

PLANTING COMMUNITY



Photo by Josh Schachter

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Greenwich Green Grows

by Rosi Kerr I arrived on Greenwich Street in the Hill South neighborhood on a gray fall day. I had been invited by Kris Sainsbury, a long time resident and member of the "Greenwich Green Team," to tour their Community Greenspace Project. Kris wanted me to see what had been planted and to learn how she feels the URI Greenspace Program has positively affected her neighborhood. She invited me into her home and her enthusiasm for the program boiled over as we enjoyed cups of tea in her kitchen. I learned that the Green Team has been working in the area since 2001, planting trees, and creating curb strip gardens, revitalizing

parks and planting ground cover. Between sips of tea, Kris explained, "Not long ago, our neighborhood was an inhospitable place. We didn't really interact with one another. Now you'll see neighbors out walking and visiting each other, or perhaps walking to the store for groceries. The operative word is walking."

It was time for our own walk. I asked Kris to start our tour with the places that the Green Team was most proud of. We hadn't left the yard before she started pointing out trees, plants and flowers that had special significance. Along the curb strip in front of Kris' house there are several large

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I am often asked whether the work of URI is about the environment or about people, and my response is that it must be about both. Environmental issues stem from human behaviors — whether it is pollution, global warming, depletion of resources, or other forms of environmental degradation. Thus, environmental solutions lie in a change in human behaviors, not just by policy makers or professionals, but by all of us — whether it is recycling, alternative transportation or tree planting. Yet without addressing basic human needs, and without incorporating those needs into our solutions, our attempts to change environmentally unsound behaviors will be at best, marginally successful. This is especially true in poorer communities, where, unless basic needs are met, addressing environmental issues may be a secondary concern.

URI's work is about empowering citizens to develop a community environmental agenda and to have the resources to achieve positive change.

Our interns this summer worked across New Haven to support neighborhood planting projects. Most of these plantings took place in lower income communities where the environment may include not only parks and front yards, but also trash filled lots and barren soils contaminated with lead. While these areas might not seem to be of ecological importance to biologists, they affect the people that live in and around them. From transforming neglected landscapes into inspirational gardens, to helping neighbors understand soil contamination and remediation, our interns and volunteers work together to resolve some of these environmental challenges.

In these communities, the simple act of working alongside neighbors to create a positive change has, perhaps, a greater impact than in neighborhoods with more advantages. Our team of interns — Jenna, Suzy, Mohamad, Madeleine, Wendy, and Margaret — was incredibly committed to this idea and to supporting the project goals set by the neighbors in their neighborhoods. You'll read their stories of the people they met, and the impact of our collective work. Through our interns you'll witness the meaning of small acts of kindness from one stranger to another. In New Haven, where more than 20% of the population lives in poverty, the effect of even small positive changes is powerful.

Through volunteers' eyes, you'll see that the impact goes beyond the moment of planting, as neighbors continue changing their landscape together and continue watching their work grow. You'll recognize how planting a tree connects two women who had not spoken to each other before and also connects them, together, to their landscape. You'll read how small scale plantings can add up to address some of the human and environmental challenges communities face. I hope you are as inspired as I am by these stories — stories of neighborhood volunteers, and interns, and board members, and staff, who believe together we can create healthier environments, people and communities.

Greenwich Green Grows

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flower pots, identical to ones I had seen further up the block on my drive in. I had stepped around one without noticing it as I got out of my car. “Oh! The flower pots!” Kris exclaimed as we neared them. “I could have put in a flowerpot before URI came — but I wouldn’t have.... Because I didn’t believe it would still be there when I got up the next morning. I didn’t trust.... When I put out the first one, I filled the bottom with weights and piled rocks all around it so no one would flip it or steal it. I was so suspicious.... Now look!” She gestured to the eight pots of happily blooming petunias which now line the block, one outside each house.

As we walked through the neighborhood, Kris introduced me to a neighbor who was working in his garden and we stopped to speak with others who were out walking. “Hello Mrs. B.!” Kris said, waving, to an elderly woman in a wooly cap walking on the opposite side of the street who waved back at us and smiled. Mrs. B., Kris explained, had lost her husband to illness more than three years ago. For a long time after that Mrs. B. didn’t leave her house. Meals and ministry were brought to her, and she stayed tightly shuttered in the safety of her home. However when the Green Team began working in the neighborhood, Mrs. B. began checking on the progress her neighbors were making, first from her windows but then from the sidewalk. “Now, you’ll see her out walking every day. Checking on the plants, saying hello to friends and just enjoying her neighborhood.”

As we moved along, Kris pointed out yards, curb strips and trees that the Green Team had planted. Many of the plantings were small. While flowers bloomed in some, heartily carrying on in the face of approaching frosts, others were a little rough at the edges. These are the kind of plantings that people pass all the time without really seeing them. Here, each one held a story. We stopped



Photo by Josh Schachter

A Greenwich Street resident supervises Community Greenspace work in her front yard.

at one planting in front of a high fence. Kris pointed to the road that intersected with the one we stood on, explaining that most visitors arrived in the neighborhood via this road. This used to mean that when visitors came to the stop sign at Fifth St. and Greenwich Ave., the tall imposing fence and barren curb strips greeted them. “Now look!” Kris exclaimed, gesturing to the purple flowers growing up and around the light pole, then toward a little white garden fence guarding a curb strip brimming with colorful flowers and hanging flower baskets adorning the now not-so-imposing fence.

As we walked Kris pointed out three houses recently purchased by young families. “These were derelict houses!” she says with a scowl. “Now they have the most lovely families in them!” The Greenspace Program has, Kris says, helped people see the potential and the possibility in their diverse neighborhood, while incorporating what already exists. As the neighborhood worked with URI, they were able to draw other resources and support to their aid: Last summer Alderman Jorge Perez called on City Plan

and the Parks Department to help rebuild the Kimberley Field Park entrance, which is now an integral part of the community. Using wrought iron fencing, landscaping, lighting and a new path leading from Greenwich Ave to Kimberly Field, the Parks Department made the entrance more inviting and user-friendly. As we walked along the path Kris checked on each plant, reminding herself when watering was due. She knew the species of nearly every one, and a story about most of them. She could remember when almost all of them were planted and who was involved. “It’s important to remember!” she said, because the plantings are what make people feel connected. Kris described one of her favorite Greenspace moments: As she worked on a new garden planting with other neighbors a little girl came up to her and said “Ms. Kris, thank you for making this feel like home.”

Our next stop was nearby Bayview Park, which neighbors had reconstructed in 2003. Kris showed me each planting, describing how Alderman Jorge Perez, City Plan, the Parks Department, URI and even Ikea, which borders the community,

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Butterflies for Tamara

by Jenna Bourne

The Wilbur Cross High School group had ambitious plans for the summer: they wanted to completely transform their Greenspace into a professionally designed butterfly garden in only two weeks. They were preparing it for dedication to Tamara Pabon, a former Wilbur Cross student who had died the previous year. This was a tall order considering that the entire site had been a cemented courtyard the summer before and the teachers were busy finishing up their school year. Located at the north end of Orange Street, the site is surrounded by the school on three sides with the fourth open side facing Orange Street and College Woods of East Rock Park. The students at Wilbur Cross High School, as well as faculty and staff, maintain the site during the school year and are planning to use the area for relaxing lunch breaks as well as a teaching tool for environmental education classes.

When I first arrived at the site, I was relieved to find that much of the hard physical labor was completed last summer with the previous Greenspace intern, Tendro, including the construction of four raised planting beds and the removal of literally tons of pavement. Some of the larger shrubs were also in place. They also already had a picnic table and a tool shed full of equipment ready for use. But, despite the massive effort made during the previous summer, there was still an impressive amount of planting to do to bring the garden to life.

As a new URI intern, the group's ambitious plans seemed daunting to me: I couldn't have known less about how to create a butterfly garden. However, the group had wisely asked professional landscape architect Christine Cook to draw out blueprints for the garden. With plans in hand, I met Mary and Steve who teach at Wilbur Cross High School and were main members of the Greenspace group. Although neither of them had led the group the year before, they were



Photo by Josh Schachter

Butterfly garden at Wilbur Cross High School.

enthusiastic about the project this summer and hoped to work on it for years to come. Their goal was to prepare the butterfly garden for a special ceremony in commemoration of Tamara. The inspiration for the garden was that Tamara adored butterflies and her backpack had always been covered in patches of them. The teachers thought that she would have really loved having a space for butterflies in her school. They also felt that it would create a space where people who were close to her could visit and remember her.

We agreed to use the blueprints as a baseline for our plantings but to change the arrangement slightly in order to accommodate new ideas from the group and variations in the plan. Our time ran down to the wire due to scheduling conflicts and lack of a core group of volunteers. The dedication was on Thursday and it was already Monday by the time the group was able to get working! Monday is normally a day off for Greenspace interns because we work on Saturdays. However, the dedication meant so much to the faculty involved in the project that I couldn't turn them

down. So, on Monday, I delivered a huge load of mulch, compost, perennials, and shrubs that included high bush blueberry, butterfly bush, black-eyed susans, hostas, catmint, lavender, sage, coral bells, purple coneflower, false indigo, coriopsis, and salvia. The courtyard was instantly filled with the smell of soil, ground cover and flowers, and brought to life with colors and textures, and we began to feel hopeful that the project would work. The teachers and staff banded together and worked tirelessly on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in order to prepare the butterfly garden. Mary was particularly diligent and was a great role model, working through the torrential downpours on our last workday, when most of the perennials were going into the ground.

By Thursday, the day of the dedication, the garden was completely transformed! It was beautiful, filled with new plants, smiling faces and a renewed spirit! Shades of purple, yellow, and green brought the space to life and immediately attracted a host of butterflies and other insects. One teacher

even made a 'butterfly box' for the butterflies to feed from and he painted it purple, Tamara's favorite color. Tamara's entire family was in attendance at the dedication, emotional and eternally grateful to the Wilbur Cross Greenspace members who had worked so hard in memory of their daughter. The poignant dedication ceremony went flawlessly. Students performed a song, and teachers and administrators, as well as Tamara's family members, offered their thoughts and remembrances. Mary and Steve received well-deserved praise for their hard work and vision. The family was in

tears and overwhelmed by the generosity and dedication to their daughter's memory. They were extremely grateful to the Urban Resources Initiative for providing the materials to make the garden possible and promised to visit regularly. As I watched the ceremony unfold, I was impressed by how much work the group had done in such a short amount of time. It felt miraculous! But, as family and friends mingled in the garden to remember Tamara, I was also amazed by how the garden brought people together, to create something beautiful in the face of a tragedy. The

purple flowers and butterfly box were a celebration of Tamara's life. Tended by the students and staff of Wilbur Cross, the garden is a celebration which will live on to bring smiles and fond memories to many others.

Jenna Bourne is a second year masters student at Yale F&ES. She studies air quality, climate change, environmental health, and urban issues. After graduation, Jenna will most likely stay on the East Coast and pursue a career focusing on urban air quality and health.



Photos by Mary ALice Lamb

Our staff and interns have been busy teaching in the Hill Central, Lincoln Bassett and Barnard Schools. Students have been exploring nature in their own neighborhoods as they learn science. Look for more on the Education Program in the spring newsletter!

Growing Together

by Madeleine Meek

Walking through the courtyard of Waverly Housing Project for the first time, when my internship started in May, I felt extremely uncomfortable and out of place. I took a quick sweep of the place with Margaret, another Greenspace intern, and we immediately hopped back into the URI pick-up truck. The police officer who patrols the Dwight neighborhood had warned me that this was a dangerous part of New Haven, even during daylight hours, due to gang activity and related crime. This, however, was not the only reason I was uneasy. I felt like I represented everything that Waverly was not: a white, upper-middle class Yale kid with enough leisure to devote myself to environmental causes. The moment I walked in there, I feared that even armed with ecological knowledge and idealism about the Greenspace Program's impact on New Haven's low-income neighborhoods, I couldn't catalyze healthy change in this community.

I couldn't have been more naïve. Each Tuesday evening, I felt more and more at home pulling into the courtyard parking lot and gathering the Greenspace troops. By the end of the summer, Waverly was the site where I felt most comfortable, and where I felt that Greenspace had had the most positive impacts on the health of the community on many levels. One night when we'd worked until after dark and I was clearly scared to leave the yard we were working in, Nikki, one of the volunteers, reassured me. "We will take care of you, Madeleine, you're part of the hood now. You're one of our sisters." Despite all the differences between me and Nikki, by the end of the summer, I felt like I was.

Waverly is a public housing complex in the Dwight Neighborhood. It is a vibrant place, where there are always dozens of adults hanging out in their yards or in the courtyard barbequeing, playing loud music, swimming in inflatable pools, chatting, or playing cards.

Children are always running around, looking for something fun to do. Early on I was warned that there were a number of insular social cliques, and I felt that tension between a couple of the core members during our planning meeting and first planting. As the summer went on, however, I connected with more people, particularly women, from different social groups, and more and more people got involved as new members. At the first meeting there were four women, then a few more and more until we had 12 members, seven of whom—Mary, Vivian, Marie, Nicole, Nikki, Patricia, and Hannah — were very active.

At first, the plantings didn't go smoothly. The social tensions within the neighborhood meant there were few people participating. I started to see that territories existed between yards and those boundaries and tensions were relentlessly maintained by the women in this neighborhood. These pre-existed the Greenspace project but I saw that perhaps Greenspace provided an opportunity to address them. One day the tension boiled over: One woman openly refused

to help in another woman's yard and then attempted to take plants for her own yard and plant them by herself. This was my moment! By explaining the Greenspace Program objectives, I was able to, without exacerbating tension, calmly point out that planting was a group activity. The situation began to shift. One week later the two women who had quarreled were planting a dogwood tree together in silence in Mary's yard. While this was surely not "happily ever after," — they did not become best friends and there were a few more tense incidents — there was a triumph in this silent planting: a truce had been reached and from then on the dynamics among all the group members improved. Because everybody agreed that planting was a good idea and that it improved their neighborhood, there was a mutual (even if sometimes grudgingly so) sense of purpose.

The dogwood tree the two women planted in Mary's yard will always be a symbol for me of the power of the Greenspace Program. Not only did the tree make the yard prettier and healthier, but it made the community healthier and



Photo by Josh Schachter

Mary in her garden.

stronger by bringing together the women who planted it. This tree was also special to me because it was planted in Mary's yard. Mary, who only missed one of our workdays and helped in everyone's yards, was always in good spirits and friendly with everyone. This touched me especially deeply because Mary is in a wheelchair and faces enormous personal challenges, including caring for her son who is brain damaged. And yet, every week, one of the children would run to her door and tell her where we were starting our planting, and immediately she would roll on over and pick up a shovel and help however she could. Throughout the summer, we transformed Mary's yard, from pure grass to three beautiful garden beds with smokebush, rosa rugosa bushes, juniper, euonymus, hastas, daylilies, and the beautiful kousa dogwood tree. Her yard, and her tree, were not just beautiful plants but symbols of days Mary had

spent outside, moving, laughing and talking, days that made her, and me, healthier and, I hope, happier.

As I look back on my internship, I think about the impact of the program, both on me and the neighborhoods I worked in. In a place like Waverly, where many of the people are marginalized by poverty, low education levels or poor health, programs like Greenspace seem to matter more. Because the neighborhood has little, each positive step makes a big difference. In many cases, for example, the simple act of getting outside to work hard was a big step in the lives of women who are otherwise not very active and in a neighborhood where obesity is commonplace. Waverly started the summer with little in the way of greenery, which made the work the Greenspace volunteers did stand out. The women were very proud of each other's yards and we received many compliments about the new plantings in the courtyard.

To me the most important positive impact of the program, however, was something that could not be measured in trees planted or sweat produced, but instead something less tangible but more critical. Sociologist Robert Putnam describes a quality he calls social capital as "the connections among individuals and the networks and norms of reciprocity and trust that arise from them." According to Putnam, the health and quality of life of communities depend upon this social capital. While Waverly will certainly benefit from the beautiful plantings and new trees in the community, I feel it is the social capital building that was the most important effect of the program. In a neighborhood with few reasons for social cohesion, even the

small connections that developed from planting a tree together seemed to have a big impact. Watching the boundaries between cliques fade and the bonds between people grow was one of the highlights of my summer. Women who previously would not talk to each other or work together began taking small steps together to help beautify their neighborhood and make their environment healthier. While they might not have expressed it the way I do, in the process of planting, they were connecting with each other. I have faith that this will continue to ripple through the community. In our last couple weeks, there were many other women in Waverly who were impressed by our work, and who expressed interest in beautifying their own yards with the Greenspace Program next year, something which will, I hope, continue to connect new people to each other.

When I left the Waverly courtyard at the end of the summer, I was still a white, upper-middle class Yale kid with enough leisure to devote myself to my environmental ideals, but I also felt that I had the ability to catalyze healthy change in a community like Waverly. One night, as I planted trees in a downpour with a bunch of neighborhood kids and then ran through the summer rain whooping with them in celebration of our new trees, I realized that, when it came down to it, we are all more or less in search of the same things. The community's commitments to our Tuesday workdays, their ability to overcome inter-personal issues to work together, and their acceptance of me, with everyone giving a little, are what made the program work. The process was the success, as much as the outcome of trees, flowers and grasses beautifying people's yards. The tree was the medium but what really mattered was the experience, the memory those kids will have of running through their neighborhood in proud celebration of something they had accomplished together. And, just as important, the memory I will have of running with them.

Madeleine Meek is a graduate of Yale College and F&ES. She will enter the Peace Corps in January 2007 to serve in Morocco.

Photo by Josh Schachter



Nikki and Madeleine with an autumn flowering cherry tree.

Crossroads

by Margaret Carmalt

"It's just a choice. Either choice is good and healthy for the tree, but you get to decide what shape this tree will take as it grows."

Charlie and I stood back and observed the slight bend in the *Saphora japonica*, a peculiarity it developed in the nursery. He was deciding whether or not to straighten the tree. Charlie pointed towards the feathery leaves, inadvertently showing his tattoos from the days when he was, "an angry young man." I never asked him how long he had been in prison or what he had done to get there. All I knew was that he was in the process of returning to a free life, a life with endless choices and responsibilities.

Every week I arrived at Charlie's temporary home, a court mandated residential program for adjudicated men, with a truckload of trees. He and five or six other residents would dig holes, remove the burlap and wire caging covering the roots, and plant the trees. Although the work was hot and strenuous, the men were grateful for the change in routine and a chance to get outdoors in the fresh air: grateful for a chance to accomplish something tangible and, as one resident said, "give back to the community after taking from it for so long."

Throughout the summer, the men learned valuable landscaping skills, like how to properly plant, prune, and mulch trees and how to weed and maintain existing plantings. Using these new skills and working together, they

added new species like hackberry, witch hazel, and shadblow to their urban ecosystem.

They also had an opportunity to interact with neighbors and make a positive impact on the community. One of the men was deeply touched when a neighbor brought him a cold soda. This simple gesture was meaningful to him because, he said, he had never been thanked by a stranger for something he had done. For most of his life, his pattern of behavior was negative, self-indulgent and, sometimes, criminal. Now he was trying hard to change this pattern. For him, transforming the streetscape with his sweat and hard work was about more than just planting trees, it was about living a healthy life and having a positive impact on others.

As a Greenspace intern, I watched these men change over the course of the summer. Initially, the residents were quick to denigrate themselves and over-

state the differences between themselves and me. Some were eager to prove their worth, while others were dismissive of the tasks at hand. As the summer progressed, each of the residents realized that I did not judge them for their past, but respected them for the work they did every day. They began to relax and, I hope, to trust me. The work, although strenuous and physically demanding, became fun and social.

I can't believe how much the men accomplished! They worked diligently and tirelessly during some of the hottest weeks of the summer, even though they aren't permanent residents of the area. Their work will live on in the trees they planted and it was a gift, a legacy, for East Ramsdell Street. While this gift is important, and will likely be appreciated by the residents of the area for a long time to come, I believe it is only a small part of the impact of their work. Each tree we planted meant hours of working together



Before and After: Crossroads volunteers changed the face of their neighborhood by leaving a legacy of street trees.

Photos by Margaret Carmalt

and each of those hours had an impact on the men in the program, and on me.

It goes back to Charlie's decision. When you are poor, or when you have little education, the choices available to you are few. When you are in jail, they are even fewer. Society revokes your right to make choices. When Charlie planted his tree, he had the power of decision, the power of choice. To you or me, it might seem like it was a very, very small choice, but for Charlie, it was

significant, an opportunity for him to make an impact and take ownership of something. In Charlie's life, the choices have always had major, sometimes dire impacts, and perhaps here seemed less like choices than movement around insurmountable obstacles. Part of the process of learning how to live in society again, for Charlie, is the process of learning how to make positive choices. The Greenspace Program, and the choice he got to make planting "his" tree provided

valuable, positive and safe practice.

Charlie decided to let the *Saphora japonica* grow as it was, with its bent form because he liked how the crook in the tree made it unique. I hope he will always be able to go back to that tree and see the difference he made.

Margaret Carmalt is a second year masters student at Yale F&ES. She is studying community forestry and restoration ecology.

Greenwich Green Grows

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had contributed. She noted that when they started, neighbors had had to remove trash every day, being careful not to cut themselves on glass and debris. I gazed around the neat park in amazement. A play area occupies one end and well cared for lawn fills most of the space, with trees ringed by wood chips. She told me that she and her husband John had lugged fifty gallons of water a week all summer long to the small decorative garden in the park, to keep the flowers alive during the hottest months. One day a woman they had not met but who lived across the street came out and asked in Spanish if they wanted to get "agua" from her house instead of hauling it from theirs, more than three blocks away.

At the basketball courts Kris checked on the nets, one of which had gotten torn. She described how the "Friends of Bayview Park" group is hoping to use the space for a modest farmers market next summer, in an effort to provide fresh local fruits and vegetables to the community. As we approached a big Parks Department sign surrounded by attractive plantings, with tall grasses swaying beside each post, Kris pointed at it and turned to me. "We didn't have a

sign," Kris smiled and looked at me "but now, we do! That says something about us, our neighborhood, and who we are!"

When we returned to Kris' house, she took me along the fence-line and showed me a pot of beans with its vines growing luxuriously over the fence. "I just grow these to make more beans," she said. I was perplexed. "You see, the beans are great for climbing and making things look nice. You can also eat them, though I don't, I just give them away. Now nearly everyone on the street has some of my beans growing somewhere." Green, Kris said, grows. Not just where you've planted it but also where you've given it away and in the hearts of those who are connected by the time spent working on a mutually cared for plant. Planting, Kris told me, leads to sharing, and soon people call to you across the street because you are a neighbor and a friend. A mutual experience leads to a mutual interest, which leads to more mutual experiences. This neighborhood started their Greenspace plantings modestly, with a few front yard projects and an effort by a small group to improve how their neighborhood looked. Now, she says, the neighborhood is building in ripples, a

momentum, which the Team hopes will grow into waves. "When we started Greenspace I never thought all this would happen. Through this I can see how things happen in the world... something so big out of something so small!"

Returning to my car, I carefully stepped over the curb strip, which was planted with Hasta and Vinca that I hadn't noticed on my way in. Starting the car I noticed that the flowerpots, which had been pretty on the way in, looked different to me now. Even in the gray afternoon light the pots looked beautiful, carefully placed. I could see not just the pots but the many hands that had helped put them there and that quietly kept them protected.

Rosi Kerr is a graduate student at F&ES, where she studies social ecology and how environmental change can be a catalyst for community involvement. She is also involved in community-based energy initiatives and hopes to work in this area when she graduates.

The Giving Trees

by Suzanne Oversee

What type of a tree does Juan want? One that is tall like me (Suzy) not short like him, one that has flowers that are as white as my skin or as pink as Jenna's cheeks? Because the space we were planting, the curb strip in front of his house, was small, we decided on a short tree like him with white flowers like my skin, a kousa dogwood. Juan was one of the most committed community members at Lloyd and Wolcott this summer. He helped plant trees nearly every week, no matter which street we worked on. I was impressed by how well he worked with the neighborhood children who helped plant trees. The children had wonderful energy, but were challenged by the ordered process of planting, and by being patient and gentle with the trees. Juan was firm with them, and they quietly respected his instruction.

Stellistino loves to tell stories. He farmed as a child in Puerto Rico before moving to the U.S. This enabled him to work on farms when he first moved here. When he tells his stories, it is clear he's proud of his knowledge of working with land. He is a strong and hard worker at the lot on Lloyd and Wolcott. On a couple of occasions when the community was hard at work in the lot, he came with a couple of liters of Coke, with paper cups and ice to share. This was always a much appreciated treat, and gave folks a few moments to stop, chat and reflect on what they'd done that evening.

Dietra explained to me that working at the lot is therapeutic for her. She works through pain associated with health problems. Working at the lot makes her feel healthier. Her health condition is much better than her doctors expected, she believes, because she remains active as a gardener.

Gwen LOVES flowers. She understands that in an urban environment, plants that you want need to be tended to, not left to fend for themselves. She and Dietra have been known to haul

buckets of water from their homes to the lot to water new plantings, like the blue holly and hydrangea that they planted towards the end of the summer. Gwen is frustrated by trash that accumulates in the lot and throughout the neighborhood, often just a couple of days after a community clean-up. She understands that for a community planting project to be sustainable and contribute to the health of the neighborhood, a critical mass of people in the community need to be committed to the project. Gwen, like all of the people I have mentioned, is one of these committed people.

Juan, Stellistina, Dietra and Gwen taught me a lot. In their neighborhoods, planting was about much more than just flowers or trees. Planting meant a connection to kids, a connection to home, a connection to health and to natural beauty. Working in Lloyd and Wolcott made me think about how we assign value. I noticed the aesthetic benefits of Greenspaces resonating with the community members that I worked with this summer. People associate colorful flowering plants with thriving, safe and

healthy neighborhoods. There is good reason for this. Flowers in well-kept front yards, curb strips and pocket parks signify dedication to a neighborhood and the patience needed to nurture a healthy community. Flowers in public view, blooming in front yards, curbstrips, and pocket parks, mark territory. That is, they make a statement that the neighborhood is owned by its residents. People bringing drugs, trash, and disrespectful activities are unwelcome. Flowers make a quiet yet very powerful statement that the people that live in this neighborhood care about it and are taking care of it. This can be especially powerful in some of New Haven's poorer neighborhoods.

But what about the other, less visual benefits that urban plants contribute to the health of communities? What about the large, non-flowering trees such as oaks and maples that provide needed shade on hot summer days for pedestrians, and may even help decrease energy costs associated with air-conditioning in homes? In urban communities where traffic is abundant,



Lloyd and Wolcott residents plant a street tree.

Photo by Suzanne Oversee

what about the air-purifying benefits of street trees? What about the benefits provided to urban streams by community plantings, benefits such as water filtration, flood control, erosion control, and stormwater retention? These are benefits, things of value to us all but they are not qualities whose value we normally capture. It is difficult to measure the air purifying benefits of trees in dollars, or to measure the beneficial effects that planting has on Dietra's health. How can we measure the delight Stellistino takes

in remembering his childhood when he works on a Greenspace project? How can we measure the way my connection with Juan made me feel?

My summer internship with URI has inspired me to investigate some of these questions more deeply in my graduate thesis. While many types of benefit are difficult or impossible to capture, I hope my thesis will inform neighborhood residents and city officials of the benefits of urban plantings above and beyond the aesthetic benefits that contribute to healthy urban

neighborhoods. Hopefully, my findings will give reason to applaud the work of Community Greenspace groups even louder than before, and will also help to inform participants of the program, and city officials, precisely how much value there is in Greenspace.

Suzanne Oversee is a second year masters student at Yale F&ES focusing on urban ecology. Her research quantifies the value of the ecological services provided by street trees in New Haven.

Dirty Work:

An Update on URI's Preliminary Analysis of Soil Contamination and Remediation at Community Greenspace Sites

by Meg Arenberg (Extracted from a report by Wendy Francesconi)

Like many industrial cities in the Northeast, New Haven has areas of soil contamination. Contaminated soil can be dangerous when people, especially children, frequently come in contact with or even ingest it. While there might be good reasons to suspect that soil contamination is widespread in the Elm City, and certainly contaminated soils have been observed, we don't necessarily have a good handle on the level of contamination in our own parks and around our homes. This summer, URI Intern Wendy Francesconi began what we hope will be a continuing process of evaluating soil health in Greenspace sites. Our hope is that Wendy's preliminary study will help improve environmental health and minimize potential hazards to participants in the Greenspace Program and their families, improve soil safety and increase awareness of the problem.

With the support and collaboration of several local organizations, agencies and testing services, Wendy evaluated the levels of soil contamination on selected current Community Greenspace Program sites. URI also wanted to ensure that current Greenspace activities, such as planting, do not increase the chances of environmental health problems like lead poisoning, asthma, or low-

level chemical exposure through contact with soils. We aim to reduce these risks by developing a protocol for future soil remediation activities. Wendy sampled soils on five properties in neighborhoods around New Haven. Homeowners and tenants gave permission to test soils and were educated about the results and best ways to reduce exposure to contaminated soils when they were discovered. The soil was tested for five common contaminants: lead, arsenic, chromium, cadmium and thallium. Results revealed lead contamination was within acceptable parameters at two of the sites, in the "moderately-high" range at two of the sites and in "high" levels at one of the sites. The other contaminants were all within the acceptable range.

Remediation treatments for the lead contaminated sites included re-grading soil, creating raised beds of clean soil on top of the old soil, adding a layer (3-4 inches thick) of pine bark mulch, and then planting the area, being careful not to bring up and distribute contaminated soil. Neighborhood residents were actively involved in the sampling and remediation work carried out as part of this study, and education about environmental hazards was provided to residents at all of the sampled sites.

Wendy's analysis was a vital first step in URI's learning process about the nature of soil contamination in New Haven neighborhoods and how best to ensure that Community Greenspace restoration activities minimize environmental health hazards in these communities. URI will continue to build on this knowledge and implement best practices as financial resources and staff capacity allow.

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