



Planting One Seed at a Time and Alleviating Climate Change in the CITY Project

This report highlights a series of climate change activities/projects undertaken and completed by the Community Improvement Through Youth (CITY) Project Teen Leaders, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Broome County, as part of the One Seed at a Time: Alleviating Climate Change through Youth Community Action in the Garden Project. The goal of the project was to pilot a set of youth-determined activities through which youth and adults working in partnership would begin to understand the impact of climate change on the local environment and explore how they could make a difference in their communities through sustainable gardening practices and other environmental efforts. All activities took place in conjunction with normally scheduled CITY Project's afterschool and summer programming, May through September 2008. The project began in the spring with a meeting at CCE Broome County between six of the CITY Project Teen Leaders; Vicki Giarratano, Kelly Mabee, and June P. Mead, CITY Project staff; Ann Supa, 4-H Educator, CCE Broome; Christine Hadekel, Garden-Based Learning Assistant, Department of Horticulture; and two Cornell student interns from the Department of Horticulture, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Department of Fiber Science and Apparel Design (FSAD), College of Human Ecology.

“Green CITY Projects”

Green Jewelry

Working with the Cornell student interns, the CITY Teen Leaders learned how to make beads out of recycled magazines. Throughout the summer, the CITY teens made thousands of beads in preparation for taking their “green jewelry” to the New York State Fair in September. The teens learned how to make necklaces, bracelets and earrings. As Vicki Giarratano, CITY Project Coordinator, CCE Broome, explained, “The jewelry looks like something that would be sold at local fairs and trendy stores, but it’s just recycled paper, string and a little glue. The countless requests we got to buy the jewelry have led us to explore the 4-H entrepreneurship curriculum. The project opened the door for youth to learn new skills and in turn teach others. It was a great success at State Fair.”



Recycled Clothing

Using ideas they learned from the FSAD student intern and working with Ann Supa, 4-H Educator, CCE Broome, the CITY teens learned how to recycled worn or used clothing and create purses, shoulder bags and totes. As Vicki explained, “The CITY Teen Leaders not only learned how to sew, a skill they will have for a lifetime, the project spurred discussions about how much we paid for our own clothes and accessories, and how we could be creative and influence the fashion realm with our taste and style. The bags are to die for and we learned that we have some real talent in design and fashion careers within our group. It was very exciting for the CITY Teen Leaders to learn that fashion and design are part of the Cornell. It was really an eye-opener our young people in terms of their future plans for going to college.”



Taking it to the Streets

The CITY Project’s “Green Project”, as the One Seed at a Time project became known, gained momentum over the summer. The CITY teens showcased their “green” jewelry and sewing projects at Binghamton Farmers’ Market, Broome County Fair, and New York State Fair. The teens taught other teens, children and their parents how they could make jewelry on their own. They took time at each of these events to explain how doing these kinds of projects as a family actually helps the environment and reduces the impact on climate change through recycling.



Working to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle

The CITY Teen Leaders worked at the Annual Book Recycling Fair at CCE-Broome County. Each year, the book fair recycles over 23 tons of books. The teens worked with 150 volunteers in the community to receive, sort, and categorize donated books. The fair raised approximately \$1500 in donations. As Vicki reported, "What an eye opening experience of how books and music can be recycled and not dumped into our landfill just with one event!"

What's a Carbon Footprint?

Through the various "green" projects, the CITY Teen Leaders learned what the term "carbon footprint" means. Kevin Mather, CCE-Broome County's Environmental Resource Educator, taught the teens about how long waste takes to break down in a landfill and how buying locally helps to preserve the environment and reduce carbon footprinting. As Vicki explained, "We can honestly say we never even considered that the fuel used to deliver our strawberries were causing climate change! It was eye-opening for the teens to learn how many footprints we all have in our trail."

Eco-Meal Activity: Calculating our Carbon Footprint

Through the Eco-Meal activity, the CITY Teen Leaders got a firsthand lesson on the impact on climate change of preparing and serving just one meal. As Vicki explained, "We put our new knowledge about carbon footprinting to the test, setting out to prepare an eco-friendly meal. First we went shopping with a \$50 budget to prepare lunch for 20 guests. Tacos, tuna pocket sandwiches, and yogurt fruit crunch were all on the menu. We couldn't believe how much garbage we created! Too much—and looking at the waste, we were able to think of ways to reduce, reuse and recycle. Using the lesson plan developed by Jamila Simon, CITY Project Coordinator, Cornell University Cooperative Extension New York City, we assigned points for garbage based on whether we could reuse the garbage and how long it would take to decompose. Now we were thinking green, using reusable bags, buying fresh at the Farmers' Market (where the food travels much shorter distances) and using glass vs. plastic, buying in larger containers instead of little to go's, and asking ourselves, "Why all the packaging for everything?" (See "Eco-Meal Lesson Plan" attached.)



In the Garden

The Columbus Park East in downtown Binghamton has a community garden where community residents gather to plant and grow vegetables, flowers and herbs. This year the garden was vandalized and needed some restoration. As part of their Youth Community Action project, the CITY Teen Leaders spent time in the garden cleaning, raking and planting herbs. Neighbors regularly come to see what happening and engage in tending the garden. Taking the fresh produce home—sometimes with a new, healthy recipe—allows residents from this low income neighborhood access to fresh fruits and vegetables, provides nutritious food for their families and helps them learn gardening skills that they can use for self sufficiency for generations to come. This summer, the efforts of the CITY teens took on an added

dimension, by learning how having a vegetable garden and composting impact climate change. As Vicki pointed out, "No one even realized we were helping to reduce the carbon footprint of the whole neighborhood!"

Green CITY Interviews

Through the various "green" projects undertaken by the CITY Teen Leaders, the young people learned how much they really didn't know about climate change and global warming. Inspired by Christine Hadekel and her visit to the Arctic, the CITY teens learned about the local effects as well as the effects of climate change across the world. They learned about the impact of climate change on polar bears, how glaciers are melting and impacting tiny communities in the Arctic. To learn more about climate change, the CITY teens decided to conduct a series of "green interviews" to see what people in the community believed and know about global warming and their own carbon footprints. Surveying at the Binghamton Farmers' Market helped customers begin to think about climate change as well as helped the CITY teens understand the importance of their community outreach and education efforts.

The CITY Teens produced a short video of their interviews on climate change. The video will be shown at the New York State Association of Cornell Cooperative Extension 4-H Educators (NYSACCE4-HE) Conference, Trans4mations, October 16, Rochester as part of the CITY Project's workshop, *Planting One Seed at a Time and Alleviating Climate Change through Youth Community Action*.



According to Vicki, "The responses were amazing! No one really knows what a carbon footprint is and no one has the faintest idea how to calculate their own. We were surprised some people did not think global warming was a big deal. They mostly thought it was natural and we were in a cycle. Everyone thought they should recycle and that they needed to be responsible with the environment. These activities let us know there is a need for more community education and a need for widespread marketing on behalf of the environment, the economic future of the farmers and the various "green" reasons for eating locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables." (See "Green CITY Interviews" attached.)

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