

Hamilton Community Garden Networking Program 2019 Annual Report

What is the Hamilton Community Garden Networking Program?

The Hamilton Community Garden Networking (HCGN) program is run by Neighbour 2 Neighbour to sustain and expand the garden community of Hamilton and support Hamiltonians in using gardens to build the community, enhance the environment, and promote wellness.

The HCGN serves as a hub of the garden community by helping people:

- **Access Resources and Tools** to start, run, or participate in gardens through guides, and fact sheets, and get connected to supplies
- **Find Gardens** through the interactive garden directory and map
- **Learn and Connect** through list-servs, events, workshops, and meet-ups

Mission

The HCGN program engages and connects community garden organizers, members, and supporters as well as the public to collaboratively build and sustain the garden community of Hamilton.

Vision

A community in which everyone has the opportunity to participate in and benefit from gardens grown to meet their needs.

Definition

Community Gardens are spaces where plants are grown by a community to meet its needs.

History

In 2007, guided by community interest, Hamilton Public Health Services approached North Hamilton Community Health Centre about resurrecting the Hamilton-Wentworth Garden Network. Interested parties came together and the HCGN was formed.

In 2010, stakeholders came together with the Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee to develop and pass the Hamilton Community Garden Policy. In 2011 and 2012, Green Venture developed the HCGN to include branding, outreach tools, and workshops with support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the City of Hamilton Public Works, Public Health Services and many partners.

In 2013, the Ontario Trillium Foundation supported Green Venture and Neighbour 2 Neighbour in continuing to grow and define the HCGN and support food growing garden projects in Hamilton. Today N2N continues to grow and support community gardening initiatives in Hamilton through the HCGN program. Learn more at <http://www.n2ncentre.com/hamilton-community-food-centre/community-garden-networking-program/>

Annual Report Overview

The HCGN program provides support for garden coordinators, gardeners, and community members wanting to connect with community gardens in Hamilton. An annual report is produced to reflect on the program and for the greater community to see what was accomplished. In order to assess how Neighbour 2 Neighbour provides support to community gardens, an annual program survey is conducted with garden coordinators. The results help to adjust programming and improve the ways help is provided to gardens in the city. The findings of the survey are included in the Annual Report.

2019 HCGN Annual Report features:

- Current partners and supporters of the HCGN program
- The ways Neighbour 2 Neighbour has engaged community through the HCGN Program
- The ways Neighbour 2 Neighbour has provided support to gardens
- The successes of the community gardens in the city
 - These success are organized into 3 areas: building community, enhancing the environment and promoting wellness
- NEW: Amenities and Programming in Community Gardens
- Hamilton Community Garden Networking Program Statistics

Partnerships and Supporters of the HCGN Program

In 2019, Neighbour 2 Neighbour leveraged partnerships and worked with a diversity of Hamilton groups to strengthen the HCGN program.

Partnerships included:

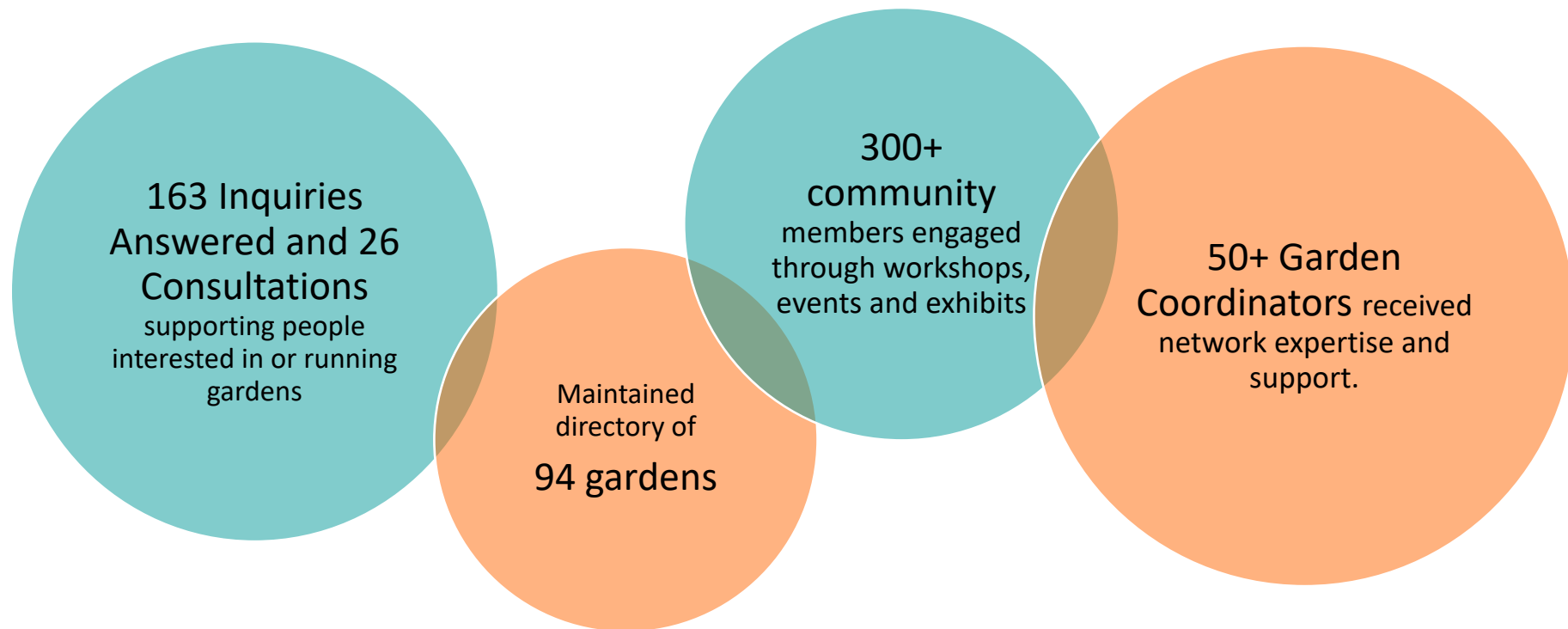
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Hamilton, Healthy Environments Division, Public Health Services, Healthy and Safe Communities Department • CityHousing Hamilton • Hamilton Victory Gardens | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compass Community Health Centre • Royal Botanical Gardens • Hamilton Mountain Paramedics • Mohawk College • Hamilton Wentworth Public and Catholic School Boards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Venture • Local suppliers • Community Food Centres Canada • McQuesten Urban Farm • Dundurn National Historic Site, Kitchen Garden |
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Support was provided by:



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

HCGN Program Engagement



Additional Network Engagement and Community Outreach

- 8 Gardening Workshops held at Neighbour 2 Neighbour were open to the HCGN program participants and gardeners across Hamilton. topics were: The Soil Food Web, Companion Planting, Fall Garlic Planting, and Yoga, Dance and Movement in the Garden.
- A Growing Season Review was held on November 25th, 2019 with participants in the HCGN program (coordinators of community gardens) to go over the growing season successes and challenges and make plans for reinstating quarterly Knowledge Swap meetings in 2020.

- Marked increase in traffic on HCGN list-serv

HCGN Program Support for Gardens

Neighbour 2 Neighbour has been able to offer annual Resource Boost opportunities for community gardens to access tools, equipment, and materials to improve their community gardens. In addition to this support a website featuring an online Hamilton Garden Directory, interactive map and library of online resources for coordinating gardens is maintained, a garden coordinator email list-serv is provided and moderated, and monthly winter Knowledge Swap meetings for garden coordinators are hosted.

- Resource Boosts in the spring of 2019 provided \$4,989.50 of in-kind donations and financial support for gardens and coordinators in the HCGN program.
- 89% of coordinators surveyed said that the Resource Boost was a useful way that the HCGN provided support to their garden.
- 37% of garden coordinators reported that the Resource Boost helped cover seasonal garden expenses. Rental fees and small grants were the next most significant sources of funding for gardens (26% and 11%, respectively).
- Top 3 garden expenses in 2019 were: 1. Garden Equipment (tools, hoses, etc), 2. Soil/compost, and 3. Plants and seeds.
- 73% of coordinators reported that the coordinator email list-serv was a major benefit to being in the program allowing them to be in touch with other garden coordinators in the City of Hamilton.
- The online garden directory and online resources were useful to 63% of gardeners surveyed.
- 68% of coordinators surveyed said the online resources and tools provided on the HCGN website were useful for running their garden.

“The Hamilton Community Garden Networking program has been vital in supporting our Giving Garden, so that we may further support others in our community. Thanks you.”

– **Donation Garden**

“Connecting with N2N staff has been very helpful. As a new garden it is helpful to be put in touch with resources and others that may have advice for us.”

– **Plot Garden**

“We are grateful for having the opportunity to connect to supportive resources for the members of our community. Without guidance and support from N2N through the HCGN we would have likely not been able to continue with this program.”

– **Tenant Garden**

Community Gardening Benefits

The HCGN program supports coordinators of gardens to improve life in the City of Hamilton in the following ways:

Build Community

People develop and leverage relationships out of gardens leading to other projects and partnerships.

- More than 1300 gardeners grew food in gardens across Hamilton in 2019, representing over 1000 households.
- Over 450 volunteers helped in 2019 connecting faith groups, service clubs and workplaces with community gardens across Hamilton.

Improved community access to gardens...

- Over 11 different languages are reported to be spoken by gardeners in community gardens across Hamilton, with most gardens having at least 2+ languages spoken.
- 47% of gardens surveyed are at least partly physically assessable, 15% are fully accessible including the shed and tool areas.
- 57% of gardens do not charge rental fees to participate and 16% offer a sliding scale for those who cannot pay the full amount.

- 979 school aged children and youth participated in community gardens through volunteer opportunities, educational visits, or children's garden programs.

- 77% of gardens surveyed said that their participants return each year to garden.

Enhance the Environment

Community gardens help the ecosystem in many ways.

- 72% use organic practices, and 61% have have pollinator species planted to promote pollinating insect and bird populations, 44% are growing native plants, 44% are watering in part with water harvested from rainwater, 61% are mulching soil during the growing season to conserve water.

- Approximately 200 square feet of community garden space was added in 2019. This number represents a few gardens adding a few extra beds to their spaces.

Promote Wellness

Community gardens increase access to fresh produce while promoting an active lifestyle and community involvement.

- 38,790 lbs of produce was donated to Hamilton food banks and meal programs in 2019.
- 27% of gardens host regular small events like barbecues and potlucks. 22% run their own gardening workshops.

Success Stories...

"People have begun to explore the garden, and have shown interest in volunteering. As this was our first year running it, we are looking forward to offering rental plots next season."

- Plot/Communal Garden Coordinator

"Milkweed plants had monarch eggs this year! A new volunteer has offered to coordinate the garden in 2020 and has already tested the soil and begun dreaming about strategies and ideas for greater veggie production."

- Donation Garden Coordinator

"The most significant change is the relationship that the children are creating with their food! They understand that you need to water and love your plants so that they produce the beautiful fruits. They have a sense of ownership and belonging!"

- Tenant Garden Coordinator

Programming and Amenities in Community Gardens

NEW this year*, we surveyed garden coordinators to find out about programming they currently host and what programs they would like to host if they could. Garden coordinators shared the reasons that they are not currently offering these specific programs. We also learned what existing garden amenities they have and asked what amenities they wished they had to improve the gardening experience. We present these findings to show how physical infrastructure improvements and more targeted animation would make gardens more welcoming, community spaces, and the resources that would be required.

Programming

Existing

Most of the gardens surveyed (over 50%) reported that they host programs at least once a year. The 2 most commonly reported programs were workshops and barbecues/potlucks. 40% of gardens said that they do not provide any form of programming.

Potential

Educational gardening workshops (for both adults and children) was the most reported programming that gardens would like to start running. Additional potential programs reported were preserving and cooking programs.

Resources Needed

The greatest barriers to being able to provide these programs were proximity and access to kitchen spaces (for preserving and cooking programming ideas), lack of staffing, and lack of funding. Time, energy, and motivation for volunteer coordinators and participants were also cited as reasons for not yet offering their dream programming. Community partnerships, where possible, would be one way to address some of these limitations. Distance from and limited access to certified kitchens would be a greater hurdle to overcome.

Amenities

Existing

Nearly 80% of gardens had a tool shed or something comparable to store gardening equipment. Over 50% had at least one table and close to 60% had some form of seating. 47% had some form of shade. Only 1 garden that completed the survey reported to have a gazebo.

Potential

When asked what amenities would improve their gardeners' experience in their garden, the most reported amenity was educational signs (56%) followed by shade, a gazebo, and seating (all at 43%). One garden noted that their proximity to a play structure and a splash pad were important amenities for their gardeners. Considering how gardens are positioned in multi-use public green spaces as well as the distances and sight-lines to these separate, public amenities would give a greater appreciation of the experience of gardeners who use these spaces with other family members. We intend to ask questions to address this in future surveys.

Resources Needed

Funds to purchase the materials needed as well as volunteer time to source, build and install these amenities were cited as the main reasons for not already having these amenities.

*This new area for the survey was requested by Heather Harvey, Health Promotion Specialist and Registered Dietitian, Healthy and Safe Communities, City of Hamilton. Questions were designed with N2N staff and added to the existing Annual Survey. Survey participants were made aware of the changes to the survey and the partnership with Public Health in the introduction to the survey.

Hamilton Community Garden Networking Program Statistics

HCGN Program Stats by Ward	
Ward Number	Number of Gardens 2019
Ward 1	10
Ward 2	20
Ward 3	12
Ward 4	5
Ward 5	5
Ward 6	8
Ward 7	6
Ward 8	8
Ward 9	1
Ward 10	3
Ward 11	1
Ward 12	4
Ward 13	4
Ward 14	4
Ward 15	3
Total	94

HCGN Stats - Total Gardens Per Year by Type to 2019											
Type	Pre 2010	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Plot	7	10	14	17	19	22	21	24	25	23	21
Youth/School	2	3	5	10	12	13	11	12	13	14	13
Donation	1	1	2	2	5	5	5	3	3	8	9
Hamilton Victory Gardens	0	0	1	4	5	9	15	15	17	10	8
Communal	1	1	1	2	2	2	8	7	7	6	4
CityHousing + Tenant	0	0	7	20	28	33	33	34	34	36	37
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
Total	11	15	30	55	71	84	93	95	101	99	94

Garden Closures:

- Bartonville Garden at Faith Lutheran Church closed.
- Budget Environmental location of Hamilton Victory Gardens closed.
- No contact from Carpenter's Garden, Ancaster Discovery Gardens, and Streetlight Children's Garden.
- Rygiel Supports for Community Living Garden confirmed that they did not grow in 2019 after extreme vandalism in late 2018.