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## Flourishing Gardens In Peoples Lives

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Flourishing Gardens in people's lives

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## Abstract

Mesa Verde Gardens has been a great asset in the Watsonville and Pajaro area by providing a unique way for people to live healthier lives. The community gardens have given people an opportunity to reach new standards for themselves. The organic produce being grown out of the seven different gardens in the area has accommodated the gardeners with delicious food for the entire season. In order to grow Mesa verde Gardens, an outreach project was conducted to allow people to familiarize with all seven gardens. These events included fundraisers, door to door outreach, and participation in community gatherings like festivals. Reaching an increase of 20% of membership sign-ups was a goal agreed upon staff, so that empty plots would begin to fill up.

Most importantly, Mesa Verde Gardens wanted to make sure that the culture of gardening reached a majority of the community because of the benefits it has for everyone both physically and mentaliy.

Keywords: Gardens, outreach, food, organic

### **Agency and Community Served**

Mesa verde Gardens is a non-profit organization located in Watsonville, California right beside the Watsonville Community Hospital. Almost a decade ago, the Pajaro Valley Community

Health Trust foundation assisted in the founding of Mesa Verde Gardens to serve the community by introducing community gardens in the area. This gave families a second alternative to food intake, since they are forced to buy produce from the grocery stores where food isn't organic the majority of the time. The current seven community gardens along with the orchard are a place where members can simply grow organic fruits and vegetables for themselves. Low-income families are in a constant struggle of survival because of high-rents and other expenditures which would make it unaffordable to get a plot in the gardens to grow organic produce. According to KQED.org, "Even for families that are able to make rent or pay a mortgage, the high cost of housing in Santa Cruz County may put a strain on their ability to pay for other basic necessities, like food."(para. 9). An article by the Pajaronian shows the struggle that families are facing when trying to apply for affordable housing, "Nearly 2,500 people applied for housing when the 46-unit Pippin Orchards apartment complex, which is geared toward low-income residents, was ready for occupancy. Those that were not selected in MidPen's lottery system are not expected to find relief soon, as no new predominantly affordable housing is set to be completed in Watsonville for at least another year."(para. 11). People are being placed under a lottery system where they have to play their luck. If they don't get accepted then the struggle continues with the rents.

Gardeners every season have a choice to rent a plot for \$56 for seven months or \$80 for ten months, this gives gardeners a chance to have long or short growing seasons depending on what they like to grow. Mesa Verde Gardens has invited any member of the community to be part of a culture based around eating organic and healthy most importantly. Mesa Verde Gardens also acknowledges the devastation large agricultural corporations are doing to the Watsonville area. Pesticides are being used all over agricultural fields and farm working families are the ones

being impacted the most. According to panna.org, Over 33 million pounds of fumigants are used in California agriculture each year, with over 9 million of cancer-causing chloropicrin alone. For strawberries grown in the state, fumigants account for 87% of all pesticide use. A 2014 report by the California Department of Public Health found that fumigants are the top five pesticides of public health concern used in close proximity to schools, with chloropicrin at the top of the list. Mesa Verde Gardens brings cultural ideas together because gardeners are able to learn methods and skills from each other, something that they learned from their grandparents back home. According to Berkeley Wellness, “A chronic comment about our modern world is that we no longer have a relationship with our sources of food. It comes from the store—and the store gets it from many places around the world”. Culturally and historically farmworker families are losing their connection to the land and food, something cherished largely by their ancestors.

### **Project description and Justification**

The capstone project being implemented for Mesa Verde Gardens is an outreach project. This project suits the organization's needs perfectly because of how important it is for community members to learn about Mesa verde Gardens. In most of the gardens there are empty plots of land ready to use. The project includes days both for outreach and registration days. The intern is in charge of creating the calendar and coming up with the dates and times. This calendar will be helpful in organizing the outreach, so there is enough time to reach out to the community and register new gardeners before the start of the next season. The intern is also in charge of creating

the flyer which includes basic and important information about Mesa Verde Gardens as well as the dates of registration for the gardens.

Mesa Verde is planning on expanding its outreach to schools, churches, and neighborhoods near the gardens themselves. The reason it was decided to choose this area is because that's where large groups of people are located, also the majority of the gardens are next to schools or churches. Most importantly reaching out to the neighborhoods near the gardens would be helpful in familiarizing community members with the gardens just yards away from them.

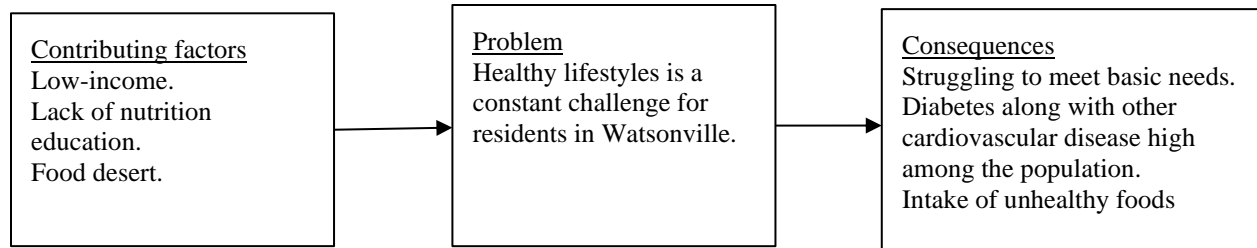
For registrations the intern and mentor are still yet to discuss an orientation for new gardeners joining Mesa verde Gardens. For Mesa Verde Gardens it is also important to create an orientation because there are rules that new gardeners must know as new members. There are different problems at the gardens like people stealing and maintenance issues of the gardens. An orientation would also be helpful because it introduces new members to the culture currently in Mesa verde Gardens. In Mesa Verde Gardens, gardeners themselves inform the agency that the community gardens allow them to connect to the land. This is because the healthy lifestyle that a garden gives is both physical and mentally beneficial. Gardens can be both therapy and exercise for the human body something everyone can benefit from not just for nutrition.

The primary purpose of the outreach project is to familiarize people with community gardens so they can reach full capacity and expand further once there are no more plots available. Mesa Verde Gardens has seen how helpful the gardens have been for current members and they don't want to halt on any sort of outreach. In Watsonville according to the Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust Foundation, " In 2013, 20 percent of Pajaro Valley respondents reported that they'd been told by a doctor that they had either diabetes or prediabetes. This rate has increased steadily

from 14 percent in 2007 to 17 percent in 2011 to its current 20 percent rate. In Watsonville, almost half of our children are overweight or obese— 49.3 percent compared to 31 percent in Santa Cruz and 38 percent statewide according to the 2012 UCLA Center for Health Policy Research report”. This is another motivating factor since we do see how bad nutrition is for hispanic families in Watsonville, something impacting people from all ages, especially children.

Hopefully, from all the outreach and registrations we can begin to see gardens more full and very soon also begin to see the affects a garden has for a family with the amount of organic food it can produce. Families might begin to see changes in eating habits like beginning to implement more fruits and vegetables into their diet which will lead to a decrease in obesity rates and diabetes in Watsonville.

The main issue in all of this is how effective the outreach will really be which is the main concern. Mesa Verde Gardens is worried that many of the people they talk to might not even show up to the registration dates which will be devastating if they didn't. Expanding the organizations outreach to as many places as possible even the radio since they do hear that the radio is very common for latino people to listen especially with some popular stations in the area. The most positive benefits the agency will receive is that they can see the growth in the organization as well as the positive impact it will have to every member. This will be good for Mesa Verde Gardens since getting a bigger organization gives the opportunity to expand and one day even own the gardens not just rent them something MesaVerde Gardens does currently. As for the clients we hope to see happier families all around from growing and harvesting their organic produce.



## **Project Implementation**

Reaching out personally to community members would be the main strategy, this is because people have a hard time doing something unless they are really persuaded by the idea.

Community members need to see why gardening is important. Some people might see gardening as boring, a waste of time, or just very time consuming but that isn't the case. According to [strongtowns.org](http://strongtowns.org), "Community gardens can bring back a sense of pride to communities that have long felt overlooked and helpless. That's a benefit that's impossible to measure but difficult to ignore."(para. 15). This quote can relate a lot with Watsonville. Community gardens can help lift up the farm working families in this community since we do see illnesses and other issues arising.

The interns role in the project is coming up with outreach ideas like where to go to reach out to people, getting the calendars ready, making the flyer, and putting together an orientation for new gardeners. The outreach project will include going out to neighborhoods to inform them about the community gardens in their area as well as how to register and contact the agency. Ana who is the director, as well as Hugo the assistant director will assist me whenever there is an announcement or presentation of the organization to better guide me. Ana is checking and approving any new ideas that might come up as well as helping me create new ones. Hugo is



very familiar with most of the gardens and their needs so he will play a key part in the orientation whenever my mentor can't be there. As for community members' involvement, they are being given flyers so they can give to any friends or family members that might be interested in becoming part of Mesa Verde Gardens. Gardeners will also play a key part in orientation since they can be very helpful in showing gardening techniques as well as sharing their experiences with Mesa Verde gardens, but the agency still needs to check with gardeners so they have time to be at the orientation during the registration days.

Resources is something Mesa Verde Gardens aren't really worried about since little to no money is going to be spent on this project. Most of the work will be done outside in the community in person or with announcements. Location isn't an issue since the gardens will serve as the place where we will have registrations and the orientation itself.

The only challenge currently is that Ana the assistant director might not have time in her schedule to be in every outreach event we will have. This will require the intern to take on more responsibility of the project itself and of some of the outreach by himself. Ana will need to create a clear guide to follow for the intern so he feels comfortable doing some of the outreach by himself.

Goal of the project	Primary objective	Primary activities	Main deliverables	Timeline for each activity and deliverable	Estimated completion dates
<p>The goal of the project is to create an effective outreach plan or system that works.</p>	<p>The primary objective is to get at least an increase of 20% in membership sign-up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Attend and assist with the outreach events and registration dates</li> <li>-create flyers to spread this information</li> <li>-orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Have gardeners that can assist during the outreach and registration dates</li> <li>-Get approval of dates</li> <li>-Work with my mentor in developing outreach information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-September 2019: Create flyers and set-up calendars for outreach events and registration dates</li> <li>Monthly assembly.</li> <li>-October 2019: Attend two registration dates and two outreach events.(Neighborhoods)</li> <li>Monthly assembly.</li> <li>-November 2019:Dia de los muertos fundraiser and attend two outreach events as well as two registration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-End of September:Flyers and calendar for registration and outreach dates</li> <li>-Each week I will complete either one registration event or outreach even.Monthly assemblies are done on the last sunday of the month.</li> <li>-November 2019:Dia de los muertos fundraiser completed Nov. 2nd</li> <li>-Dec 2019: First sunday of the week</li> <li>-Jan 2020: Calendar for registration dates and</li> </ul>

				<p>dates. Monthly assembly</p> <p>-December 2019: Host a Gardner Christmas theme dinner. Monthly assembly.</p> <p>-Jan 2020: Plan registration dates and new outreach events.</p> <p>-Feb 2020: Attend two registration dates and two outreach events (Neighborhoods). Monthly assembly.</p> <p>-March 2020: Was going to begin to attend outreach events at schools and churches.</p>	<p>outreach dates completed at the end of the month</p> <p>-Feb 2020- Continue to complete one registration event or outreach event per week</p> <p>-March 2020: Was going to attend at least one school and church for outreach events by the end of the month.</p>
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## Project Results

The main thing Mesa Verde Gardens wanted to achieve from this project is to reach an increase of 20% membership sign-ups in total from all the seven gardens they offer.

Gardens	Start of 2019	May of 2020	Remaining
MI jardin Verde	45	53	0
Starlight	29	37	0
Valle Verde	8	5	3

Pajaro	11	6	5
Vision del Paraiso	14	7	7
Pedazo del Cielo	5	4	1
River Park	13	3	10

Total	125	115	26
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Total after remaining  
Gardners added            141

Increase                    12.8%

In general the project did a good job of having an organized outreach plan. At the start of 2019, Mesa Verde Gardens had a total of 125 active members in all seven gardens. Reaching an increase of 20% of membership sign-ups would put the current status of members to at least 140 members by the end of registrations by May of 2020. At the moment, there are currently 115 gardeners registered for the 2020 season but there still remains 26 returning gardeners to sign-up either because they haven't filled out the application or haven't paid their dues. After adding 115 to 26, 141 gardeners are expected to be enrolled for the 2020 season.

The calculation that was done to get the increase in percent was to first subtract 141 from 125 to get the increase in people which was 16. After getting 16, 16 was divided by 125 which gave a result of 0.128. In percentage that would be 12.8% which would be less than a 20% increase. Unfortunately, the 20% goal that Mesa Verde Gardens put forward for this wasn't as successful as they wanted it. On the other hand, Mesa Verde Gardens is grateful that new gardeners joined this year which shows the 12.8%.

The cause for not reaching our main goal was because of the lack of outreach during March and April which Mesa Verde gardens had events planned in schools and churches as well as going to other neighborhoods in the community.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation for the agency**

The project showed that with a consistent and well organized outreach plan, new members will begin to join with time. Due to the results I do believe Mesa verde Gardens could have reached its 20% increase in a year of membership sign-ups. For this reason, I would encourage the agency to continue to have yearly outreach events as well as registration dates to give multiple opportunities to sign-up. In order to improve the current project, the agency should network more widely with newer partners so reach more people. Keeping track of community events or gatherings is also useful so that they don't miss on valuable opportunities.

### **Personal reflection/final thoughts**

The project allowed me to learn a lot about the community and its needs. Many of the gardeners in Mesa Verde Gardens, suffer from certain diseases like diabetes, hearth problems, or cholesterol. I had a lot of great conversations with gardeners regarding how the gardeners benefit them. I learned that most people just want to have a place where they can garden which gives them happiness as well as makes them more healthy because of the food they are growing which is organic. Professionally, I learned that a non-profit is really about the people's needs and what they want something that slowly discovered with my time there. Certain staff members had great ideas on what direction Mesa Verde Gardens should continue, but most of those ideas were not in collaboration with the gardeners, something I felt had to be. Gardeners wanted the gardens to be more open to selling the produce like in the farmers market, something that was just constantly denied and made impossible for them. The planning and implementation of the project taught me a lot about how to lead a project and how to plan for it. Keeping a well organized system where we can track all the registration and outreach dates was well needed. At the same time, I learned how to network with partners around the community which made me nervous at first. For example for the fundraisers, I had to contact a winery to see if they could donate some of their bottles to put them in gift baskets.

The project had great success, one of them being the big fundraiser we had in one of the gardens. . We had over a hundred people show up to participate in the fundraiser and learn about Mesa Verde Gardens. We had different sorts of food to sell, music, and even beer. Other successes include the design of the project which provides consistency throughout the entire season with events. This allowed us to get most of the returning gardeners signed backup as well as reach new ones.

Some limitations to the project were definitely because of the virus happening which didn't allow us to reach every place we wanted to. I really wanted to go to an after school event where we were going to be able to table and pass flyers to parents and students. At the same time, we were going to attend a church where we were going to give an announcement at the end of the mass so that people learn about us.

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