

## A Year of Helping to “Grow It Forward”

As year one of AmeriCorps service draws to a close, I have much positive to reflect upon.

For the past year, I have been serving as a Farm to School Specialist in the AmeriCorps at Grow It Forward Community Food Center. When we had our training last August, we were told that the year was going to fly. Did it ever! I can't believe that my year of service is almost done. AmeriCorps gives the option to serve a second year. I was planning on serving just the one year but events in the last few months have changed my mind.

In May, we held a Gardenpalooza event at the S. 14th Street Community Gardens. This space is technically a Manitowoc City Park but it is managed by Grow It Forward. We had a morning of garden activities for kids, including a performance by entertainer Judy Stock. Students had a chance to plant, transplant, play games, make garden totes out of repurposed seed bags. In addition, students and their parents were able to take a tour of the garden and the greenhouse.

Also in May was Wisconsin School Garden Day. On May 20th, about 200 students and eleven teachers from Monroe Elementary School visited the gardens. They talked about the MyPlate standards, food miles and took a tour of the garden and greenhouse. They also took part in a scavenger hunt, where they located various vegetables and plants.

As an educator for thirty years, I enjoyed the years I was in the classroom. Working with young people is invigorating and fun. If I am honest with myself, I miss teaching. The two events I just mentioned helped me to transform my thinking and picture the community garden as my new classroom.



For the last eight weeks, I have been teaching a Recreation Department class and working with youth in the YMCA's Y Break program. These two programs occupied my Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Most of the students were new to gardening and learned much as they helped. With the Y program, college students were the advisors. A few of them had limited knowledge when it came to gardening so they learned as well.

One young man fell in love with Sun Gold Tomatoes and Dragon Tongue Beans. He loved picking them and munching them right off the plant. He had plenty to take home and in return, he painted a picture of a Sun Gold Tomato plant for me.

Last month, AmeriCorps provided us with access to a Kids Gardening conference that was put on in conjunction with the American Horticulture Society. I learned a couple things that I can put to use as I work to transform our S. 14th Street Community Garden into a school garden for use by all students, but specifically, Monroe Elementary School which is housed on the same block.