

Serenity Farm Grows More than Vegetables

by: Linda Geggie, CRFAIR ED

Many years ago, I worked with David Stott on a pretty amazing project, called the Garden Training Project. This was an initiative that supported mainly single parents to make social connections, learn new skills, and grow food. I heard from David this week when he wrote me to invite me to an open house for a similar project in Saanich called Feeding Ourselves and Others.

David writes that “Twice a week, spring to fall, at a large garden overlooking the Blenkinsop Valley, a small miracle occurs. A very mixed group of 15 – 20 people gather together to work, talk, laugh, and learn to grow food for themselves and others in our community. Our official name is Feeding Ourselves and Others, but our real name, as the participants call us, is Serenity Farm”.

For the last 6 years this unique project has impacted the lives of people in the Victoria area. The Feeding Ourselves and Others community garden project was created to provide a therapeutic environment for marginalized people struggling with addictions, mental illness and chronic offending. This project is a partnership between the John Howard Society of Victoria as the sponsor, Island Health, the Assertive Community Treatment teams (ACT), the Victoria Integrated Community Outreach team (VICOT), the Victoria Integrated Court, and the Seven Oaks Tertiary Care Facility.

In the garden, located on the grounds of the Seven Oaks Facility, participants and community volunteers work side-by-side to produce healthy organic vegetables and fruit which are provided free to the participants and community agencies, and sold to the community. Between April and October last year a total of 33 participants and 18 volunteers worked in the garden. Together they contributed over 2,400 hours producing over 4,000 pounds of vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers for sale and for themselves. These activities helped to generate over \$8,000 for the project.

David is most proud of “ *the wonderful way that each time the volunteers and participants get together a real sense of commitment and camaraderie forms. People are coming, not because they feel obliged to be there, but because they want to be there, all of us benefiting in various ways from our time together*”.

Want to see this garden in action? You are invited to their annual Open House on Tuesday June 26 from 11:30 am – 1:30 pm at the garden which is located on the grounds of the Seven Oaks Facility, 4574 Blenkinsop Road. Come out to see the garden and meet the people who make it all happen. If you need additional information please contact serenityfarm2018@gmail.com

