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**Community Organizations Create Roc Kids Grow
Collaboration forms to encourage learning through gardening**

During this time of COVID-19, the Rochester community has seen disruptions to the food supply chain that have made finding some foods challenging, and have caused prices to increase for many foods. Financial challenges due to job loss or reduction of hours have affected many families. Stress is at an all-time high, and many have found it may be mitigated by spending time outdoors. Conditions in Spring 2020 have created the perfect recipe for an increase in gardening.

As organizations in Rochester began to realize this, they formed a collaborative effort which has come to be known as Roc Kids Grow. Plans were made to support one hundred Rochester School District families to learn about and experience gardening during a time when they were socially distanced from school and other learning opportunities. "The outdoor education and hands-on growing experiences we provide in our programs for school children needed to evolve to meet the needs of this moment," said Katie Nuber, Therapeutic Horticulture Programs Coordinator at EquiCenter, INC. "We needed to adapt in order to continue serving our communities. That meant bringing the materials and instruction to families at home."

Nuber pointed out, "It was important to all the partners involved that we limit barriers to access for participating families. Gardening can be an expensive endeavor, especially in the city where planting in the ground is not always possible. Container garden kits seemed like the perfect solution for supporting youth and their families in learning the new skill of gardening at home." Growing Out of Poverty, funded through the RMAPI Participatory Budgeting Project, provided the resources to assemble and distribute gardening kits. Each family received a ten gallon grow bag. Bags were filled with soil donated by The Garden Factory. Families also received seeds donated by Black Button Distillery and the City of Rochester Department of Recreation and Youth Services. In their kit, families received gardening gloves and a trowel. Through the Growing Out of Poverty initiative, three RCSD students received stipends for helping fill the bags, assemble the kits and make deliveries. Cornell Cooperative Extension Monroe County and 4-H Youth Development provided a growing tips sheet and provided information that was contained on a USB Drive.

After families received all of their gardening goodies, they were invited to attend a Zoom workshop Planting Party. Lori Koenick, 4-H Educator at CCE-Monroe, and Selena Ragland, Outreach coordinator at South East Area Coalition, led families through soil preparation,

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reading seed packets, best growing locations, and actual planting in the containers. Koenick shared how excited the youth were to get their hands dirty in the soil and plant their seeds.

Families involved in the project will receive additional gardening and community building support through a private Facebook group and regularly scheduled Zoom calls. Rachel Betts, at Connected Communities, serves as admin for the group and provides opportunities for connection, including special gardening tips and a place for families to discuss their gardening experiences -- sharing both the challenges and successes of growing food. The project will end the growing season with a Fall Harvest Party to celebrate the abundance of fresh foods and community grown throughout the summer.

Organizations that collaborated to pull this project together are numerous. They include the City of Rochester Department of Recreation and Youth Services, Equi-Center, Connected Communities Emma & Beechwood, St. Marks & St. Johns, South Wedge Food Program, 441 Ministries, Growing Out of Poverty, South East Area Coalition, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Monroe County, and Monroe County 4-H Youth Development.



Roc Kids Grow participants learning about gardening

