

# Gardening Empowers Diverse Youth to Serve Community and Gain Life Skills

## Public Value Statement

Junior Master Gardener Program provides hands-on activities that lead to healthier children and communities.

## The Situation

According to the 2017 Watford City High School Youth at Risk Survey 41% of students are not physically active at least 60 minutes per day on 5 or more days of the week and 87% of students do not eat the recommended amount of vegetables for a healthy diet. These rates are among the highest in the nation. Poor diets and unhealthy lifestyles limit the potential of children.

Watford City is one of the fastest growing communities in America. Many of its new residents live in apartments and have no previous experiences in gardening.

## Extension Response

Children who grow their own food are more likely to eat vegetables and have healthy eating habits throughout their lives. Gardening programs can sharpen skills in science, raise awareness of the environment, build self-esteem and help youth learn to work together.

NDSU Extension Agent Marcia Hellandsaas worked with four volunteers to offer the Junior Master Gardener program in Watford City. The program began in early May and continued to mid-September. Children learned about gardening, nutrition and public service. Each participant planted their own 18 square-foot garden.

Youth were involved in all phases of gardening, from designing their plots to harvesting the crops. Participants also planted flowers and shared them with residents in the nursing home and assisted living facilities in Watford City. In addition, potted flowers were planted to beautify the McKenzie County Fair.

## Impacts

Fifteen youth developed skills in gardening. All gardeners learned how to make healthy snacks and consumed vegetables they had never eating before. New partnerships were created with a church, farmer's market, McKenzie County NRCS, a nursing home and assisted living facility, fair board members and master gardeners and their volunteer helpers. This will lead to more community service projects. Gardening fostered friendships, teamwork and a greater sense of community for children in this growing city.

## Feedback

Gardeners said:

*"It's cool how soil is made out of worm's poop."*

*"I liked how we learned how to build a garden and taking care of a garden is fun."*

*"It was cool how we built a bee hotel."*

Julie Dragseth, LPN, Horizon Assisted Living said:  
*"The residents really enjoyed the children and in turn had a beautiful pot of flowers to enjoy all summer long. They requested we do this every spring!"*



## Primary Contact

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