

Hamilton Community Garden Networking Program 2020 Annual Report

What is the Hamilton Community Garden Networking Program?

The Hamilton Community Garden Networking (HCGN) program is run by Neighbour 2 Neighbour to sustain and expand the garden community of Hamilton and support Hamiltonians in using gardens to build the community, enhance the environment, and promote wellness.

The HCGN serves as a hub of the garden community by helping people:

- **Access Resources and Tools** to start, run, or participate in gardens through guides, and fact sheets, and get connected to supplies
- **Find Gardens** through the interactive garden directory and map
- **Learn and Connect** through list-servs, events, workshops, and meet-ups

Mission

The HCGN program engages and connects community garden organizers, members, and supporters as well as the public to collaboratively build and sustain the garden community of Hamilton.

Vision

A community in which everyone has the opportunity to participate in and benefit from gardens grown to meet their needs.

Definition

Community Gardens are spaces where plants are grown by a community to meet its needs.

History

In 2007, guided by community interest, Hamilton Public Health Services approached North Hamilton Community Health Centre about resurrecting the Hamilton-Wentworth Garden Network. Interested parties came together and the HCGN was formed.

In 2010, stakeholders came together with the Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee to develop and pass the Hamilton Community Garden Policy. In 2011 and 2012, Green Venture developed the HCGN to include branding, outreach tools, and workshops with support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the City of Hamilton Public Works, Public Health Services and many partners.

In 2013, the Ontario Trillium Foundation supported Green Venture and Neighbour 2 Neighbour in continuing to grow and define the HCGN and support food growing garden projects in Hamilton. Today N2N continues to grow and support community gardening initiatives in Hamilton through the HCGN program. Learn more at <http://www.n2ncentre.com/hamilton-community-food-centre/community-garden-networking-program/>

Annual Report Overview

The HCGN program provides support for garden coordinators, gardeners, and community members wanting to connect with community gardens in Hamilton. An annual report is produced to reflect on the program and for the greater community to see what was accomplished. In order to assess how Neighbour 2 Neighbour provides support to community gardens, an annual program survey is conducted with garden coordinators. The results help to adjust programming and improve the ways help is provided to gardens in the city. The findings of the survey are included in the Annual Report.

2020 HCGN Annual Report features:

- Current partners and supporters of the HCGN program
- The ways Neighbour 2 Neighbour has engaged community through the HCGN Program
- The ways Neighbour 2 Neighbour has provided support to gardens
- The successes of the community gardens in the city
 - Success are organized into 3 areas: building community, enhancing the environment, and promoting wellness
- Gardening in Hamilton in 2020 during the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Hamilton Community Garden Networking Program Statistics

Note: The section “Amenities and Programming in Community Gardens” that was added in 2019 was omitted in 2020 due to Municipal recommendations for community gardening during the COVID-19 pandemic that prohibited programming and use of non-gardening amenities.

Partnerships and Supporters of the HCGN Program

In 2020, Neighbour 2 Neighbour leveraged partnerships and worked with a diversity of Hamilton groups to strengthen the HCGN program.

Partnerships included:

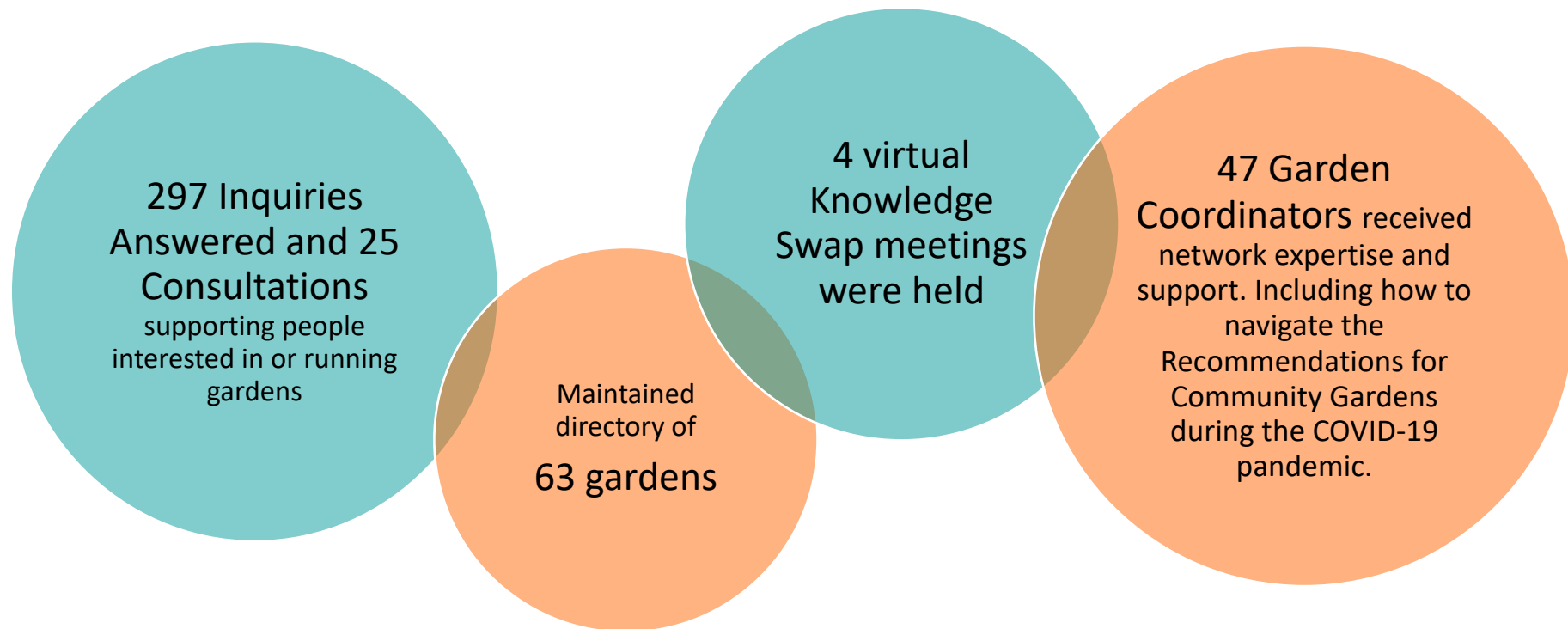
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Hamilton, Healthy Environments Division, Public Health Services, Healthy and Safe Communities Department • CityHousing Hamilton • Hamilton Victory Gardens | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compass Community Health Centre • Royal Botanical Gardens • Hamilton Mountain Paramedics • Mohawk College • Hamilton Wentworth Public and Catholic School Boards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Venture • Local suppliers • Community Food Centres Canada • McQuesten Urban Farm • Dundurn National Historic Site, Kitchen Garden |
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Support was provided by:



TD Friends of the
Environment
Foundation

HCGN Program Engagement



Additional Notes on Network Engagement and Community Outreach

- 297 inquiries represents a 82% increase in email and phone inquiries from 2019.
- 2 Knowledge Swap meetings were facilitated with City of Hamilton staff so that garden coordinators could understand the impact of the Provincial closer of all outdoor amenities on community gardens in the city and how the Public Health recommendations for community gardens should be interpreted once gardens were declared essential.
- There was a marked increase in traffic on the HCGN list-serv, with coordinators discussing garden procedures under the new COVID-19 recommendations.

HCGN Program Support for Gardens

Neighbour 2 Neighbour has been able to offer annual Resource Boost opportunities for community gardens to access tools, equipment, and materials to improve their community gardens. In addition to this support a website featuring an online Hamilton Garden Directory, interactive map and library of online resources for coordinating gardens is maintained, a garden coordinator email list-serv is provided and moderated, and regular Knowledge Swap meetings for garden coordinators are hosted (virtually).

- Resource Boosts in the spring of 2020 provided over \$10,000 of in-kind donations and financial support for gardens and coordinators in the HCGN program.
- 88% of coordinators surveyed said that the Resource Boost was a useful way that the HCGN provided support to their garden.
- The HCGN Resource Boost, rental fees and donations were the most significant sources of funding for gardens.
- Top 3 garden expenses in 2020 were: 1. Soil/compost, 2. Garden Equipment (tools, hoses, etc), and 3. Plants and seeds.
- 65% of coordinators reported that the coordinator email list-serv and the Knowledge Swap meetings were helpful benefits of being in the program, allowing them to be in touch with and share experiences with other garden coordinators in the City of Hamilton.
- The online garden directory and online resources were useful to 63% of gardeners surveyed.
- 71% of coordinators surveyed said the online resources and tools provided on the HCGN website were useful for running their garden.

“Community extends beyond the garden gate. The HCGN program helps all of us maintain our individual garden communities.”

– Plot Garden

“One of our volunteers has chronic mental and physical health issues. She credits the work at the garden for her peace of mind. It was her happy place.”

– Plot Garden

“I think that if we didn't have the HCGN a lot of us wouldn't be able to do our gardening. There are a lot of people who need assistance so it's a very important program, especially the Resource Boost.”

– Tenant Garden

Community Gardening Benefits

The HCGN program supports coordinators of gardens to improve life in the City of Hamilton in the following ways:

Build Community

People develop and leverage relationships out of gardens leading to other projects and partnerships.

- More than 900 gardeners grew food in gardens across Hamilton in 2020.
- Despite restrictions on programming and events, over 200 volunteers helped out in gardens in 2020.
- Nearly 70% of gardens surveyed said that their participants return each year to garden.

Improved community access to gardens...

- Over 10 different languages are reported to be spoken by gardeners in community gardens across Hamilton, with most gardens having at least 2+ languages spoken.
- 60% of gardens do not charge rental fees to participate and 24% offer a sliding scale or will not deny a gardener for being unable to pay the full amount.
- 94% of garden provided tools for gardeners.

Enhance the Environment

Community gardens help the ecosystem in many ways.

- 70% use organic practices, and 82% have pollinator species planted to promote pollinating insect and bird populations, 77% of gardens have onsite composting systems, 60% are growing native plants, just under 60% are watering in part with water harvested from rainwater, 58% are rotating crops (to reduce soil nutrient depletion and employ some integrated pest management, 53% are mulching soil during the growing season to conserve water.

- Approximately 404 square feet of community garden space was added in 2020. This number represents a few gardens adding a few extra beds to their spaces.

Promote Wellness

Community gardens increase access to fresh produce while promoting an active lifestyle and community involvement.

- 22,074 lbs of produce was donated to Hamilton food banks and meal programs in 2020.
- Green Venture launched their Grow A Row Program asking gardeners to commit to planting an extra row of produce to be harvested and donated to N2N's Food Bank.

Success Stories...

"We worked with the Canadian Mental Health Association this season who ran a horticulture therapy program for its participants. They utilized two of our beds for their program."

- Plot/Communal Garden Coordinator

"This garden is located at a senior building. It helps keep our tenants active and many are in the garden each day. They find mental and emotional positive effects."

- Donation Garden Coordinator

"There are less ambulance visits because people are engaged in both the vegetable and ornamental gardens. It's a social place, there's more exercising and people go out and look at the plants. There is less loneliness. People gravitate to the garden."

- Tenant Garden Coordinator

Programming and Amenities in Community Gardens

In 2019 we surveyed garden coordinators to find out about programming they currently host and what programs they would like to host if they could. Garden coordinators shared the reasons that they are not currently offering these specific programs. We also learned what existing garden amenities they have and asked what amenities they wished they had to improve the gardening experience. In the 2019 HCGN Annual Report, we presented these findings to show how physical infrastructure improvements and more targeted animation would make gardens more welcoming, community spaces, and the resources that would be required. **Due to the required safety restrictions on community gardening during the COVID-19 pandemic, events, workshops and use of non-garden related amenities were prohibited in 2020. We look forward to gathering more information on programming and amenities in future, when it is safe to reinstate these important features of community gardening.**

Community Gardening during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In the 2020 HCGN Annual Survey, we asked garden coordinators to reflect on their growing season in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting Recommendations for Community Gardens from the City of Hamilton, Public Health. Garden coordinators followed the safety rules outlined in the Recommendations and took additional measures such as lending tools to gardeners for the season (reducing sharing of tools), staggering attendance, and scheduling gardening times during busy periods (e.g. Spring planting).

The most commonly reported challenges for garden coordinators was the communication of the new procedures to gardeners, followed closely by keeping gardens closed to the public. One garden coordinator reported that because their garden is not fenced and is located in a public park, it was difficult to enforce recommendations around restricting access to only participants/gardeners, and preventing the public use of benches. For a number of gardens, lower participation and few volunteers meant more work for some garden coordinators.

For other gardens, the new restrictions had little impact on the success of the gardens, with one garden expressing that 2020 was their best year yet. The renewed appreciation for growing food in 2020 was felt by some gardens with 53% of coordinators that responded to the survey reporting finding an increase in request for garden plots, to become a gardener/participant, or to otherwise be involved in the garden.

Some coordinators identified safety improvements needed for the 2021 growing season. These include translated signage on COVID-19 safety procedures, better hand washing station equipment, and improved delineation of garden spaces from other public park amenities.

“The garden was a place people could reconnect with the outdoors, with 'normal' things in such an abnormal year and summer.” - Plot Garden Coordinator

“After conducting our own survey, gardeners were impacted by the lack of face to face social interactions and gatherings. However, ‘The time & peace of growing vegetables’ made it worth it said one gardener.” – Plot Garden Coordinator

Hamilton Community Garden Networking Program Statistics

HCGN Program Stats by Ward	
Ward Number	Number of Gardens in 2020
Ward 1	4
Ward 2	14
Ward 3	11
Ward 4	4
Ward 5	3
Ward 6	4
Ward 7	2
Ward 8	6
Ward 9	0
Ward 10	3
Ward 11	1
Ward 12	2
Ward 13	4
Ward 14	2
Ward 15	3
Total	63

HCGN Stats - Total Gardens Per Year by Type to 2020												
Type	Pre 2010	2010	2011	2019	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Plot	7	10	14	17	19	22	21	24	25	23	21	19
Youth/School	2	3	5	10	12	13	11	12	13	14	13	0
Donation	1	1	2	2	5	5	5	3	3	8	9	9
Hamilton Victory Gardens	0	0	1	4	5	9	15	15	17	10	8	6
Communal	1	1	1	2	2	2	8	7	7	6	4	4
CityHousing + Tenant	0	0	7	20	28	33	33	34	34	36	37	23
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2
Total	11	15	30	55	71	84	93	95	101	99	94	63

Garden Closures:

- The Cancord location on Mary Street of Hamilton Victory Gardens closed permanently.
- CityHousing Hamilton reported 12 permanent garden closures.
- Corktown Community Garden permanently closed.
- Temporary garden closures include 13 school/youth gardens and 4 gardens located on university or other institutional property including the Hamilton Victory Garden at Macassa Lodge.