

## Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities

Ann Horan, White Branch Library, 763 Butternut Street, Syracuse, NY 13208

### **This project has impacted my life because:**

It has afforded me the opportunity to better know the people who live in the neighborhoods near the garden. It has brought together people of different abilities and circumstances to work together toward a common goal. It has been heartwarming to see people of all abilities, of all ages, from all over the world, coming together to work the same soil alongside one another. By helping each other and improving our neighborhood, I believe the gardeners are making connections that would not have otherwise been made.

In a food desert, providing people access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs is truly rewarding. I like to think that we are improving the health of neighbors not only by making fresh food available, but by making it fun to exercise and get fresh air while gardening.

### **The most influential policy, system, or environmental change to me was:**

This project has not changed any policies, but one system that has been impacted is the local food system. The systemic impact the garden has made is to break down the barriers – availability, cost, transportation – that prevent our community from eating healthy food. There also has been a paradigm shift about who can garden. We have created an inclusive gardening space because the community garden's raised beds encourage the participation of people with disabilities. By providing adapted tools to garden, everyone (including people with disabilities) can engage with the garden and harvest food from it.

The garden's impact on the environment includes beautifying and "greening up" what had been an abandoned property lot. By adding vegetation, we are cleaning the air and preventing soil erosion. We believe that we are improving the neighborhood by creating a safe, green space where neighbors can gather to socialize, garden, and harvest produce.

### **As a result of this, I/we:**

This project has connected people who, without another reason to get together, may not have organized with one another. I like to think that we are growing a better connected community (in addition to growing plants). I believe that we are providing people, including those with disabilities, the opportunity to learn about/share knowledge of gardening with people in the neighborhood. Gardening affords gardeners exercise and fresh air. It is rewarding to plant and see how plants grow. It is empowering to be able to grow one's own food – vegetables, fruits, and herbs.

### **What was the emotional connection, self-efficacy, or "ah-ha" moment for this project?**

In a neighborhood where there is abundant poverty and crime, I see the garden as an initiative where neighbors work together toward a common goal. To see people with disabilities or mobility issues working together with others (of all ages and nationalities) to improve the appearance of the area and to help feed people in a food desert is inspirational. I envision the gardeners discussing additional improvements that would better the quality of life for those who live nearby.

***Please note that testimonials may be edited for clarity by the NACDD Communications Department.***