, and where it comes from. Like I've always had those questions, but when you taste it every day, I feel like it's more of a sensory experience of like 'wow, what's actually goin' on here?' I guess, yeah, it provides a sensory experience too, like that taste. I think that the idea of community gardens, it's really important, and I think that we should have it, that living classroom that we can experience. I'm trying to think of all the community gardens in our area, and I think that Blacksburg has about two or three, and we have one here, there's about five in Roanoke with the Roanoke Community

Garden Association, there's two in Pulaski, so I'm just kind of thinking, if you to think about all of the people that are around there, it's a way to start, and I think it does contribute to the food system in that it makes people think about again, with that taste thing, once you eat those fresh tomatoes you can't really go back to the grocery store without thinking about that, so I think that's a good place to start in that it helps people build, maybe the confidence to grow their own food. But then I think there's a lot of work that needs to be done too, and we could grow, and there could be gardens everywhere, like in all the grass, there could be gardens there.

I think the Farmacy Garden has changed my perspective of the community. It's different for me because I don't actually live in Christiansburg, I live in Salem, and the few community gardens that are up there are very small and they might be tied to a church or something, so they're kind of I don't want to say closed off, but it's kind of exclusive to that church or that space, or to a school, or whatever, whereas this garden specifically seems to be really open and really welcoming. I think that really anyone can participate in the garden, and that's kind of what makes it unique. So as far as this community, I didn't have a strong sense of this community before I started working here. I lived in Blacksburg for a couple of summers, but Blacksburg is very different from this kind of area, and where I lived was more in town, but it was it's own little neighborhood back there, but they actually did have a community garden back there, which was cool. So I would say that I have a better sense of this area now. It's kind of nice too, being able to go around to the different Health Departments and stuff, and being able to meet the different people that work there, and trying to meet clients, and everything, and I think that's also helpful to get a better idea of the New River and how to serve and everything.

The Farmacy Garden has changed my perception of the natural world in two words: squash bugs. That has really changed my perspective. You know, in the gardens that I've had



before, I guess because maybe I've just kind of bounced around in college from house to house, and they were really small, I had never really experienced the pests as much I have here, whereas this garden has been here for what? About six seasons now, maybe seven? So I think of when you do have a garden space that's kind of permanent, there's a lot more that goes into the pest management, so that was one thing for sure. And then this year there was a good amount of rain in the early Spring, but we did have a drought this year, so that was another factor of the natural world that you have no control over. And I think at that point we can do as much as we want in the garden as humans, but there's a point where nature is like 'you know what, this is what's gonna happen' and you just have to roll with it--there's really no point in getting upset, or being like 'I'm a failure!', which happens, especially with beginner gardeners. Maybe they're not tuned into that fact that there's only so much that we can really control as gardeners, so just being able to kind of surrender to nature, and be like alright, we're on this ride. I feel like I was a lot more aware of the natural cycles, and like I said, I'm a morning person, so I rise usually pretty early, so I'd notice that, but just noticing the different shifts and angles of the sun was really interesting. I guess I'd never had work where I'm outside every day, all day in similar spaces, and just noticing how from April or May when I was out there to September and October, just the different angle the sun was at, and I guess the shorter days too. It was really fascinating to watch that. 'Cause the shade in Floyd, and then it gets cold, and you're like 'oh, god, now I got six feet of shade and I wanna be in the sun now, dang.' It's funny how that works.

With the drought this summer I just kind of thought, well this is more of a drought year 'cause I know last summer I feel like we had a lot more rain, and especially the Fall last year we had a lot more rain than we did this year, so I was like 'oh, well maybe it's just one of those off years'. But yeah, it's kinda interesting cause I feel like maybe here in our location we might not

necessarily feel the effects of climate change as harshly as other places, like in the desert climate, or like not desert but places where they're close to the desert like Northern Mexico where they've had these drought cycles for the past five to ten years maybe? Where their crops are really suffering and a lot of farmers can't farm anymore because they don't have the resources and they don't have the rain to do it. So, it's kind of interesting, I feel like we're almost like protected from that here, like it doesn't feel as strong.

I kinda touched on this earlier, but I think it has kinda changed the way that I try to contribute to my community, so like offering the community free yoga classes is kind of a big part of that, and also just working in the garden in terms of coming from more of the health department angle, so like a place that offers health care. So, I'm currently in an integrative medicine program with yoga therapy, and I think a lot about the health department and the things that we offer, and the Community Health Center, and it's like, how can we offer more of the integrative side, because I think there's health disparities, and even more so with those kind of things that are expensive to go to, like a massage therapist, or a yoga therapist, or to even go to yoga classes, or a nutritionist, or anything like that. I feel like this position has really helped me to think about how can we provide these more integrative services like gardening and yoga, and how can we provide that to people, so I guess that's kind of shifted how I kinda live my everyday life, and how I think about it, and how I can offer my services to people in that way.

I also feel like I have kind of gained a better sense of the needs of the community, and I think a lot of it, what I hear is that connection piece. For a couple of the clients that, one of them in particular, she's a stay-at-home-mom, she has five kids, so I think for her to be able to come out to the garden and talk to someone is really nice. You know, we've stayed in contact over the holidays and we're gonna go grab some lunch next week, and I think it's nice, again, to touch on

that connection point. And then, you know, our older participants that are retired, and again, it's a space that they can come out and kind of connect again. I think that need for connection is kind of all over the garden, and all over the participants, and everyone. But, I think another need, again, is for support. And not just in the way to connect and talk and support that way, but support through being able to take home the fresh produce, and being able to be out there and learn different things and empower yourself through learning how to garden.

What gives me hope about the Farmacy Garden is all the kids that come out. That's so hopeful to see. I think we're at a weird crossroads where like a kid is literally born with a phone in their hand now, so I just wonder how that's gonna affect people, you know? Like I already see it now-- like if you walk in public there's like six year olds that are just staring at their phone, you know? And not to mention the musculo-skeletal problems that are gonna occur from that curve in the cervical spine, because there is that lordosis where the spine is supposed to curve the other direction, so we're putting compression on the neck, there's also a lot of psychological and emotional things that go on there. We're humans, we're made to have this physical kind of connection, talking, looking into your eyes, and so I think that the garden provides a space for the kids to play and to dig in the dirt, and it's really awesome to see them put down those things when they come in there, and they don't even think about them for the hour or two that they're in the garden. So that's what gives me hope, is that being able to play and have fun and learn in the garden is exciting for kids, and if they can take home seeds and watch them grow, then maybe they'll learn something from that, you know, something that's a little deeper than playing candy crush or whatever kids play these days, I don't know what they play, but you know what I mean? And I think being able to be in the community garden is one thing, but I think the idea of having that space in other places too. Like going to school and there's a garden, so it's not just like, 'oh,

we go to this garden once a week', it's like 'oh, now my school has a garden', and then it's like 'oh, now I have plants at my house' or like 'I have a pot with my basil plant in it', you know? So I feel like to make more of that greater social impact that it's not just the one visit at the garden, it's being able to see it kind of over and over again. And I think a lot of schools do have gardens now, so I've heard, a couple. I know high schoolers will actually get more involved and have gardens. I've heard that around here, but, yeah, even like the elementary schools, I think it's important that they see that, because it's such an important time of their lives where it's kind of building how they perceive the world, and what's normal to them.

My ideal community is one where I know all my neighbors, and I feel comfortable talking to them. I feel like even growing up I knew some of my neighbors, but it wasn't ever that connected and that intertwined, and I think that maybe that's something that we've gotten away from. We're very individualized, so I'd like to live in a place where I feel supported and I can support my neighbors. I think, just very generally, the idea of the community garden is a space to bring people together, so that could be something that could connect everyone around you, like wherever you're living. But another thing, my personal garden, I got way too excited with tomatoes this year and planted eight or ten plants, all different kinds, so that was a very simple way to kind of go, even though I don't know my neighbors very well, but going to offer them to people, so that was one thing.

In five to ten years I'd like to see the Farmacy Garden everywhere. I'd really like to see more local community involvement. I feel like there are a couple folks that would come to the garden and enjoy it that lived in the very surrounding community, but I would like to see more people feeling comfortable to come in. Like sometimes I get a question from outside the fence, like 'Hey, can I come in here?' and I'm like, 'yeah, come on in! Please, check it out, look

around.’ But I’d like to see it to be more of a space for that community where people can come together and feel like they can be there. But I’d also like to see it used for more educational purposes, so like all the surrounding businesses and whatever it may be, social services or the health department. How can we integrate what we’re teaching, or what everyone is doing here-- how can we integrate a little bit more into the garden with that. So it’s not just like one person that’s running it, but it feels like more of that community where everyone’s kinda supporting it in a way. That’s what I’d like to see.

And it already is to some extent. The Farmacy Garden is not just me and it’s not just the Health Department, like there’s a lot of community partners that work to support the garden, one of which is the Town. So I’ve got those guys, they’re so cool, all the mowers and stuff. I just wanna offer gratitude to them, because they have always been so helpful for us. Especially, they brought a bunch of leaves over to us for mulching and everything, and I think he had to really work with his boss on that to convince him at the time to come over and drop the leaves, so that was really amazing. And when I did get to meet his boss, and meet the whole crew it was kind of like, okay cool, we’ll do this, and it was a nice connection to meet those guys, and I kind of miss them now that I’m thinking about it. I haven’t seen them in a couple months, so I’ll have to try to catch up with them again. But also the fire department comes and fills the water. Gratitude--you can’t grow a garden without water, like it’s crazy for them taking time out of their day to do that. And then for the support from the gardener up here at the Montgomery Museum, she’s so amazing, she’s like a book of knowledge in her words. She just speaks all this wisdom and knowledge in her words, and support, but she keeps it real at the same time, so I can really appreciate her knowledge and especially when I ask her something and she’s like ‘oh, I don’t really know anything’, and then she tells me like five different ways to do the thing. I’m like

'you literally know everything.' So, I really appreciate her. And then working with the intern this summer, she was just amazing, and so willing to work, and offering great ideas, and helping with the cooking classes, and support through Virginia Tech. And the Cooperative Extension as well. Kelli offered some support and some really helpful resources about those squash bugs, and then Wendy Silverman, she's with the Master Gardeners, she has helped a lot with offering ideas for workshops, and offering some of her gardeners for potential workshops, and kind of cueing me in on who does what and how we can build workshops from that, and she's actually helped with a couple workshops herself in her crazy busy schedule, so I appreciate all the support from everyone as well.

## **Appendix S: Maureen's Story**

My name is Maureen and I grew up in Arlington, Virginia. Growing up I was pretty much totally disconnected from my food system in the sense that I didn't have any sort of agricultural background, didn't ever garden, grew up in the suburbs, grew up kind of as a city kid playing sports and running around outside, obviously there was a trees around and little tiny patches of woods, but mostly I was in the city. As I went through college at Virginia Tech in Undergrad my major was Humanities, Science and the Environment and through that process I got really interested in environmental sustainability from the human dimension, so where humans and the environment intersect, and understanding the way that we impact the natural world, and how there's that reciprocal relationship. I really cultivated a way of thinking from a systems approach in my undergraduate degree, and graduated and had no clue whatsoever what I was gonna do with that, or if what I had learned in school was gonna somehow translate into my work environment. I spent a year abroad actually, my last year studying abroad, but after I graduated, came back to Blacksburg and got a job working at a natural food store, and low and behold, began to get connected to my food system working there. Getting to know the local farmers, getting to know the local community, better understanding the local food system within Blacksburg. So, while I was working there I got to know one of the local farmers in the area who came in once a week to buy stuff in preparation for the Farmers Market, and ended up chatting with him, and then ultimately working for him on his farm, despite not having any farming experience whatsoever. My roommate and I at the time had our own little garden, but had no idea what we were doing. We joke now about how we would plant carrot seeds 6 inches deep in the ground thinking they needed to be deep because they're carrots. So I got a little bit of background farming with Chinkapin Hill Forest Farms. The farmer I worked for was basically

my first introduction into agriculture. We grew a bunch of garlic, a bunch of tomatoes, a bunch of cucumbers. I started working at the farmers market, helping him every Saturday selling, and ended up working with him for two seasons just very part-time, 5-10 hours a week out there, and kinda got an introduction into again, more of that local food system--really meeting a lot of producers in the area, really understanding the way this alternative food system operates, specifically in Montgomery County.

At a certain point, again, it seemed like all my jobs were ending, and I was really looking for work, and I happened to be at the Farmers Market one day and ran into the AmeriCorps VISTA at the time, and she said 'yeah, we're looking for someone to be the next VISTA', and I thought 'Really? This is perfect!' So I applied for the position, and got hired on as the AmeriCorps VISTA, and worked again at the Farmers Market, but for more of the non-profit side of things. That was an experience where I started to understand not only the local food system from a producer standpoint, but more from an equity lens, because my role within the Farmers Market was really to expand local food access through the SNAP Double Value Program, and then also do kids programming, so more of an educational lens around food systems and food production with kids. So VISTAships generally only last a year, you can sign on for another year, but I didn't, so again I was in the position of looking for a job. I knew the previous Farmacy Garden coordinator at the time, so fortuitously, right around the time that my job at the Farmers Market was ending, the Farmacy Garden was hiring, so I went to check out the garden and talk to the garden coordinator about the position, and ended up applying, and ended up getting hired. I think it was 2014, and started my role as the Farmacy Garden Coordinator. Fortunately, we had some overlap, me and the garden coordinator, before she fully transitioned out, and I transitioned in, so she gave me a lot of tips, and I had the whole Winter to



kinda think through the position, and learn a lot, and while I had, again, done some food production, community gardening was a whole different beast. From a production standpoint, I really had a lot to learn. Part of the position of the Farmacy Garden coordinator is mapping out the plan for the season, and growing all the seedlings, and getting all the plants and seeds, so really doing all that sort of garden planning process, and I had never done that before, so I was reading books on gardening, and kind of diving into the horticulture side of things. And, I remember leading up to the opening of the season, calling all of the participants, and realizing like ‘oh shit, there’s this whole other human dimension to this position as well’, where you can’t have a community garden without a community. And, so began kind of forging some of those existing relationships from the year prior, and thinking through like, how do we get people to know about this little spot, you know, tucked away at the end of the health department parking lot, that is this little hidden gem that easily gets glazed over because of its location. So, yeah, ended up working there for four years, four seasons, and each year the position really evolved for me. Being in a program and being kind of the main person overseeing it, and running it, and developing skills in certain realms to open up space for the program to grow in other dimensions, I really saw that happening in that four year span, where I could focus less in certain areas so I could put in more effort in other areas.

The Farmacy Garden is a partnership with Cooperative Extension, the Family Nutrition Program, and the Health Department, so in my role I was representing the Health Department in that partnership. From an agency perspective, I was working collaboratively with Kelli Scott, and Meredith Ledlie-Johnson, and Sarah Misyak in the beginning to really explore what was possible out of that space. How could we take our intersecting organizational goals, and create a community space that could meet community desires and needs simultaneously. So it was kind

of balancing this interesting dynamic of kind of top-down and bottom-up. I always felt that-- being between two worlds in the program I was developing and evaluating and my interactions with the broader community at large. Initially the space was really intended for low-income participants. It was envisioned as an extension of the WIC program, and it was partly funded through the WIC program, so there was really a focus on reaching out through different poverty alleviation programs, partnering with WIC staff, and going into WIC clinics, and talking to WIC moms and talking to them about this opportunity to extend the benefits, fresh fruits and vegetable benefits. Honestly, there's so many different working pieces, so I could talk about it for a long, long time, but initially stepping into this role it was, okay so I need learn how to grow plants, keep plants alive, and begin to establish connections in the community so we have a sense of community in this space. Within that, my role was really production, garden planning, reaching out to participants, and holding garden hours where participants could come out and work. From that baseline, and then through these collaborations through Extension and with WIC, and with other poverty alleviation programs in the area, and the Community Health Center and the prescription program, a lot of different programming emerged to extend the possibilities in that space, and so some of the things that that looked like was the Market Kids program. Market Kids was an extension of my position with the Farmers Market. After my first season at the Farmacy Garden, the Farmers Market didn't have a VISTA to coordinate the Market Kids program, so it was kind of a sustainability piece to bring the program over to the Farmacy Garden and use the Farmacy Garden space to do education around nutrition, horticulture and entrepreneurship, so that was a piece of it. There was also WIC nutrition education in the garden where we partnered with the WIC program, and had an FNP program assistant, along with different student interns coming down to the garden. The students were mostly from HNFE. Every year the Family

Nutrition Program provided an HNFE student intern throughout the summer and then we also had MPH practicum students come out and help. So it was either the program assistant from the Family Nutrition Program, or the HNFE intern, or the MPH intern. Generally the MPH intern also had a nutrition background too, so they would lead WIC nutrition education in the garden, so using the site and the resources and do like a cooking demonstration, and do garden tours and tastings and that sort of thing. My role within that was to forge the partnerships, and help them access resources. And yeah, and we did pilot projects, and grants, and building projects, and there was the edible landscape. It was really like we had an idea, try it out, see how it goes, evaluate, assess, and then determine what my capacity was, because I was also running the Floyd Garden.

The vast majority of my role was at the Farmacy Garden because there was a lot more momentum around that space, but the garden programming started with the Floyd garden. The Floyd garden was always a struggle because of it's rurality, and there was only a WIC clinic every other week in that space. It was really a WIC garden, but people would only come for clinic every other week. I tried to get creative, but both the former garden coordinator and I never had a whole lot of luck. We had a couple of participants come out regularly, but it was always this struggle garden. It was also always the garden that the groundhogs got it, or you know, who knows what. We had all sorts of issues growing stuff, not only issues with participation. But the garden is still going, and we would bring extra produce to Plenty, so at the very least, it's a production space that's getting more fresh fruits and vegetables into peoples' hands.

From a personal standpoint, I feel really drawn to the idea of creating a space where people can come connect to their food system, and just having that personal experience within

my own life in terms of growing my own food, and the whole creative process of everything that you can do with that. I was really drawn to being able to create a space where that can be shared with others. There's a sense of empowerment in growing your own food, and being a key player in creating your own food system. So being able to share that with others is a big motivating factor. I feel like that space too, is a space of holism, and I feel like that is a way that my mind and thinking has always operated. So in terms of having a position the dynamism of working in a role where I get to work with people, I get to work with plants, I get to do kind of strategic, programmatic planning, I get to forge partnerships and collaborations in the community, and develop programs from the ground up, there's just so many working pieces and working parts, and food is this kind of anchoring staple that connects all of these dimensions. It was very exciting to me, and it's challenging, but rewarding. Balancing all of the dimensions was challenging, because I always felt like I was being pulled in lots of different directions. So feeling like there's always something that could be given more attention or improved. But, also just the human dimension, and being able to work with people, and having that one-to-one connection, and seeing that one-to-one connection happen between other people, and seeing how a single space brings people together and creates a collaborative effort where we can work together and see past our differences, and work toward a common goal.

I think in the earlier years, environmental stewardship would've been kind of a primary value that drives me in this work, like forging that connection where we can begin to see our relationship with the earth more clearly through the action of growing food, and tend to it in a way that's healthy and that recognizes the diversity of plant life, diversity of animal life, and then that really situates us on this Earth in relation to the broader picture. As I worked in that position, and especially through graduate school there definitely became more of an equity lens, again that

human dimension where seeing community need a lot more clearly, especially being in this epicenter of different social services and kind of stepping outside of the Blacksburg bubble to see a different part of the community and how there are these geographical and socioeconomic disparities here in Montgomery County and the broader New River Valley. I did work throughout different parts of the New River Valley, so seeing how things change as you move through space.

Thinking about this a story that clearly reflects the impact of the garden, I keep coming back to this instance with this one participant who came to the garden, I remember the first day he showed up at the garden. He was from India, and he showed up with his wife. He was a patient at the Community Health Center, and saw the garden through the parking lot, came over and was just blown away. I could see it in his eyes, the excitement that a space like this existed, and he said ‘I will absolutely be back’, and sure enough, a couple weeks later, I saw him again, and then became more and more a regular presence at the garden, and really started to take ownership over the space in a way that I hadn’t seen other gardeners do, which I really appreciated. He started planting his own Indian bean varieties and Indian squash varieties, bringing different tomatoes, and chili peppers, and every week he would show up with new plants that just came out of nowhere seemingly. New plants, new seeds, and asked for space to grow these plants. We had space to share, and he also started planting in the mulch, which over the years had broken down underneath the top layers, so we would just supplement with some compost, and he would plant along the border of the garden different Indian squash, which he always said would grow ‘like an anaconda’ and they did, they would vine up into the trees, and basically take over the trees, it was really amazing. I’d never seen squash like that, and the squash themselves would grow the size of a baseball bat or bigger. So not only would he grow

vegetables, but he would take produce home, and then come back the next week with a traditional Indian dish made from that produce. So every week, whoever was at the garden got to enjoy his wife's cooking, which was amazing, and at the end of the first season he invited a bunch of us to the motel he co-owns in Christiansburg. So it was me and the interns. It was mostly the garden staff cause he would always come basically at the end of garden hours because he worked the night shift, so he'd wake up kind of late morning. We closed at 12, so he'd often show up around 12:15 so we'd be the last ones there. So, yeah, it was me and two of the summer interns that he really got to know over the course of the season that he invited over. Just invited to come have dinner, but I'm sure he was excited to show off his garden as well.

So, there was a season where we got a lot of grant funding and we had tons and tons and tons of compost, we used some of the grant funding to buy compost to supplement the beds and to grow different plants in pots and that sort of thing, and we were able to actually give him some of those resources so he could take it home and use in his own garden, and so at the end of the season we went out to his place for dinner, and he greeted us, and immediately took us on an epic garden tour. In the long landscaping strip median between the parking lot and hotel, there was a strip of landscaped area with kind of your traditional shrubs and stuff, and he had planted sunflowers, and marigolds, and indian squash, and indian beans, and tomatoes, and okra, he had planted the whole thing. Like probably 300 feet in that long strip, and had hand watered the whole thing. And I remember he looked at me and was just beaming with pride, and said to me 'the Farmacy Garden inspired me to grow food for my community', and I was just blown away. I mean he would talk about his garden, but actually just going there and seeing it and seeing how the Farmacy Garden space could inspire him to do something like this. Before this garden he said that he had a really small garden when he lived in Lexington, and he also said that his dad

gardened in his village in India. So he would help his dad a little bit, but this is the biggest garden he's had. And I just heard from him and he talked about how he provides food to extended family out in Luray, extended family out in Harrisonburg, throughout the summer he'll go and visit and bring them some. I'm not sure how frequently he goes to visit, or how that works, but he also shares with his guests at the hotel. He'll share prepared foods, and a lot of that sharing is centered around a health focus, like he was talking about the bitter gourds and how they have anti-diabetic properties, so he'll talk to his guests about that, and his wife is an amazing cook, and she cooks up all the food, and so he talked about how he would share the prepared bitter gourds with the guests, and then send them off with some of the bitter gourds that he had grown, and he said that's a way for him to forge relationships with the people that are coming and staying at his motel. His wife has also come to the garden a few times. She's mostly the cook behind the scenes, and she came to the garden once during a potluck to do a cooking demonstration to share the indian cuisine with the other gardeners, and give them a demonstration on how it was prepared. She had prepared a lot of it ahead of time, and just kinda put it all together and everyone got a chance to try her cooking and a different way of preparing things. So he's still growing and is excited for the season, and he continues to be involved over the course of three seasons, continues to send me messages over the holidays, and just really maintains that relationship. So that was one instance, although there's many I could speak about.

We've had many potlucks in the garden over the years, at the height I think we would have a monthly potluck, and then maybe it went to three times a season, and then maybe two times a season, just depending on the capacity. But yeah, it was a way, to really bring everybody together at once, and kind of anchor the Farmacy Garden community in one space at one time

because during the garden hours, people would come at different times and stay for different amounts of time.

I guess broadly speaking, hearing that and seeing that from him made me see the Farmacy Garden more as an educational space, where people can engage in a space and then be inspired to bring that out into their lives in some way. I hadn't really thought about the garden in that way prior to seeing PK's garden and hearing the way that the Farmacy Garden had impacted him in that capacity, so it got me thinking differently about the role of the Farmacy Garden. Before, I guess it was more of a place for people to garden and access fresh fruits and vegetables, and come together as a community, I mean I definitely saw the educational role of it, but maybe not in the way that it could have impacts that carry beyond the space. Through this experience I saw that has an impact because I feel like in that position there's so much going on, and so much to keep track of, so it's really easy to lose sight of what you're doing, and what it means, and the impact that it's having, so it's moments like those, and there's many more, where it kind of stopped me in my tracks, and gave me a moment to realize that the work that I'm doing is having an impact, it's inspiring something new in somebody. It's easy to just focus on what's wrong, especially coordinating a garden, because there's always something that could be done better because there's so many working parts, something gets lost by the wayside.

So as I said there's many little moments that show the impact of the garden. There was a moment with a little kid in Market Kids. We were out at Den Hill Permaculture picking berries, and all the other kids were just stuffing all the berries in their mouth as they went, and he was saving up his berries to share with his sister and his mom and his grandma, and saying 'I really want them to experience this', and yeah, that little moment. There was a little old man who would come by in his pickup truck every week and pick up produce and he had made his rounds



at the different pantries, and would always bring me food that he had gotten at the pantry, so there was this reciprocity, and would bring produce to homebound folks in his assisted living as well. He was probably 83, 84, 85. We always had a table of produce set up in the lobby and in the clinic, so I would always have interactions with people there as well. I remember there was a woman and her son there who were there at DSS and I brought out a bunch of produce to give away, and she came up to me and thanked me and said how they barely didn't have enough to eat, and this was making a big difference in their lives. You know, moments of that reality of poverty and hunger being right there, you know, especially in this area in Blacksburg it's really easy to not see that. Just being apparent and seeing how, yeah, there were lots of little moments like that.

I think moments like these awoke a sense of connection--where they made me feel more connected to my community in different ways, and more a part of it, and more enlivened in the potential of the Farmacy Garden and how it can be a space for the community. There's also this sense of the impact translating out. It's like that connection between structure and agency, it's where that agency piece comes in. Especially seeing its relation beyond the individual and the way that they're tapping into their own community and engaging differently with it. So seeing the power behind that, an individuals' role and yeah personally it's like, I just felt such a, I mean really it just awakens my heart, you know? I think there's a shared humanity that happens, and a space of connection, and a space of working toward something together, common humanity, person to person.

I've learned a lot working in the Farmacy Garden about balancing tensions from a programmatic standpoint. Like I said earlier, there was kind of the institutional lens and then the community lens, and then me as this kind of intermediary between both, and I feel like I saw

those tensions play out a lot. I could talk on and on about these moments of magic where these incredible things happened, but then there were tons of moments where I felt like the space never really had strong community ownership, and I really wanted that, but there was something, and I don't know if it was my own...like there were few people that could step into that space and do whatever they wanted with it. And I don't know if that's the nature of a collaborative garden, where nobody wants to be so overbearing and taking control of the space because they want to honor the collaborative nature of it, but then there's also something where I always wanted it to be more of a community project. And so, still kind of grappling through those different tensions. And I wanted the garden to be more of a community project cause that's where the magic happens. That's the purpose of it, to truly be a space that's owned and operated and managed by whoever wants to be involved, and it always felt like more a sales pitch, not always, obviously there's lots of instances where it didn't, but I often felt that I had to convince people to take their ideas and give them permission to run with them. And I'm still kind of struggling with why that was the case. Maybe because of the way that it was set up in having hired staff. But also I think that's a strength of the garden, so again, the tension. Thinking about like individual plots, people do have that ownership, and so then they're the ones deciding what and when and where and whatever. It was a garden that gave flexibility, and that's also a strength of it, when you can come, how you wanna engage, you can just pop by for thirty minutes, you can only come once and that's totally fine, maybe the freedom to be as committed as you want in a lot of instances didn't get it to that next level, but also the community was never part of the leadership so that's definitely a consideration, but I always struggled with that because I don't want to place a burden on them to manage this space if they're not being compensated for it, and so there was always this kind of tension around that.

The garden has changed the way I think about public space. I think it changed my perspective around having a common, collaborative space on public land, and the potential of that. It's like a kind of creative example of harnessing public resources for the community to come together and create something. The commons. So it really changed my perspective on that, and the potential of that even though there's challenges to that too. It takes a lot of work and effort and energy to maintain a space, a physical space, but I think it should, and I think it's worth it, despite all the effort and energy put forth.

The Farmacy Garden changed my perspective of my food system. I now don't think community gardens are the answer to food access issues. I don't know if I thought that before, I might've been more inclined to say, you know, like yeah, but I see their role and their importance. Particularly their role as educative spaces, spaces of connection, spaces to share and give, mental, physical health spaces. I mean obviously it increases fresh fruits and vegetables, but I think the more primary functions they serve is for community connection, connection to the natural world, really engaging in that process of being part of the food system and appreciating where food comes from, just enjoying time and space and activity with those around you, and I think a lot comes from that.

I talked about stepping outside of Blacksburg a bit, and it definitely changed my perception of my community in that way, and enabled me to forge relationships with people that are very different from me, and I thought that was a very beautiful thing. To this day I have maintained a lot of connections with people that are of a different age than me. Just this past weekend I went out to lunch with two of the gardeners, one of them's 72, one of them's 52, and so there's this kind of intergenerational component, a little bit of an international component. So seeing the diversity of people and being able to connect with people that I wouldn't normally

have an opportunity to know, that have really diverse and beautiful life experiences and wisdom to share. On a very personal level it changed my perception of my community by giving me an opportunity to know people that are different from me, but also the same in a lot of ways.

The Farmacy Garden changed the way I live my life as far as coming back to graduate school. It's been a really beautiful opportunity to take my lived experiences with the garden, and kind of filter them through this broader lens of literature surrounding community gardens, and community food security, and alternative food movements, and the different creative avenues that people are developing as we speak for challenging the industrial food system. So it really gave a broader lens for this very tangible, grounded work that I was doing as part of this larger movement, and seeing how it fits into the bigger picture. And I think again, it's hard to see that bigger lens when you're so wrapped up in the finer details of this or that day to day, so it was an amazing opportunity to take those experiences and put them through different applied lens' and see how they are part of this bigger picture and bigger solution.

I think it also underlined the level of adaptability these ventures take. That role really required me to go with the flow. I'm already kind of that nature anyway, but recognizing this work is really complex, and there's not a singular, prescribed solution to some of these big problems that we're facing. It also gave me an opportunity to reimagine impact, especially being outside of the garden and giving me an opportunity to really reflect on my experiences and think through what impact means.

What gives me a sense of hope are the people that are part of the garden, how different they are from each other, and how they are all working towards this common goal, through their own unique angles. All being part of this project, and they all have their different reasons for doing it, but it gives me hope that they're all in it, in whatever capacity, and inspired to, really

inspired to give. That was something that's really come up for me doing all these interviews with participants, and seeing that they're not just engaging in the space for the vegetables, I mean even if they get the benefit of the fresh fruits and vegetables, almost everybody uses the space as an opportunity to give back because they care about the community that they live in. And they give back by gardening. By growing food for other people, by sharing their knowledge, their skills, by teaching people, by being part of it. Through the prescription program, for their children.

In five to ten years, I would love to see the Farmacy Garden with a community staff. Leveraging some of the examples I've heard from my interviews, I'd like to see the Farmacy Garden with full time paid coordinator with benefits, recognizing the value of having staff that's compensated well, because it's a hard job, and it requires a lot of skill. And having like a community board of directors made up of participants, whatever that looks like, whether that's paid, ideally compensated in some form. I'd like to keep it as it is, the size it is, and as an educative space, and keep some of the educational programming operating out of it, especially Market Kids. I see the role of kids in the garden, in that space, and having a cohort of kids, I mean it's just magic, it's amazing what happens when you put that together. And, a lot of people have spoken about having more gardens, more Farmacy Gardens, the replication of the model, this and that. Given the amount of energy and resources, just thinking on a very practical level, I don't think we should be building more gardens without more community buy-in from the beginning. I think if there's community buy-in and they want funding and resources, it should kind of go the other way around, as opposed to creating a garden and hoping people come. But, where there is expressed need and interest, and community buy-in, having satellite gardens for like home food production could be a great idea. There's a number of people who have talked

about gardens in section 8 housing, that live in section 8 housing, that want to see that in their community, so I think that's something great that could happen. It doesn't have to be to the scale that the Farmacy Garden is, but a small space, with a few beds, that's something feasible and doable that could have impact would be beneficial. But overall, just more community ownership of the space.

At the end of the day, I'd like to live in a community where people have power and autonomy over their food system. I've been thinking a lot about the commons, and about the decommodification of food and how we could transfer big ag subsidies into more community food production, particularly in some of the other interviews that I've been engaging in. And so, I would really like to live in a community that had federal support for local food production for farmers, and food that was free and available to everybody. Healthy, fresh, delicious food, that's environmentally sound and safe to eat. I'd really like to live in that community. I'd like to live in a community where diversity is celebrated, and that recognizes, and prioritizes the voices and expressed needs within the community. One where people actually have time and energy to participate in a democracy, and a democracy that is actually upheld by, yeah gosh, just a true democracy.

I think the Farmacy Garden is part of the solution. Despite the challenges of being operated from a governmental standpoint, the fact that there's governmental dollars, community dollars, going into a community initiative like this, I think is really a powerful statement, despite the funding challenges of the space. It's funded through Montgomery County. And, so it's an example of subsidizing food production, education, community, really putting financial support behind an initiative like this, so I think in that sense for sure. It's also an embodiment of the commons in a sense, despite the fact that there's still these different ownership structures and

power dynamics. So I think it is part of the world I'd like to live in, it may be a small part, but I think there's a lot of room for it to be a bigger part too moving into the future.