

A fresh start

Written by Titilayo Bediako
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For the past three years, WE WIN Institute has included gardens in its summer program for children, ages 5-15.

In conjunction with Zion Baptist Church, WE WIN maintains a garden that is over an acre in front of the church, which faces Olson Memorial Highway. WE WIN believes it is important to not only feed students healthy foods in its programs, but to let them learn about food firsthand by studying about, growing, watering, weeding, picking and cooking the food that we grow. Children have also sold produced grown at local farmers markets.

This summer, WE WIN has shared 25 percent of its garden with a new innovative program called Fresh Start. Fresh Start is a collaboration between LeCreche' Early Childhood Center, WE WIN Institute, and the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), which is evaluating the benefits of the program to families, older youth and the Community.

Every week, WE WIN students work with the other partners to teach preschoolers and their parents about every aspect of growing and preparing food. WE WIN children, who range from 11 – 14-years-old, are at stations where they do a variety of activities with the toddlers and their families. They have taste testing activities, where children identify the flavors, textures, colors, and uses of food. They also learn how to make delicious drinks that are sweetened naturally, and they learn how to use various fruits and vegetables in everyday cooking. The participants all share a meal cooked from foods they have grown in the garden. The program has been an opportunity for the organizations involved, to work together, to know each other and to bond.

Fresh Start is the brainchild of Michelle Horovitz, the co-founder and executive director of

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Appetite for Change. When speaking of the program, Horovitz said her vision is to, “create a community-shaped, holistic, culturally relevant and inter-generational garden-based cooking program for preschoolers, their adult care-givers and older youth.” She would also like the project to demonstrate that they can respectfully develop and implement a community based evaluation model to document a process that benefits the families who participate and the older youth.

Phyllis Sloan, executive director of LeCreche’ Early Childhood Center, is no stranger to partnerships to strengthen her community. An example of a past collaboration is the work between WE WIN Institute and LeCreche’ where high school students from WE WIN, came to LeCreche’ and tutored and mentored her preschoolers.

“Having the high school students work with our younger learners was a great experience for our children,” said Sloan. “I was excited about the opportunity to have our students work with WE WIN youth again, and to have our families learn about growing food and show how it is connected to strengthening the community. It has been a fun project for our families.”

Sedrique Ametor, a 13-year-old with WE WIN Institute, said she loved the opportunity to work with the project this summer.

“Working with Fresh Start has helped me gain a better understanding of how to teach little kids. I like playing and learning with them. It helps to reinforce my understanding of how to grow, maintain and cook food,” said Ametor.
The Fresh Start project is an example that when we work together, WE WIN.