

Down on the Farm

From the Executive Director



Photo by: Paul Schraub

Happy New Year to everyone! I hope you have as much enthusiasm and excitement about the potential for 2007 as all of us here at HGP are feeling these days. We ended 2006 on a great note with you exceeding all of our challenge grants, the holiday store doing better than hoped for in its out-of-the-way location, being able to keep more trainees than ever on the payroll year-round, and the new Cultivating Community youth outreach program having its first recruited participants. There's more on these topics inside. We definitely would not be in this positive position though without a little help from our friends, as the song goes. Actually, it's with a lot of help from our friends and we just can't thank you enough!

With a little help from...

Being in the position of offering help to those who need it is at the heart of the Homeless Garden Project. As a manifestation of the community's interest, we are here to ensure that your individual donations are collectively put to the best use in providing a place where we all can come together and create relationships with one another; where we can learn how to incorporate sustainability (emotional, environmental, and intellectual) into our lives; and where those who are homeless can earn a wage while being supported to better their circumstances. Although we focus on the stories of those who are most in need when they come to us, we firmly believe that everyone who comes into contact with the Homeless Garden Project is all the better for that connection. Whether it is through mindful peacefulness as a result of an hour's weeding in the sun, or a burgeoning new friendship after sharing a meal with a stranger, or more healthy meals because you have fresh veggies from the CSA, or even the joy of having a beautiful wreath made with organic flowers grown and crafted locally by people who are trying to do better for themselves. There are many ways in which we all can benefit from being an active part of positive change and I hope you will take advantage of this in 2007.

Unfortunately, the Homeless Garden Project cannot provide solutions to all the needs that people bring to us. We live in an integrated society whereby the actions of federal and state institutions far away have profound consequences for the lives of our community members. While low education levels and lack of job skills are responsible for many people being homeless, another important contributing factor to homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. Despite the successes of our job preparedness enterprises, Santa Cruz is still an incredibly expensive place in which to rent a home and the waiting list for housing subsidies has been closed for two years. Even those on the waiting list may have to survive for up to seven years before receiving a housing subsidy and the amount of affordable housing being built in this area is truly under-whelming. Yes, the minimum wage just increased to \$7.50/hr but even working 40 hours/week only amounts to \$1290/month pre-tax, and with the average studio apartment renting for \$900/month it is an extraordinary achievement to make ends meet.

The Homeless Garden Project is not in the business of constructing homes, but together we can make life better for those who are most in need, helping them access those resources that are available and providing jobs where they can start earning their own money again. With a little help from friends we can make it through and maybe make some more friends in the process.

— Dawn Coppin

From the Board— Introducing Ellen McGibben

It is with great pleasure that we welcome Ellen McGibben to Homeless Garden Project's Board of Directors. Although Ellen has only been on the Board since the end of 2006, she already stepping up to the plate by volunteering to lead the planning for one of the events in 2007. We still have a couple of openings on the Board for anyone who is dedicated to helping the Project achieve all that it can in the coming year. Let me know if this is you (426-3609, extension 1#) Dawn Coppin.

I was introduced to the Homeless Garden Project by Barbara Johnson, Secretary of the Board of Directors. I have known Barbara for many years due to our association as Registered Nurses. Prior to this, my volunteer work was connected either to health care or my son's various activities. I was involved with Hospice Caring Project as a volunteer R.N. in its early days and instrumental in formation of the first "I Can Cope" workshops for cancer patients and their families. I served as the California Nurses Association Union Representative (a volunteer position) for several years at Watsonville Community Hospital.

Barbara caught me at a time when I was searching for a new direction. The Homeless Garden Project meets so many community needs and integrates those needs so well that I am very pleased to be a part of it. I currently work a couple of days a week as an RN in the Post Anesthesia Care Unit of the Santa Cruz Surgery Center as well as operating my own Real Estate Brokerage, McGibben Properties.



Ellen McGibben

Voices from the Fields...

As I see it

The most important thing about the Garden is the community. I didn't know it was going to be that way when I first came to the Project. I didn't even know there was a program. On the street, there isn't much of a community and what there is, isn't very encouraging. After I came here to HGP, I found out that the Garden is a community of people that want to work together, that support each other and care about each other. Knowing how to work together is a learning process, some people come and don't know how to fit in, maybe never had a job before. Sometimes, it's a slow process; it just takes patience, understanding and support. On the street, there's no support system. You can get free meals, but no support. There's a stigma to being homeless. There are people who are homeless who want to do more, but there just isn't any place to do it. The lifestyle doesn't promote self-esteem. Once I got started working here, I got more self-confidence and self-esteem— those things are important.

The garden itself definitely figures into the community. Everything here needs to be cared for. Other jobs, you're not really caring for things, you're fixing or selling, or... what makes the Garden a community is that everything is nurtured including people. Someone has a bad day and you try to find out what's going on. Something happened the other day that really kind of made my day. One of the girls from

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All photos in this issue were taken by Jon Kersey except where otherwise noted. We thank him for his support!

Laurel Street (a day program for developmentally disabled people that visits and works at the Garden regularly) that really doesn't speak much, arrived smiling and happy giving me a big hug. Having our meals together is important. Cooking and sharing meals helps bring community closer together.

What led to your being homeless?

It started with coming from a fairly messed-up family, being beaten and tortured as a kid, being psychologically damaged really young. If you have emotional problems and don't learn how to deal with things, when you grow up, there's no one really to teach you those things you should've learned as a kid. I became angry and antisocial. I was raised in foster homes, reform schools and even two years in prison. I grew up disliking all authority figures. There's always an authority figure in your life— police or a boss— and you have to learn how to deal well with them.

The event immediately before I became homeless?

My father took a shotgun to me when I was seventeen. I hitchhiked down here to get out of the snow. (I hadn't finished high school. I got my GED in jail; it was actually fun.)

I know I'm not the same guy I was twenty years ago. I always wanted to be responsible and live within society. I just couldn't. The thing that's changed the most is anger. Maybe it's believing in God, working on myself. I still have the propensity to be angry; I don't like that in myself. My dad always dealt with problems with either violence or indifference, running away from whatever wasn't to his liking. I found myself doing that— running away. I haven't talked to him in thirty or thirty-five years.

Being homeless, especially after doing it for 25 years, becomes your comfort zone. You don't have to deal with society, you can disappear. You're really invisible when you go downtown. When things got too hard—a job or a relationship— I'd go back to the street. I was used to it. It was easier than to deal with some situations that I should have dealt with, but I didn't know how. It's running away. Mostly, it's communication skills that I need to work on. I was in a recovery program at Salvation Army and I got kind of jazzed about doing something different, moving out of my comfort zone and taking chances. But the same thing happened. I had a confrontation with a roommate and I did everything staff asked me to do to resolve it, and it didn't work out. So I left and didn't even tell anyone. I probably set myself up for that one— I had my camp gear and my bike; I was prepared for it. I knew it would happen.

Voices from the Fields...

What would need to happen for you to get into and stay in housing?

Well, that attitude about the street as my comfort zone! I don't want to get into housing and have it go the way it's been before. I want it to last. In the past, I haven't had a support network; I wouldn't go looking for resources. It's hard for me to ask for help. I don't think it's pride, maybe it's fear. I've always had fear of people— guess it's my upbringing— fear of being rejected? I don't let people in. I'm trying to be open right here. In my comfort zone, I don't have to take risks.

How did I give my anger away?

Mainly, I pray, meditate, reflect. And, also, I think of people so much less fortunate than me. It's been a gradual thing; it's not like I woke up one day and it was gone. Listening to sermons helped too. The anger and hatred I had for my father was the driving force in my life. I was always angry which led to being depressed, even suicidal. I have tried to forgive my father for everything he did to me and my family. I think it's made a difference.



Above: Jorge and Kim at the farm
Middle: Rose cooks for us on Tuesdays
Bottom: Carol



What makes moving out of homelessness difficult depends a lot on how you feel about yourself. Depression is such a huge part of it. If you feel you don't deserve to be part of the community, it's not going to be easy. Society treats people who are homeless as if they are not part of society. For example, most people want to be clean, but we all have to prioritize; sometimes food has to come first or staying warm. Every time I got off the streets, I've always had help. Someone gave me a job or a place to sleep. I didn't do it alone. I didn't have any support network before I came to the Garden. This is unique as a support system because here, I don't have to be around people that are using drugs or fighting. My support network is made up of the staff at the Garden, people who work here or even people who come around here and don't work here. I have a place to work and stay in the mountains over the weekend. My friend there has been good about coming down and getting me when it's cold.

What do you consider the most valuable parts of your education?

I think it's learning to be understanding. I've got a long ways to go, but I think that's been the most valuable part— learning to understand people. The face of pain takes on many forms. Someone who is drunk and happy— that's their pain face. Someone who is angry and fighting— that's their pain face. I try to understand and be compassionate. Another valuable lesson has been forgiveness for myself and for others.

Will you talk more about the stigma you feel as a person who is homeless?

It's being generalized— you're not an individual when you're homeless. It's being generalized as all the derogatory things that some people who are homeless might do. People look at my long hair and beard and think I must be a drug addict or a dishonest person. It makes me feel good when I get to show someone that not all people who are homeless fit the stereotype. I might open a door or help someone carry something and they're surprised. I've had people comment, you're nothing like I thought homeless people were.

— Rob Vallandigham is a trainee at the HGP and has had experience planting trees, doing carpentry, installing furnaces, air conditioning and training quarter horses.

Voices from the Fields...

The best dirty job I ever had

On Saturday January 13th I spent several hours digging in the dirt. That probably doesn't sound so strange coming from an HGP staff member. Who helped me in the digging was even more important. As the new Outreach Coordinator at the Homeless Garden Project, my job is to get teenagers outside, on the farm, hopefully willing to get their hands dirty and their minds more open to the philosophy of sustainable living. Most importantly, as I see it, my job is to make sure they have FUN!

The kids I hung out with on Saturday were students from Watsonville High School looking to do some community service hours. Putting teenagers to work on a farm. They walked on to the farm and my first thought was, "How do I convince them to get down and dirty—to let loose and have fun doing something they wouldn't usually do on a Saturday morning?" After about ten minutes, we worked it out, as usual. One thing I'm confident in is my ability to work with people this age and to get them to have fun in situations they may not feel so comfortable in. So, we joked around! We talked about their families at the same time that we discussed the advantages of organic produce. We saw who was strong enough to pull out the biggest weeds—none of us were and we had to use a pitchfork in the end.



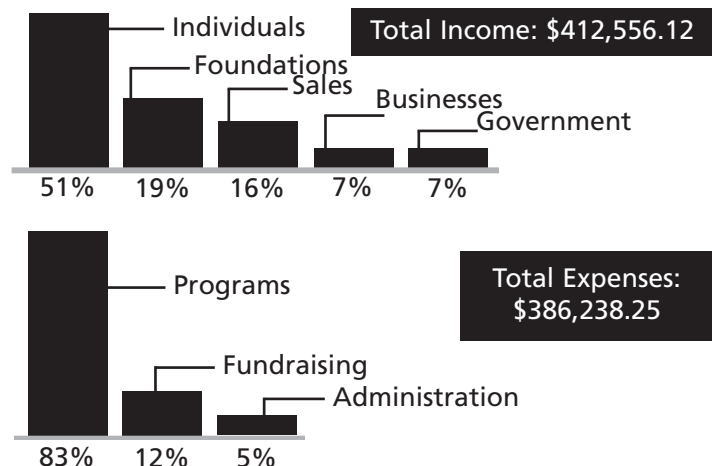
Then, the highlight of the day came—FOOD! We harvested bunches of greens (chard and kales) which nobody had ever eaten. We chopped onions and discussed the vital nutrients our bodies get from fresh vegetables. Then we ate, all sitting at one table, talking and laughing, something they had harvested and prepared themselves. WOW! The joy that brings to a young person is truly inspiring. Josue, a 13 year-old tough guy, took a plate full of rice and two tiny pieces of kale. I stood by silently and watched. A minute later he stood up, exclaiming, "Damn! That stuff is good!" and grabbed a whole lot more. By the end our meal together they were asking me where they could buy "this stuff" so they could make it at home.

My job is to get teenagers outside, on the farm, hopefully willing to get their hands dirty and their minds more open to the philosophy of sustainable living.

When I was looking for a job last year a friend asked me what my dream job would be. My instant response was to work with kids on a farm. "I don't think I can actually do that in Santa Cruz, though." Obviously I was wrong because two months later I was hired by HGP to do exactly that. When someone asks me about my new job, I can't help but smile. Not everyone is lucky enough to work with youth, on a farm and share these kinds of experiences. I am ecstatic to do what I do. I am blessed to have been welcomed into such an amazing community.

— Layla Aguilar

Revenue/Expense Streams 2006



Recent tribute gifts made to the Homeless Garden Project:

In Memory Of:

The F.O.G. — Joseph Matheny
Patricia Green — Kathleen and Dana Jones
Susan Lentz — Joan Domin-Hentges and David Hentges
June Swenson — Margaret and Donald Fitzgerald
Bill Tracey
— Katherine Beiers, Peter Beckman, James Bottini,
Jack Bowers, Linda Charman, Richard and
Diane Doubrava, Diane and Jeffrey Gunvalson, Maggie
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Sharon and Jim King, Rebecca and Jim Lang, Diane Molnar,
Anne Murphy, Ann Ramer, Donna and William Smith,
Woutje Swets

In Honor Of:

Adam — Linda Clevenger
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Angela Finfrock — Andrew and Betty Finfrock
Jesse Finfrock and Rachel Lichte
— Andrew and Betty Finfrock
Ginny and Chris — Jeanette and Peter Katzlberger
Ellen Garrett, our 4th Grade Teacher!
— Kim Rhody and her family
Farol Henderson and Mike Vickers
— Robert and Vivian Vaughan
Christina Howard — Amber Rohrer
Elizabeth and Robert Imlay
— Robin Imlay and Jeffrey Hing
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The McPheeters Family — Rachel Dvorsky
Cate Mugasis — Karen Harwood
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Bernice Rendrick — Joan Zimmerman
Bill and Annie Salmansohn for Chanukah
— Muriel Salmansohn
Becky and Bob Spitzer
— Mandy Spitzer and Victor Schiffrin
Wes Thomson — Anonymous
Junco Uno — Frank Dietrich

Community Fundraisers for the Project

Third Party Events are a great way to financially support our programs! By choosing the Homeless Garden Project as a beneficiary of your upcoming event, you not only raise much-needed funds but also bring awareness to the community about the services available at our Farm. For additional information or ideas, please contact Vivian at 419-1189 or at vivianr@homelessgardenproject.org.

We'd also like to give two big thanks to recent community events put together for us:

Seascape Foods for hosting a holiday store of our products in their Aptos shop.

Laurie Broderick-Burr and her yoga students for their Thanksgiving event.

The Project values the support of the following foundations. Their gifts allow us to continue the work we do at the farm. Thank you!

- Bioneers Fund Grant
- Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County:
Brian and Patricia A. Herman Fund, The Native Iris Fund
The Spring Fund, The Stocker Family Fund
- Community Foundation of Silicon Valley:
Quentin Hancock Fund
- East Bay Community Foundation
- Jewish Community Endowment Fund
The Purple Lady Fund
- Mazal Foundation
- AT&T Pebble Beach Charities
- Newman's Own Foundation
- William L. Price Charitable Foundation
- San Francisco Foundation:
Alper Fund, Jordan Family Fund
- Porter Sesnon Foundation
- George L. Shields Foundation
- Stewardship Council
- U.S. Bank Foundation
- Helen and Bill Webster Foundation
- Wells Fargo Foundation
- Women Helping Others (W.H.O.) Foundation

The Homeless Garden Project

P.O. Box 617 • Santa Cruz, California • 95061

See our Web Site: www.homelessgardenproject.org
or call us at: (831) 426-3609

Be an active supporter:

- _____ \$1,000. Friend of the Garden
- _____ \$ 500. Cultivator of the Garden
- _____ \$ 250. Sower of the Garden
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Enjoy a great meal while supporting the Homeless Garden Project!

Invite a friend to join you at

Ristorante Avanti
Monday, March 5—

for dinner. 1711 Mission Street
831.427.0135 for reservations

Charlie Hong Kong
Tuesday, May 8—

all day! 1141 Soquel Avenue

Our Partner-in-Dining will donate a portion of your entire bill to our employment training programs.

Mark the date and bon appetite!

Lettuce tickle your fancy this VALENTINE'S Day

Visit us at our year-round store location next to Depot Park.

Feb 8—18
Mon—Fri: 10-5 Sat—Sun: 10-6

Fresh flowers from Bonny Doon Garden Co.,
cookie mix, wreaths, floral hearts, candles and more!

Come visit us!

