



Growing Good Things and Good People

The Food Project Sprouts on the North Shore

by AINE GREANEY photography by GREIG CRANNA

When Evelyn, a high school sophomore from Lynn, signed up to work on a farm with the Food Project - North Shore (www.thefoodproject.org/northshore), she had no idea that she would end up “eating things like squash and cherry tomatoes.”

Before joining the Food Project, Evelyn had never grown anything before. Even so, by the time she was a few weeks into her stint as a crew worker with the Food Project, 16-year old Evelyn realized that she really liked getting her hands dirty. And even better, she liked having a five-day-a-week summer job.

Since 1991, The Food Project has built a national model of engaging young people in personal and social change through sustainable agriculture. It employs local youth ages 14 through 16 who build a locally-grown food system while experiencing the joys of planting, tending and harvesting fresh produce.

Through the program’s leadership development, young people can become role models in community involvement, healthy land stewardship and food distribution. Currently, the Food Project North Shore serves over 30 young people from Gloucester, Beverly, Salem, Marblehead, Swampscott, and Lynn.

In addition to its youth employment program, there are several days throughout the summer when project staff invite friends and neighbors from across the North Shore to spend a day on the farm where they can

watch the teens at work and lend a helping hand.

Gloucester resident and project director Melissa Dimond has been with Food Project – North Shore since 2002. Previously, she worked in a number of other non-profit programs in the area, mostly counseling young people about nutrition. Then one day, at a luncheon reception in Boston, she heard a presentation by two 16-year-olds who were spreading the word about their pet project: The Food Project – Boston.

“I just couldn’t believe these young people,” says Dimond. “They were so bright-eyed, so self-assured, so excited to tell about a program they so clearly loved.”

Soon thereafter, Dimond volunteered for a week of hands-on intensive learning at one of the Project’s three city farm lots in Boston. In 2002, when the Project’s administrators were trying to develop a second location outside Boston, Dimond suggested the North Shore, and the Food Project – North Shore was born.

Since then, the Project has acquired and cultivated two urban farms in Beverly and Lynn. Through a partnership with the Lynn School Department and the Lynn Community Development and Housing Corporation, they have been able to lease two parcels of land in the Ingalls School neighborhood.

Last summer, the Food Project partnered with the Trustees of Reservations in Beverly and opened a two-acre farm at the historic property at Long Hill. Farming at Long ►





Hill now gives area teens the opportunity to be a part of larger scale agriculture, and allowed them to grow even more food.

How do they recruit such a diverse crop of teen workers?

"It's really a matter of getting the word out to local teachers, guidance counselors, housing authorities, and parents," says Diamond - "anyone who works with youth groups."

While participants like Evelyn are learning a lot about land stewardship and the growing season, they are also learning about the benefits of being able to personally affect a growing local need. Last year, over half of the Project's harvest was distributed to farmers' markets in Lynn, Marblehead, and Beverly. The produce is also distributed to local food pantries like My Brother's Table in Lynn and the Open Door Cape Ann Food Pantry in Gloucester, thereby providing naturally-grown produce to low-income residents.

After their first summer on the farm, participating teens can sign up for continued involvement throughout the school year. During the non-growing season, the teens themselves grow via training in leadership and public-speaking skills.

Evelyn says that her involvement with the Food Project - North Shore has helped her grow in many ways.

"It lets me do something good," she says, "so it's not just always about me." 🌱

To support the Food Project, purchase their produce at the Marblehead Farmer's Market (9 - 12, mid-June through October), the Beverly Farm Stand (days and times to be announced) or the Lynn Farmer's Market (Thursdays, 10 - 4, July 6 through October).

Know a great program for kids?
Write us at kids@nshoremag.com.