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Gardening for the Future

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MDS/BAS 495 Capstone Project

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Abstract

This paper discusses the importance of the capstone project working with the Boise Urban Garden School and the impact they may have on the community. We explore what the project is and how it will lead to greater knowledge for the future.

*Keywords:* community, food insecurity, produce, knowledge
Gardening for the Future

Have you ever wondered where your next meal would come from? Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have to worry about if you couldn’t afford your next meal? This is the reality for almost ten percent of the population in Idaho (America’s Health Rankings). When we think about ten percent of something, it doesn’t seem like much, but this percentage equates to over 175,000 people. This brings the issue into perspective and may lead you to ask yourself, “What can I do about this?” I’m glad you asked. In our community, there are many options including donating time, products, and money to several organizations we have in Idaho. The option I explored during this project was volunteering my time with the Boise Urban Garden School, learning to grow and care for different types of produce while learning about the impact this organization and others like it can have on the community, allowing me to share that knowledge with you.

Throughout my time working on this project, I have tried to consider the perspectives of others. My perspective at the beginning of this project was more fact based: wondering how much produce the BUGS garden created, how many people that could potentially feed, who the excess produce went to, etc. When speaking with Laura, the main caretaker of the garden (her title is Urban Ag Specialist), she informed me that the garden was meant to be more of an educational facility and that the focus was not on the amount they could grow, but of what knowledge they could pass on to others. With this additional perspective, my project began morphing into a combination of gaining knowledge and spreading information.

My approach was to use both hands-on experience and research to obtain new knowledge about how we can have a positive impact on our communities. I have said before that I’m unsure
how innovative this project is, as I don’t know the experience of others. However, this was
definitely new for me and allowed me to step outside of my comfort zone. If I were to do this
project again, I may use a little more creativity and create a digital flier to send to people on
social media because I don’t believe the information about the Boise Urban Garden School is
well disseminated unless you are in that circle. An article discussing community gardens in
Illinois makes a similar statement: “...from the focus group discussions, it became apparent that
one significant barrier to community gardens providing greater benefit to food-insecure persons
in Rockford is a lack of awareness of these projects” (Furness and Gallaher, 2018). I think
bringing this information to more people would make a difference if only just informing more
people about the issue of food insecurity and could possibly be a call to action on a larger scale
to be more involved in the community, be that by donating time, products, or money.

The research and work that I am performing indicate awareness of self by showing
cognizance of the impact I can have on the community. This allows me to feel helpful that in
turn increases positive feelings and fulfills the need to belong. This project shows awareness of
others because the work and research I’m doing directly correlates to how I can help others and
get a better understanding of the issue of food insecurity in our own community and what kind of
impact we could realistically have on it.

For reference, according to leaders at the organization, the garden donated 270 pounds of
produce last year. The recommended daily intake of fruits and vegetables is about six servings
per day. If one serving is about four to six ounces, that puts us at about 24 ounces minimum
(Mayo Clinic Health System, 2019). One pound equals 16 ounces which means the
recommended weight would be approximately one and a half pounds minimum. What this all
means is that Boise Urban Garden School provided enough produce to meet the recommended fruit and vegetable intake for 180 people for an entire day.

First, I would like to say that at least three of my audience members are children. I feel that it is extremely important for them to learn about the issues in their community and how they can make a difference. I also feel it is important for them to learn about gardening and growing produce for themselves. Considering the emotional intelligence of the audience, I am aware that some may not be as emotionally intelligent, but as we worked through this project, it gave them an opportunity to become more emotionally intelligent by learning of the effect they can have on others through their contribution. They can make a difference both in the community and in their home now and in the future. This project considers the emotional intelligence of my adult audience by appealing to their empathy and showing how they can have an impact on food insecurity in our area by participating in a program like the one at BUGS.

This research is valuable to others because it can show others the importance of being involved in the community. This research may be the push for some that have been considering doing something like volunteering in the community, just like this project was for me. There are also many positive aspects to being more involved in an organization such as this one. “One recurring theme is the health and financial benefits of community gardens, particularly increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, increased physical activity, stress release and well-being, and significant cost savings by substituting home-grown produce for store-bought foods (Patel [35], Armstrong [3], Brown [8], Twiss et al.[42], Wakefield et al. [43])” (Gary et. al, 2014).

A way that I drew on my creative framework when approaching this project was through brainstorming what I thought would be eye opening to myself and to the stakeholders involved in
this project. I think a limiting factor would be that I don’t know everyone’s experience, so coming up with something that hasn’t been done before would be unknown to me. I went with an approach that was interesting to me, that got me out in the community, out of my comfort zone, and that would allow me as well as the stakeholders to expand our knowledge and experience.

This approach is unique based on the questions that I’m asking. The things that I am looking to get out of this project regarding food insecurity and the effect on the community of this program is a unique perspective. As I mentioned previously, the program at BUGS is mainly focused on helping people learn about growing produce as well as how to use that produce while preparing healthy meals. Therefore, approaching this project from the point of questioning the impact on food insecurity is unique. It is at least something that I was previously unaware of and I am looking to share that information with others. I think my approach is also unique in that it hopes by spreading awareness that it may lead to action by others, even if that is just investigating it for their own knowledge for the future.

My project demonstrates innovation because it led to thoughts about what I could do for my family in the future such as how could we grow our own produce, what could we grow, and what could we do if we had excess? I can take the information I have gathered from my time volunteering and apply it to what I’m trying to do at home in an attempt to teach my children and housemates what we can do to be self-sustaining. This process is innovative because I’m not just looking for the outcome to write this paper. I’m looking for ways to improve what we do at home and how this new knowledge could have a positive impact on the futures of many people.

One of the things I wanted to do during this project was to find out what kind of impact this work with the urban garden could have on the community and food insecurity. I think by
showing the organizers at the urban garden this perspective, it made them look at it in a different way. They do have a partnership with an organization that donates produce, but it’s easy to see that piece and that being the end of it, rather than thinking about how many people’s lives you are actually impacting by providing that service and those goods. Seeing that they donated enough food to feed 180 people the recommended amount per day and up to 90% of Americans are not eating the correct amount, that number could be even larger (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017).

I feel that there are a few benefits to the stakeholders. They gained a new perspective on how they are able to impact the community with the added information about where their donated product ends up. It’s easy to give things away and to not think about where they will end up. “Community gardening is just one strategy, of many, that has been proposed to create a more equitable and just food system and in order to progress toward change, it is critical to understand if community gardening is a strategy that furthers that goal (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck [29]), yet, given the current literature, the impact of community gardening on important tenets of a just food system remains understudied” (Burt et.al., 2021). It is important to note that in this study, nine of twelve studies showed perceived improvement in food security which is promising when discussing the impact of community gardens (Burt et.al., 2021).

Some stakeholders gained a new goal of learning how to grow your own produce and provide for yourselves and learning about the impact that can have on your future. You would be able to provide for yourselves rather than relying on other people and places to provide your own produce. I feel like this is an important thing to learn about and it has gotten lost in the ease of society today. We don’t consider where our food comes from other than the grocery store. I think
this is a skill and knowledge that the younger generation will need to be aware of. Another benefit is the feeling of pride in giving back to the community. For all stakeholders involved, I think there is a feeling of pride and fulfillment in being able to help others and to offer that help without expectations attached.

The impact my project had on the stakeholders is less stress for some and more stress for others. For example, my work with the community garden took some of the responsibility of caring for the garden off of the people who run it. I took some of the tasks away from them. It’s also possible I added some stress to them by taking their time while they explained processes to me and we discussed what the organization does. I also believe I added more stress to my kids and housemates that I brought into this project because being involved in this motivated me to start a garden at home and that requires all of us to pitch in and learn new things in order to be successful. This project will continue to be impactful for all of us because I plan to continue my work with BUGS so that I can learn more and continue to make a difference within my community and within my household.

The service learning option fit what my project was going to be about really well. I wanted to spend time learning about community gardens, what that involves, and what impact they can have on the community. I learned that the Boise Urban Garden School grows approximately 2000 pounds of food a year. They donate excess to the organization Rolling Tomatoes. The people who benefit from my project are myself first because I learned so much and I’m going to use my knowledge to help teach others as well as continuing my participation in the garden. Others who benefited are the people who run the garden because they got a new volunteer and I think are more aware of what impact they are having on the community when
they donate their food. I also think the other stakeholders, my children and household members, have also benefited from this because it led to an increase in knowledge and motivation to learn more about growing our own produce. I learned a few different skills throughout this project including learning how to care for different plants, how to start a garden through my research, and how to lead a team in implementing care for the garden in our regular routine. I plan to continue volunteering to increase my knowledge and instill these skills, values, and knowledge to the people in my life so that in the future they may know how to provide for themselves and their communities.
References


