



YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Success Story

Amy & volunteers preparing the ground for the planting of a new community orchard

Increasing access to healthy food and engaging people to build healthier communities

THE KINGSTON COMMUNITY GARDENS
Network yields thousands of pounds of organic fresh produce every year for donations to meal programs, shelters and other organizations running food security programs.

With 35 community gardens and five community orchards across the city, the Network increases local food production and access to affordable, healthy food. It also fosters community engagement and connections, as volunteers join staff to plant, grow and harvest the fruits and vegetables.

The City of Kingston contracts with Loving Spoonful, an organization that promotes healthy eating and urban agriculture, to run the Network.



KINGSTON,
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Kingston Community Health Centres (KCHC) community development workers and volunteers were the first to introduce fruit production into the Network with the planting of three community orchards in Rideau Heights, a low-income neighbourhood in the City's north end. The Community Development division of the KCHC has designated Rideau Heights as an area to revitalize and strengthen. Through its Pathways to Education program, KCHC supports high school students in the area to successfully transition to post-secondary education, training or meaningful employment.

Loving Spoonful and KCHC's Pathways to Education both aim to engage students in Rideau Heights in the development and maintenance of community gardens and orchards. The two organizations jointly applied for and received funding under CPRA's Youth Employment Experience program to hire a Community Gardens & Orchards Assistant, who would support the gardens and orchards in the neighbourhood and elsewhere in the city in the summer of 2021.

CPRA's program, which is funded by the Government of Canada, is designed to help organizations in the parks and recreation sector enhance their programs and to expand opportunities for young people to gain experience in the sector.

The young person hired for the position was 23-year-old Amy Sebo, a resident of the Kingston area who had recently graduated from Guelph University with a degree in nutrition and dietetics. "I was attracted to this opportunity to gain hands-on experience in areas that I had learned about in my studies. Food sustainability, wildlife and the environment are all passions of mine and this position strengthened those passions and understanding that all those things are connected," Amy says.

The position provided Amy with multiple learning opportunities, she says. "In addition to acquiring new gardening skills, I gained knowledge about local food systems and how important fresh-food access is in the community."

One of Amy's mentors was Ayla Fenton, Urban Agriculture Organizer with Loving Spoonful.

"My background is in organic farming and being able to share that knowledge and work alongside Amy in the gardens was very rewarding for both of us," Ayla says.

"And the CPRA mentorship guide was very helpful as Amy and I clarified her goals for the position – one of which was to gain experience coordinating the work of volunteers," she adds. "Everyone was very impressed with the great job she did in managing volunteers working in the gardens and the markets."



Amy & Kelsey Tucker (coordinator of the Addictions & Mental Health Services Community Garden) harvesting grapes for donation to Loving Spoonful.

Amy agrees that the community development aspect of the position – playing a role in bringing people together to accomplish shared goals – was especially valuable for her skills development.

"I learned so much working in a small team in a not-for-profit that relies on community support. It was great to work with all the people stepping up to make the Kingston Community Gardens Network a success – volunteers, local farmers and gardeners, and partner organizations."

Another mentor for Amy was Joanna Rivera, Pathways to Education Facilitator, who says she enjoyed sharing knowledge with her about the city's efforts to build healthier communities.

"Amy helped us develop promotional materials aimed at connecting school-age children in Rideau Heights with the orchards and volunteer opportunities to help care for them," Joanna says.

In addition to the food security benefits, the orchards in the neighbourhood are also about "having beautiful spaces that people can feel are theirs and take pride in maintaining," she says. "It's powerful to be able to give people public spaces that they see as gathering places that have a positive impact on their well-being." 🍁