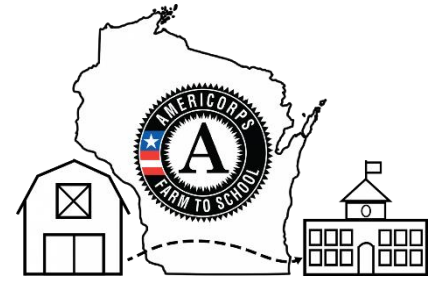


Inspiring Student Involvement

Deena Dawn Larsen



Creativity. Activity. Service. All students who are working toward a full International Baccalaureate diploma need to take part in CAS. According to ib.org, "CAS is designed to strengthen and extend students' personal and interpersonal learning." With the pandemic, finding places available for students to fulfill this component has been a challenge.

Dana Bongle is a teacher at Lincoln High School and on the board of directors for Grow It Forward. He was aware that CAS Coordinator, Barb Bundy-Jost was looking for places in the community for the students to volunteer. "The International Baccalaureate Organization requires all full diploma students to perform 150 hours of community service over a two-year period of time. This commitment enables students to enhance their personal and interpersonal development by learning through experience," said Bundy-Jost.



Pairing the students with Grow It Forward has been an ideal match. Bundy-Jost added that, "Our partnership with Grow It Forward provides opportunities for collaboration with others, self-development, and fosters a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment from their work! We have explored and experienced new facets of what building a strong community looks like - which builds a deeper understanding of how important our selfless contribution is to the whole community."



Since there is minimal traffic in the Grow It Forward Community Food Center building, social distancing is easy to accomplish. The proper wearing of masks is required in the building, adding a further level of safety. Each Friday morning, the students and Bundy-Jost meet with AmeriCorps Farm to School Specialist Deena Larsen. They discuss food insecurity, indoor grow towers, and the needs of the community, among other topics.

Grow It Forward has partnered with Fork Farms and recently Gil Shaw, Strategic Partnerships Director, spent time at Grow It Forward working with the students. Each tower can produce 20+ pounds of high-quality lettuce each month. Lettuce is used to supply families in need, for community meals, and will soon be sold online via the Grow It Forward website. Two students, Joey Beattie and Kaelle Hoepfner, are working with the indoor grow towers more closely, stopping in each week to help maintain proper growing conditions.



Aydan Linderud has been working with the administrative side of things. He has been helping research potential grants and look at city ordinances for possible future endeavors such as beehives and chickens. Recently, Linderud and Amber Daus, CEO of Grow It Forward, took part in a Zoom meeting with a representative of Youth Voices Against Hunger, part of the Hunger Task Force. Linderud is motivated to have an impact. "I've found so much that I have an appreciation for as a result of my time involved with

Grow It Forward, and will do as much in my power to ensure the program continues and has value to our community. "

Each of the students is approaching the issue of food scarcity from different angles. Ripley Walters-Giblin is interested in the area of graphic arts, using her skills to help promote programs. There are all sorts of materials that need to be designed, from brochures to buttons to murals. Ivy Gauthier has looked at the literal food scarcity side of things. Her plan is to



reflect on the food boxes being handed out. Logan Anderson has been working to keep the pantry shelves organized and help to fill boxes from the pantry for people in need. Izzy Bennett and Sam Czekala are working on the Elder Project. They will be connecting with elders in the community to share stories of gardening and farming as it would have looked years ago. Bennett commented, "The work that's done at Grow It Forward is going to change Manitowoc for the better, and I am so happy to be involved!"

Beyond the IB students, other young people have been involved as well. Joey O'Connor is working on a musical

fundraiser for Grow It Forward this spring. Explaining why he chose to get involved, O'Connor said, "what really inspires me about Grow It Forward is the dedication and caring the people involved put into what they do. They're truly working tirelessly to make our community a better place for everyone."

Additionally, Eagle scout Carson Goetz has placed one of his Blessing Boxes outside of the Grow It Forward Community Food Center. Recently, Goetz was on Coffee on the Coast with Tina Prigge, explaining the motivation and purpose behind the Blessing Box, "Take what you need and leave what you can." On the program, Carson said that, "it is important to help out our community during these difficult times." Jason Prigge, from Coolest Coast and Grow It Forward board member commented, "it is so great to see young people showing empathy and compassion in our community."

Grow It Forward is indeed a community food center. "We are fortunate to be part of such a giving community," commented Larsen. She added, "And we are fortunate to have young people who give of their time to help others in need." Perhaps Aydan Linderud said it best, "the intention and goal of the program (Grow It Forward) is to succeed to the point where it is not needed anymore, but at this time, the people of this city can count on the youth to make the community as well as the world, a better place."