

# 2023 Healthy Living Conference - City of Hope Hope Partners' Urban Farming Expansion

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## About the Partners

**Inland Valley Hope Partners** has been building hope for no or low-income families in the Inland Valley since 1968. Through our local food pantries, housing programs, healthy living programs and other supportive services, families and individuals in crisis find hope once again and are empowered to break the cycles of poverty and despair. Collectively, our programs serve more than 70,000 children, women and men annually.

**Amy's Farm** is a local for-profit chemical-free farm with whom Hope Partners has collaborated for nearly a decade. Utilizing the assistance of Hope Partners' volunteers to plant, weed, and pick vegetables at the farm, Amy's Farm donates a substantial percentage of its harvest to our food security program to ensure our clients have access to fresh, healthy produce.

**Community Partners 4 Innovation** operates Lopez Urban Farm, a community wellness project that seeks to create a sustainable and equitable future by providing access to locally grown food, promoting education and community engagement, and creating green spaces that are accessible to all.

## About Our Project

In addition to basic, staple foods, our Food Security Program provides clients with fresh, healthful, locally grown vegetables and other produce, primarily through our collaboration with local urban farms such as Amy's Farm in Ontario. Many of the families we serve struggle to access produce: when available, it is more expensive, and families with little income will instead buy cheap, less nutrient-dense foods to keep their hunger satiated. This poor diet contributes to obesity and other health problems. Our program helps counteract this by providing our clients with fresh, quality produce. Bolstered by funding from the City of Hope's Healthy Living Grants, Hope Partners set out to strengthen and expand our partnerships with local urban farms to further accomplish this goal.

Community Partners 4 Innovation, previous partners of Hope Partners, had recently established the Lopez Urban Farm on unused land owned by the Pomona Unified School District. Hope Partners and Amy's Farm came alongside Community Partners 4 Innovation to help expand the farm and develop another source of healthy produce for the families we serve and reach additional families in the South Pomona area. Together, the organizations hired a part-time farmer to help operate the farm, including leading and training community volunteers and ordering necessary supplies. Volunteers were recruited to assist at the farm through partnerships with Cal Poly Pomona, social media, the farm's junior farming program, and word of mouth.

Over the course of the grant term, the 2.5-acre farm was expanded from 50 to 150 planting beds rather and produce was distributed to families in the community via a variety of means (Hope Partners' food pantries, Lopez Farm's open harvest days and weekly farmer's market, and delivery to local affordable housing complexes). Additionally, Hope Partners established a new weekly food pantry at the site of Lopez Farm this Spring and the families accessing our emergency food services there have the privilege of having a real "farm-to-table" experience as they are provided vegetables harvested that morning on-site. Together this year, the farm grew and distributed more than 200,000 pounds of food, and as our friends at Lopez Farm say, this food was "grown in the neighborhood, by the neighborhood, for the neighborhood".

## Our Project Impact

Due to the length of the program and the many diverse "interaction-points" people have with the program, the partners decided a focus group was the best method of evaluation for impact. Interestingly, many people both volunteered and were a recipient of the produce grown by the collaboration at Lopez Urban Farm.

- 90% indicated they had increased the amount of fresh produce they consumed as a result of our program;
- 100% who volunteered shared that the program helped them develop a sense of belonging and community;
- 95% of food pantry recipients had enough food for their family at the end of the month.

One of our favorite anecdotes came from a mother with an autistic child. She shared that her child is obsessed with eating green, leafy vegetables and could easily eat a whole bowl of brussels sprouts in a single seating. Vegetables at the market are expensive, and prior to getting involved with the Lopez Urban Farm, she sometimes had to make challenging decisions, i.e., should she put off her needed oil change for her car to instead purchase the quantity of vegetables her child craved. Now, she has the peace of mind that she can get lots of green vegetables at the farm, and she feels even better about the fact that the produce has been grown organically.

## Our Final Thoughts

Collaboration with partners is never a perfect science. The organizations involved in our Urban Farm Expansion project have similar but diverse missions and therefore their goals for the project varied a bit as well. Although MOUs were established with each of the project partners, there were certain aspects of the partnership that could have been better solidified to ensure everyone was on the same page for all aspects of planning, execution, and evaluation. At the end of the day, families in need in South Pomona and the surrounding area had increased access to food, and especially healthy, locally-grown food and that's most important.

