

Harvest the North fighting poverty with food



Without access to healthy food it is hard for people to survive let alone find hope for the future. Recognizing how this struggle for survival manifests in North Hastings a team of sustainable food activists and partnering organizations have come together under the Harvest the North community garden initiative to put an end to hunger in the Bancroft area. The community gardens will be located in 10 three foot by six foot tall garden boxes about 18 inches deep, to be constructed along the riverside nearby the new strawbale canteen in Riverside Park.

?We really want it to reach as many people as possible,? said Jane Kali, one of Harvest the North's co-creators.

?The idea is to involve as many community members as possible, through agencies, community groups or even if a group of individuals want to get together and partner on the garden than they could have some of the food as well.?

The boxes will be constructed of locally harvested cedar or hemlock, and will be built, planted, maintained and harvested by the Harvest the North partners designated to look after each individual garden. Partnering organizations and individuals in the project so far include: Hastings Prince Edward Public Health Unit, the North Hastings Community Cupboard, North Hastings Community Trust, Bancroft Public Library, Lucky Duck Tattoos, A Brush With The North, North Hastings Youth in Action, Carol Kennedy, Pony Spring Farms, Metis Nation, Ministry of Natural Resources, Harvest Hastings, Renelle Farr, Student, North Hastings High School, Pat Stephenson, Erin McCorkell, Sean-Lee Popham, Miriam Hookings David Ferguson and the Art Gallery of Bancroft.

?People who are partners and are managing looking after their beds can decide what they want to grow, but we also have access to lots of plants and seeds that we can contribute and share with people,? Kali said.

?We are asking that the seeds all be non-GMO, and ended that people stay mindful of sustainable food growing practices with no

toxins. We will also be partnering with Laurie Ann Storrington's Growing Stories Seed Library at the Hastings Highlands library to get some of our seeds and plants.?

With so many partners involved in the project, Kali expects Harvest the North to continue to grow and evolve as the growing season comes to pass each year. Already Harvest the North has decided to expand by inviting people to take part in the community gardening initiative in empty growing spaces where they live. Since the group started working together on Harvest the North, Kali has noticed there is currently a buzz around growing your own food and community gardening.

Kali, who is also the North Hastings Community Trust's project coordinator, believes the initiative has huge potential to help build a stronger more vibrant community. By helping people grow food for their families, this project not only helps to eliminate hunger, she said, it also helps free people from the pressures of 'feeling stuck' within the cycle of poverty that caused them to go hungry in the first place.

According to Kali, local food security all comes down to working together and sharing the fruits of our labour.

'We're going to share,' she said.

'We are asking everyone that has a bed to share some of what they produce with the food bank, but then the people who are involved with the bed should also be able to feed themselves.'

The committee plans to celebrate the abundance gathered from the Harvest the North community gardens throughout the growing season with its partners and the community in a series of community events and workshops. They will also be bringing in someone from the Peterborough community gardens to hold a workshop for people interested in growing food sustainably.

'This is about community,' added Bancroft Councillor Bill Kilpatrick.

'If everybody does their little bit it helps a lot. It really is that simple and we have lost that whole communal mentality. I would like to see it come back and I think this is a great way to do it.'

Harvest the North growing partner Jay Gizuk recognizes shares this passion for community gardening. Also, a student at Loyalist College, he sees unlimited possibilities for growing food on municipal and private property throughout town.

'If you look around at community gardening it's huge in Ontario,' said Gizuk.

'In a lot of other small towns and communities it's there and it's established... and we want follow suit. We want to be sustainable, and be local. We know what we are going to grow; we know the vegetables that we are going to eat and how they are grown and we are not going to waste them. We don't want to put a huge footprint on our environment. By growing locally we're going to cut down our emissions and all sorts of other wasteful behaviour.'

In preparing to build these growing spaces the group is looking for donations to help see the project through. They are also looking for a materials such as: wood, preferably cedar or Hemlock, soil, compost and more growing partners to get involved in harvesting the North.

For more information contact Jane Kali at northhastingscommunitytrust@gmail.com.