

**Community Gardens as Social Connection Spaces:
Exploring the Human Ecosystem of an Urban Non-Profit Environment**

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Science

Trent University

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Abstract

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Community gardens can provide access to green spaces in urban environments and intertwine within their neighbourhood when their structure and vision are clear. This study sought to understand the effects of gardens on psychosocial well-being and knowledge sharing. Gardens provide a space for regaining intergenerational and intercultural connection, even after the challenges of COVID-19. Through mixed-method short-term ethnography, I explored community engagement of the PACT Urban Peace Program non-profit community garden. PACT specifically fostered intergenerational and intercultural connection by providing a space for residents to positively (re-)connect with one another and the land while working towards a common goal. These forms of connection, paradoxically, depend on the organization's resources limiting how and when the community can access the space, because without such constraints the program becomes unsustainable long-term. The resource management of the garden creates boundaries which influence participants' psychosocial well-being. This thesis explores the dichotomy present in community gardens and encourages further exploration of their impact.

Keywords: Community Gardens, Intergenerational, Intercultural, Human Dynamics, Psychosocial, Well-being, Urban Agriculture, Food Security, Agroecology, Human Ecosystems, Non-profit Organizations.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Abstract | ii |
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| Table of Contents | v |
| List of Figures | viii |
| List of Tables | xi |
| List of Abbreviations | xii |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 1 |
| Memories of the Garden..... | 5 |
| Ideas and Hopes for the 2023 Growing Season | 8 |
| Reality Within the Garden Space | 11 |
| Key Sources of Ethnographic Data and Findings | 14 |
| Chapter 2: Background and Theory | 17 |
| Community Gardens and their History | 18 |
| Notes on the Sustainability of the Human Ecosystem of a Community Garden | 23 |
| Organizational Structures: Mutual Aid and Non-Profit | 26 |
| Benefits of Community Gardens – The Psychosocial Aspects | 32 |
| Community Gardens as a Non-Profit Organizations: Employee Well-being..... | 36 |
| Intergenerational and Intercultural Learning Space | 39 |
| Chapter 3: Outline of the PACT GTL Gardens | 42 |
| The Garden in Relation to the Neighbourhood | 43 |
| What is PACT and GTL? | 46 |
| Describing the JPCI Garden in 2023 from Fieldnotes..... | 49 |
| Aerial View of the Garden..... | 51 |
| Structure and Governance | 53 |
| Money Matters | 58 |
| The GTL Program Through the Years | 61 |
| Community Markets and Community Meals | 63 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Pivot to FFB..... | 66 |
| PACT Garden Changes Over Time..... | 71 |
| Chapter 4: Methodology..... | 74 |
| Research Questions | 75 |
| Seasons of Research – The Development of this Mixed-Method Ethnography | 76 |
| Research Tools and Data Collection Methods | 84 |
| Questionnaires | 84 |
| Interviews | 87 |
| Fieldnotes..... | 89 |
| Photographs | 90 |
| Data Analysis | 92 |
| Methods Concluding Thoughts | 94 |
| Chapter 5: Research Results and Discussion | 96 |
| Overall Findings..... | 97 |
| Question One: How Has Engagement Changed in the Community Garden, Post-Pandemic? | 99 |
| Experienced Changed in the Garden Space: The Atmosphere and Financial Realities | 99 |
| Community Engagement during Distribution | 101 |
| Community Engagement through Events..... | 105 |
| Epidemic of Loneliness | 109 |
| Question Two: How Do the Intercultural and Intergenerational Interactions in the Garden Space Affect Participants’ Psychosocial Well-Being and Knowledge Sharing Opportunities? | 113 |
| Participant Demographics..... | 113 |
| Intergenerational and Intercultural Connections During Community Volunteering..... | 115 |
| Intergenerational and Intercultural Connections during Events | 121 |
| Participants’ Psychosocial Well-being | 132 |
| Intergenerational and Intercultural Knowledge Sharing | 137 |
| The Community Garden as an Intergenerational and Intercultural Social Connection Space..... | 142 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Question Three: How Does the Organizational Structure, as a Non-Profit Community Garden, Impact Community Commons and the Participants' Psychosocial Well-Being? | 145 |
| Non-Profit Organizational Implications | 146 |
| Boundaries and Discussions on Accessibility of the Garden Space | 155 |
| The Dynamic Relationships at the JPCI Garden | 159 |
| Research Results and Discussion Concluding Thoughts | 175 |
| Chapter 6: Conclusion | 177 |
| Summary of Findings | 178 |
| Recommendations to PACT | 183 |
| Future Research | 186 |
| Conclusion | 188 |
| Bibliography | 190 |
| APPENDIX A - Researcher in the Garden Poster | 202 |
| APPENDIX B - Consent Forms | 203 |
| APPENDIX C - Questionnaire Questions | 207 |
| APPENDIX D - Interview Questions | 210 |
| APPENDIX E – Promotional Material for Garden Events | 212 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1. Photograph of staff members and volunteers harvesting beans. October 10, 2023..... | 4 |
| Figure 2. Photograph of set up for packing Fresh Food Box (FFB). October 11, 2023. ... | 4 |
| Figure 3. Photograph of older woman’s hand holding a basket filled with Market vegetables taken at a PACT Community Market in 2019..... | 6 |
| Figure 4. Diagram by Machlis et al., “Working model of the human ecosystem.” | 24 |
| Figure 5. Diagram depicting the hierarchical organization chart for non-profits. | 29 |
| Figure 6. Diagram depicting a simplified internal structure and information flow of an organization..... | 31 |
| Figure 7. Aerial view of the Englemount-Lawrence Neighbourhood within the red border. It also depicts the PACT GTL Urban Farm, specifically the JPCI location. | 43 |
| Figure 8. Photograph of a garden sign painted in 2022 that hangs on the inside of the garden gate. June 6, 2023..... | 49 |
| Figure 9. Aerial View of the JPCI Garden. Most likely from 2021 after digging up the space and covering with tarp for solarization. | 51 |
| Figure 10. Sketch of the JPCI Garden found in the Google Drive most likely from 2022 as it has the Indigenous Garden (SGE:NO Garden) created by the Indigenous Gardens Coordinator (Cayuga, Six Nations of the Grand River) in thirteen moon mounds on the bottom left. (Accessed January 28, 2024)..... | 52 |
| Figure 11. Diagram depicting author’s interpretation of PACT’s organizational structure in 2023 with a focus on the JPCI Garden structure. | 55 |
| Figure 12. Photograph of portraits of some community garden members with compost bags that participated in the Community Compost Exchange program featured in Dirk’s book. My grandmother is on the bottom left. | 64 |
| Figure 13. Photograph of set up for packing FFB. July 12, 2023..... | 69 |
| Figure 14. Photograph of author wearing a KN-95 mask due to an air quality warning because of smoke from forest fires, and a "Garden Research" hat. June 28, 2023..... | 82 |
| Figure 15. Photograph of initial survey set up for Community Social. July 18, 2023..... | 86 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 16. Photograph of final survey set up for Garden Closing Meal. October 5, 2023. | 86 |
| Figure 17. Photograph of staff member, left, and volunteer, right, planting kale. June 6, 2023..... | 92 |
| Figure 18. Photograph of preparing FFBs for transport to the cooler. September 20, 2023. | 104 |
| Figure 19. Photograph of the set up for distribution. July 26, 2023. | 104 |
| Figure 20. Pie chart depicting the number of years participants have been part of the community garden. | 106 |
| Figure 21. Pie chart depicting the self-identified age group of participants. | 114 |
| Figure 22. Pie chart depicting whether participants have spoken another language in the garden..... | 115 |
| Figure 23. Photograph of two volunteers, Nellie, <i>left</i> , and Jenny, <i>right</i> , chatting and picking snap peas. July 4, 2023. | 118 |
| Figure 24. Photograph of painting Nick and Andy were working on representing Gasweta, The Two Row Wampum. August 22, 2023. | 119 |
| Figure 25. Photograph of staff member, Miriam, <i>left</i> , and volunteer, Dora, <i>right</i> , preparing the leeks. September 5, 2023..... | 120 |
| Figure 26. Photograph of four friends chopping chives for dumplings and perogies.... | 124 |
| Figure 27. Photograph of community members making perogies. | 126 |
| Figure 28. Photograph of community members making dumplings..... | 126 |
| Figure 29. Photograph of Indigenous Lead, Andy, <i>left</i> , and community member, Matthew, <i>right</i> , making music, August 24, 2023..... | 129 |
| Figure 30. Photograph of two community members eating together. | 131 |
| Figure 31. Photograph of community members eating together. | 132 |
| Figure 32. Pie chart depicting the themes in memories participants shared in the garden. | 133 |
| Figure 33. Bar graph depicting participant’s selection of the ways in which their well-being has improved within the garden space. | 134 |

Figure 34. Word art created with *Word It Out* based on the feelings participants shared about being in the garden. The greater the frequency, the bigger the word..... 134

Figure 35. Photograph of two volunteers Alicia, *left*, and Evelin, *right*, picking berries for jam. August 1, 2023. 136

Figure 36. Pie chart depicting whether the person with whom participants shared recipes was of a different age and/or culture..... 140

Figure 37. PACT 2023 Fresh Food Box Survey data..... 149

Figure 38. Diagram depicting author’s visual representation of some of the human ecosystem of the garden..... 161

Figure 39. Photograph of quilt created by the Program Director from square art pieces made by garden staff. Held in front of the community garden cooler. October 25, 2023. 161

Figure 40. Poster for the July 18, 2023, Community Social accessed on the PACT Instagram page. 212

Figure 41. Poster for the August 17, 2023, Garden Community Event accessed on the PACT Instagram page. 212

Figure 42. Poster for the August 24, 2023, Dumpling Making Social accessed on the PACT Instagram page. 213

Figure 43. Poster for the October 5, 2023, Community Meal posted on garden gate.... 213

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1. Table depicting the minimum donation, fundraising, and grant amounts through the years of 2017-2024. It also shows the number of organizations and individuals that contributed to this amount. | 59 |
| Table 2. Table depicting the GTL program's number of students hosted, the number of workshops, and the workshop hours. | 62 |
| Table 3. Table depicting the progression of the FFB through the years. | 70 |
| Table 4. Table depicting interview participant pseudonyms, demographics, relationship to the garden, and type of interview. | 88 |

List of Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Meaning |
|---------------------|--|
| CSJ | Canada Summer Jobs (employee) |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| FFB | Fresh Food Box |
| FOYT | Focus on Youth (summer student employee) |
| GTL | GTL |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| JPCI | John Polanyi Collegiate Institute |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| PACT | (Peace, Actualization, Community, Transformation) Urban Peace Program |
| Q1 | Question 1: How has engagement changed in the community garden, post-pandemic? |
| Q2 | Question 2: How do the intercultural and intergenerational interactions in the garden space affect participants' psychosocial well-being and knowledge sharing opportunities? |
| Q3 | Question 3: How does the organizational structure, as a non-profit community garden, impact community commons and the participants' psychosocial well-being? |
| TCI | Thistletown Collegiate Institute |
| TDSB | Toronto District School Board |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite being surrounded by people, we as a society, have separated from nature and shifted our focus to productivity, this has led to an increase in social isolation and disconnection from ourselves and the world around us.¹ For safety reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions augmented the separation and isolation reducing or eliminating some in-person social services, due to the need for social distancing.² COVID-19 also brought to light the severity of social issues caused by food insecurity, loneliness, and socioeconomic inequality.³ As the pandemic progressed and some restrictions lifted, some spaces for in-person connection became available.

One of these social connection spaces is community gardens. Though community gardens are human-made land sites, they may often be one of the only sources of nature for inhabitants of urban environments. Community gardens can provide a safe space for residents to reconnect with themselves, with their community, and with nature.⁴ Community gardens could be the spaces needed to help reunite local communities in which local agroecology, the relationships between flora, fauna, people, the environment, and

¹ Michiel Dehaene, Chiara Tornaghi, and Colin Sage, “Mending the metabolic rift: Placing the ‘urban’ in urban agriculture,” in *Urban Agriculture Europe*, ed. Frank Lohrberg et al. (Jovis Verlag GmbH, 2016), 174–77.

² Throughout this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic is referred to as COVID-19 and the pandemic.

³ Angie Mejia, Manami Bhattacharya, and Joshua Miraglia, “Community Gardening as a Way to Build Cross-Cultural Community Resilience in Intersectionally Diverse Gardeners: Community-Based Participatory Research and Campus-Community-Partnered Proposal,” *JMIR Research Protocols* 9, no. 10 (September 21, 2020): e21218, <https://doi.org/10.2196/21218>.

⁴ South Zone Community Gardens, “Cultivating Friendships: The Social Benefits of Community Gardens,” *SZCG* (blog), January 18, 2024, <https://www.szcomgardens.ca/the-social-benefits-of-community-gardens/>.

food systems, can sustainably connect in a long lasting and healthy way.⁵ Community gardens provide agroecological spaces for people to connect to the land, have more access to food security, and interact with their community.⁶

The PACT (Peace, Actualization, Community, Transformation) Urban Peace Program, a non-profit organization, provides such a space through their Grow-to-Learn (GTL) community gardens.⁷ PACT's GTL community gardens, which are located on leased Toronto District School Board (TDSB) property, are organized in a way that encourages community engagement and learning. For this thesis, I focused on their garden located at John Polanyi Collegiate Institute (JPCI), the David Wilson Memorial Garden, which is mainly referred to as the JPCI Garden. The 1.7-acre space provides a nature oasis in Toronto, Ontario with multiple outdoor learning areas and an outdoor kitchen. The images below depict one of the fields and main multi-purpose learning and gathering area (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 below). The main covered area is used both for food distribution preparation as depicted in the image, and for leading classes as well as an event gathering space. This community garden provides a space for social connectedness within which

⁵ Agroecology Europe, "The 13 Principles of Agroecology," November 1, 2021, <https://www.agroecology-europe.org/the-13-principles-of-agroecology/>; Evan Bowness et al., "Navigating Urban Agroecological Research with the Social Sciences," in *CRC Press eBooks*, 2020, 275–98, <https://doi.org/10.1201/9780429290992-13>.

⁶ Mathew R. Bice et al., "Community Gardens: Interactions between Communities, Schools, and Impact on Students". *The Health Educator*. Vol. 50, No. 1. (Spring 2018): 2. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1196092.pdf>; Nathan McClintock, "Why Farm the City? Theorizing Urban Agriculture Through a Lens of Metabolic Rift," *Cambridge Journal of Regions Economy and Society* 3, no. 2 (July 2010): 201, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsq005>.

⁷ "About GTL | Grow-to-Learn | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto," PACT Program, n.d., <https://www.pactprogram.ca/about-gtl>.

intercultural, and intragenerational interactions, connections, and knowledge transfer occur.

In the community garden space, participants work together towards a greater good as they plant, maintain, and harvest vegetables for the community. In urban environments, especially post-COVID, having the opportunity to spend time in outdoor green hubs can help individuals reconnect to themselves, to their community, and to nature whilst also providing multiple benefits for their health and well-being.⁸ Concurrently, this garden is a non-profit worksite which adds to the human dynamics of the garden space as organizational and funding goals can impact the direction of garden programming and increase tensions. Thus, I argue that when the organizational structure and vision of a community garden are clear, this social connection space provides an outdoor environment in which intergenerational and intercultural engagement occurs that offer psychosocial benefits and opportunities for knowledge sharing.

⁸ Ingrid Abreu Scherer, “Places, spaces, social connection and people’s wellbeing: what works?”. *what works wellbeing*. (May 23, 2018). <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/places-spaces-social-connection-and-peoples-wellbeing-what-works/>.



Figure 1. Photograph of staff members and volunteers harvesting beans. October 10, 2023.⁹



Figure 2. Photograph of set up for packing Fresh Food Box (FFB). October 11, 2023.

⁹ All photographs by author, unless otherwise stated.

Memories of the Garden

The PACT JPCI garden inspired me to begin my master's studies. I began attending their weekly Markets and Community Meals during the summer of 2019. I went with my grandmother as she had been attending for years and had been an active member in the community, volunteering with a different food security initiative. The summer of 2019 was stressful for me as I waited for a spinal surgery that continued to be postponed. I had never really interacted with community members, though it seemed as though many people knew my grandmother. I would come to the garden with her and her friends and spend some time with them picking out vegetables, trying different foods cooked in the garden, and learning about the community members. I joined the garden to destress, spend some time with my grandmother, and connect to the land and the community. I continued to attend after my surgery in August 2019 and throughout the fall and was able to experience the garden from a different perspective as my mobility was limited, and I was learning to walk again. I found solace sitting on a bench with an older neighbour who also could not walk much and listened to her stories. It was nice to get to know community members in the neighbourhood and learn more about them in the garden space.

Figure 3 is a photograph I took in the summer of 2019. It depicts an older woman with a basket of garden produce. It encouraged my continued interest in people's connection to the land and to the community. This image inspired me to continue to photograph people's hands in the garden throughout my research period as a supplementary visual aid; I have included some of my photographs in the chapters that follow. As part of a short-term ethnography as described by Pink and Morgan, the ethnographer has everyday first-hand involvement. "Both a close and intentional focus on the detail of everyday

practices, and the ability to probe and intervene in such ways that the “invisible” and unspoken elements of everyday life emerge.”¹⁰ I find that hands can tell a story of the person, they are used daily and depict the details within them such as the lines, wrinkles, nails and (beauty and age) spots. Hands, on occasion, can visually depict a persons’ age and visible race which could help provide a visual depiction of the intercultural and intergenerational interactions in the garden space when there are multiple people’s hands in a photograph. In this thesis, I use visuals and photographs as supplementary visual aids for narrative exposition rather than analysis.



Figure 3. Photograph of older woman’s hand holding a basket filled with Market vegetables taken at a PACT Community Market in 2019.

¹⁰ Sarah Pink and Jennine Morgan, “Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing,” *Symbolic Interaction* 36, no. 3 (2013): 353, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/symbinte.36.3.351>.

My favourite memory at the garden during that summer was one of the garden tours. Community members joined a garden staff member as we embarked on a tour around the garden. The staff member would share information about different edible plants, and we could taste and smell them as well. During the tour, an Indigenous community member and an Asian community member both shared how the different plants were used in their culture and different recipes you could cook with them. This experience inspired me to see the potential community gardens held. The cross-cultural and cross-generational knowledge sharing, and combination of information provided a holistic view of the natural world around us.¹¹ This was an embodiment of Two-Eyed Seeing, a concept introduced by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, combining Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge systems.¹² This felt more like a three-eyed seeing with the addition of Eastern knowledge. This experience encouraged me to reconnect to nature and to further explore the potential benefits that intergenerational and intercultural collaboration could bring. As I had just begun my Bachelor of Education, this experience inspired a lot of perspectives I took when it came to my educational interests. Many of my lesson plans had an outdoor multidisciplinary aspect to them. This also encouraged me to explore outdoor education, Indigenous knowledge, and nature connection as I continued my education and shifted my perspective and my perception.

¹¹ Stephen Webb, "Inclusive Spaces: Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Community Gardens," *Medium*, August 4, 2023, <https://medium.com/@stephen-webb/inclusive-spaces-promoting-diversity-and-inclusion-in-community-gardens-7816a5781849>.

¹² Cheryl Bartlett, Murdena Marshall, and Albert Marshall, "Two-Eyed Seeing and Other Lessons Learned Within a Co-learning Journey of Bringing Together Indigenous and Mainstream Knowledges and Ways of Knowing," *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 2, no. 4 (August 15, 2012): 2, 5, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-012-0086-8>.

Ideas and Hopes for the 2023 Growing Season

As I had witnessed weekly intercultural and intergenerational community engagement prior to COVID-19, my hope for this study was to further explore the benefits of these relationships. The purpose of this study was to learn more about the intergenerational and intercultural relationships and connections made in the garden post-COVID to better understand the impact and potential benefits of the PACT community gardens as a space for social connection space for community members, and participants. Green spaces which provide opportunities to participate in activities “can improve social interactions; increase social networks social interactions and bonding and bridging social capital; increase physical activity and healthy eating; improve community members’ skills and knowledge.”¹³ Community gardens are often seen as a means of food sovereignty and environmental advantages; however, I wanted to further explore the human aspect and psychosocial benefits that may occur from participating in this space. Specifically, my goal was to look at the intergenerational and intercultural relationships that are nurtured within the community garden space and their effects on psychosocial well-being.¹⁴ My hope was that further exploring the benefits of these relationships could encourage organizations and funders to create more programming focused on long term intergenerational and intercultural community engagement in gardens.

¹³ Scherer, “Places, spaces, social connection and people’s wellbeing.”

¹⁴ Scherer, “Places, spaces, social connection and people’s wellbeing.”

My mixed-method short-term ethnography focused on answering the following research questions:

Question 1: How has engagement changed in the community garden, post-pandemic?

Question 2: How do the intercultural and intergenerational interactions in the garden space affect participants' psychosocial well-being and knowledge sharing opportunities?

Community gardens can be safe spaces for all that help provide food sovereignty, food security, holistic well-being, social meeting spaces, and experiential learning through intercultural and intergenerational connection. Community gardens can also be places of exclusion, oppression, and can lead to greening and gentrification.¹⁵ Nevertheless, these spaces could also potentially mitigate the disconnect between humans and nature, addressing the individual, social, and ecological dimensions.¹⁶ It is important to note that PACT GTL community gardens are not a case of ecological gentrification, the evictions of low-income residents for higher income individuals for environmental improvements,¹⁷ as

¹⁵ Mitchell McLarnon, "Community and School Gardens Don't Magically Sprout Bountiful Benefits," *The Conversation*, August 4, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/community-and-school-gardens-dont-magically-sprout-bountiful-benefits-182832>; Yannick Baumann et al., "The Impacts of Green Gentrification on Homelessness; Urban Greening and Displacement in Parc-Extension Neighborhood of Montreal," *HomelessHub*, November 16, 2021, <https://homelesshub.ca/blog/2021/impacts-green-gentrification-homelessness-urban-greening-and-displacement-parc-extension-neighborhood-montreal/>.

¹⁶ Dehaene, Tornaghi, and Sage, "Mending the Metabolic Rift: Placing the 'urban' in Urban Agriculture"; McClintock, "Why Farm the City? Theorizing Urban Agriculture Through a Lens of Metabolic Rift."

¹⁷ Sarah Dooling, "Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33, no. 3 (October 6, 2009): 621–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00860.x>; Baumann et al., "The Impacts of Green Gentrification on Homelessness; Urban Greening and Displacement in Parc-Extension Neighborhood of Montreal."

the land JPCI is growing on used to be a vacant lot and is owned by the TDSB. Conducting this research encouraged me to see that there was more to community gardens than just the food benefits and that the human aspect of gardening merits further attention and exploration.

Another important aspect of this study is that 2023 was the first year post-COVID in which the PACT GTL gardens were hosting events and inviting non-volunteers back into the garden. The summer of 2023 was the first time in three years in which the focus was no longer on simply meeting the food security needs of the community but attempting to rekindle the community and socialization needs of the neighbourhood. These changes in the human ecosystem, the intertwined social and resource systems, of the community garden were important to observe as the people's, the organization's, and the community's values may have changed in response to the epidemiological changes.¹⁸ Further exploring community members' desires to return to how it previously was, with more access to the garden and community meals, would be beneficial, and based on my research, seemed to be something the community needed and missed. I suspected that looking at how participants feel, how many community members engaged in garden activities, and whether there were new members could help in determining the various benefits to well-being community members experience,¹⁹ specifically the psychosocial benefits, the benefits to

¹⁸ James F. Moore, Ke Rong, and Ruimin Zhang, "The Human Ecosystem," *Journal of Digital Economy* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 2022): 57, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdec.2022.08.002>.

¹⁹ Susie Cochran and Leia Minaker, "The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis," *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur L'Alimentation* 7, no. 1 (July 14, 2020): 164, <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v7i1.332>.

material, social, spiritual, cultural, emotional, and mental well-being.²⁰ In contrast to this, as the garden staff were navigating the requirements needing to be met for funding, and the relationships with community members, they needed to set some boundaries to also ensure their psychosocial well-being was considered to sustainably provide services.

The PACT GTL program diligently tracks the amount of food they produce and provide for the community and the economic impact their services provide for the neighbourhood in terms of food security. However, it is difficult to evaluate the value of interaction and community. Focusing on an aspect of gardening which benefits people, but which funders may not see as inherently valuable, may ultimately prove to be imperative for continued community engagement and access to the green space. Being in the space, I have witnessed long lasting relationships that transcended the confines of the garden walls, and which continued even after people moved. Further, exploring the psychosocial benefits of being in the garden could help to inform future programming and funding needs and focus based on the present needs of the community.

Reality Within the Garden Space

I hoped that the 2023 summer would be full of events and joy, as many of the gardeners returned from previous years. Instead, I walked into an organization attempting to recover from the pandemic, to meet community needs, and to navigate human dynamics. Not only was there tension among the paid gardeners, but there was also tension between the gardeners and some community volunteers. While recovering from the pandemic,

²⁰ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. “Psychosocial Support and Social and Emotional Learning (PSS and SEL)”. (2022). <https://inee.org/collections/psychosocial-support-and-social-and-emotional-learning>.

PACT GTL programming restructured and restored an established space. This had its challenges as participants held different roles and varied histories. Unlike the community members, garden staff had never experienced markets and community meals at the JPCI garden. They did not have much guidance in how things used to be done, including how meals were run, and where materials could be located. As staff attempted to balance the tensions between the garden participants' past experiences and the need to set boundaries for a sustainable future, there was a hesitancy and even some resistance to hosting community events. Bringing more community engagement to the garden, though stressful, did prove beneficial to the community as the community expressed a need to return to the space, experience more nature, and have a place to socialize with each other.

As PACT is a non-profit organization, funding played into these tensions. From my interview with Brooke,²¹ a longstanding staff member, I found out that due to the pandemic, there was more of an emphasis on food security needs, however, part of the GTL deliverables was to have at least three events with food in which community members had access to the garden. The JPCI site was able to meet those expectations. I have experienced that community gardens are social connection spaces and provide a green space for community, and my data also demonstrated this. Nonetheless, the GTL gardens are non-profit urban agriculture worksites, though the community has some input, ultimately funding and the organization constrain access to the space and the management of the garden.

²¹ This study has been reviewed by the Trent University Research Ethics Board. The study REB file number is 28427. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this thesis to enable people's confidential participation.

Thus, a question that developed through my observations and conversations with garden staff during my mixed-method short-term ethnography was:

Question 3: How does the organizational structure, as a non-profit community garden, impact community commons and the participants' psychosocial well-being?

Although the garden is an enclosure with boundaries using fencing and specific hours of operation and access, there were a lot of dynamics to navigate within the space and the community. In addition to human dynamics with disputes about ways of being in the space as old and new hierarchies clashed, there were also overstepping of boundaries as there were break-ins, thefts, and yelling over the fence during closed hours. Through my observations, I concluded that in the case of a community garden run by a non-profit organization, the employees need clearly defined roles and the ability to be able to set boundaries, such as restricted access to space, which need to be respected by community members to structure a commons effectively. As the garden, though a social connection space, is ultimately also a jobsite, these defined roles and boundaries, which may be seen as limitations, help to support the garden team to provide for and meet the needs of the community and funders whilst maintaining their psychosocial well-being. Mindful communication and constant check-ins are essential to adapt so that staff do not burn out and for the organization to sustainably continue to grow, improve, and intertwine into the social fabric of the community.²²

²² Gary E. Machlis, Jo Ellen Force, and William R. Burch, "The Human Ecosystem Part I: The Human Ecosystem as an Organizing Concept in Ecosystem Management," *Society & Natural Resources* 10, no. 4 (July 1, 1997): 351, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941929709381034>.

Key Sources of Ethnographic Data and Findings

Through my multi-month ethnographic research and my multiple data sources (participant observations, questionnaires, interviews, and photographs),²³ I was able to demonstrate that community gardens, specifically the PACT GTL Garden at John Polanyi CI, are a green hub of social connection and provide a space for intercultural and intergenerational community engagement. Due to 2023 being the first year with events returning, and new staff lacking prior knowledge about how events were run in the past, fewer events were organised compared to years prior to COVID-19.

I collected fifty-one questionnaire responses, gathering data from garden staff, volunteers, and community members during three community events at JPCI. I also conducted seven interviews, speaking with one longstanding staff member, five volunteers including three longtime volunteers and two new volunteers, and one community member. My questionnaires demonstrated that there was a diverse range of experience with the garden space as 25% of total respondents were new to the garden and 75% of total respondents were returning community members (with 44% of the returning participants having been part of the garden for more than 6 years) (see Figure 20). Participants reported improved aspects of well-being as a result of being in the garden space, including 90% of respondents indicating an improvement in their social well-being, 80% indicating an improvement in their mental well-being, and 77% indicating an improvement in their emotional well-being (see Figure 33). Many participants shared that their favourite

²³ Sunaina Singh, “What Is Ethnographic Research? Methods and Examples,” *Researcher Life*, December 13, 2023, <https://researcher.life/blog/article/what-is-ethnographic-research-methods-and-examples/>.

memories of the garden involved people (53%) in the garden and sharing food (30%) (see Figure 32). These interactions often had intergenerational and intercultural aspects as 77% of respondents indicated shared experiences with participants of different ages and cultures (see Figure 36). Participants also expressed that being in the community garden space provoked a number of positive psychosocial feelings including, “Relaxed,” “Love,” and “Peace” (see Figure 34). It is important to note that participant’s access to the space was limited to events and volunteering opportunities which was when most of the intercultural and intergenerational interactions occurred.

Interviews revealed similar themes. Many of the interviewees had more access to the garden, as they were mostly volunteers, they had more time in the space to work together and share knowledge. Other than knowledge-sharing, interview findings included themes pertaining to the cost-of-living crisis and participating in the garden as a way to combat loneliness. Socialization in the garden was an important component for community members. Many of the volunteers were also longstanding community members. As community members have been there long before the garden, they have experienced the garden prior to COVID-19 and now are experiencing the garden ‘post’-COVID, they and the longstanding staff members remember how things used to be. The community members rely on their institutional memory and interviewees recognized the changed atmosphere as access to the garden and engagement felt stifled with COVID-19. Human dynamics were in play both within the organization and between the organization and community members which negatively affected psychosocial well-being. There were tensions within the team as they dealt with epidemiological and political events, as well as power dynamics within the hierarchical structure of the organization. In addition to this, for their own well-being and

the sustainability of programming, garden staff had to limit access to the garden to designated times which increased the already present tension between some garden staff and some longstanding volunteers and community members. The contrasting dynamics of the intercultural and intergenerational interaction which foster connection and knowledge sharing with the need for boundaries both for well-being and safety of the garden staff overlap and feed into one another in this non-profit garden site.

Despite the needs for boundaries and new limits on when people could access to the garden, or perhaps thanks to this, the garden staff were able to host a few events throughout the 2023 growing seasons which attracted a lot of community members, both new and returning. These events helped reconnect the neighbourhood to their community and to the land and encouraged socialization which was much needed and wanted in this urban environment. Participants expressed their enjoyment of being in this space and wanted more events in the future. This seems to have positively informed the PACT organization as they are more aligned with the current community needs and are striving to continue community engagement and experiential learning for seasons to come. The seasons since this study was conducted garnered more consistent and abundant community engagement with monthly events from June to September at JPCI.²⁴

²⁴ “Annual Impact Report 2024,” *PACT Program* (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2024), 21, https://www.pactprogram.ca/files/ugd/dafc25_1301144748f54f1a9c3d738534657be1.pdf; “PACT Annual Impact Report 2025,” *PACT Program* (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2025) 7, https://www.pactprogram.ca/files/ugd/dafc25_0b2a799e96d74b62a0e4073f343c42b1.pdf.

Chapter 2: Background and Theory

There are many different types of community gardens with different structures, environments, and reasons for being. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the specific structure of the PACT Urban Peace Program's John Polanyi Collegiate Institute (JPCI) community garden in which I conducted my research. Within this chapter, I provide an overview of background literature about different types of community gardens and their structures which will help to better situate the JPCI garden structures in a broader typology of community gardens. Then, I look at community gardens as social connections spaces, describing some of the benefits of community gardens for the community as a whole. I then turn to being outdoors and the psychosocial aspect for individuals in the garden. This helps to better situate the intergenerational and intercultural learning as these are part of the psychosocial interactions that can occur in these spaces. This literature review introduces the potential benefits that community gardens provide to those who participate in them and to the community where the gardens are located. It also explores the non-profit aspects of community gardens and how the human dynamics within this hierarchy impact the human ecosystem of the garden as well as the sustainability of these urban agriculture structures.

Community Gardens and their History

Throughout history, there has been evidence of communal gardening having played an important role in society. More recently, with the Industrial Revolution, 1760-1840, community gardens as we know them became more popular as individuals from rural environments moved into urban cities, turning vacant lots and empty spaces into community gardens.²⁵ In Toronto in 1858, George William Allan gifted his five-acre family estate to the Toronto Horticultural Society. Although not a community garden, the Horticultural Gardens, renamed the Allan Gardens in 1901, was a public space growing vegetables and flowers. In 2023-2024, Allan Gardens was a controversial space as there were encampments with people with unstable housing or who lost their housing erecting over 90 tents.²⁶ These encampments were cleared and the people were placed into shelters, though there was a great backlog in the city due to the rising number of unhoused individuals.²⁷ The Allan Gardens was and still remains a gathering space for women's,

²⁵ Matthew Kosinski, "Open up the Garden Gates: How the History of Urban Agriculture Can Help Us Bridge the Rural/Urban Divide," Keap Candles, March 31, 2020, <https://www.keapbk.com/blogs/keap/open-up-the-garden-gates-how-the-history-of-urban-agriculture-can-help-us-bridge-the-rural-urban-divide>; McClintock, "Why Farm the City? Theorizing Urban Agriculture Through a Lens of Metabolic Rift," 191, 197, 200; Dehaene, Tornaghi, and Sage, "Mending the Metabolic Rift: Placing the 'urban' in Urban Agriculture."

²⁶ Andre Bermon, "No More Tents in Allan Gardens – but Will the Encampment Strategy Last?," The Bridge Community News, November 7, 2024, <https://thebridgenews.ca/no-more-tents-in-allan-gardens-but-will-the-encampment-strategy-last/>; Dale Manucdoc and Muriel Draaisma, "Toronto City Crews Dismantle Encampment in Allan Gardens," *CBC*, October 19, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/allan-gardens-encampment-clearing-1.7356957>.

²⁷ Bermon, "No More Tents in Allan Gardens – but Will the Encampment Strategy Last?"; Manucdoc and Draaisma, "Toronto City Crews Dismantle Encampment in Allan Gardens."

LGBTQ+, and Indigenous rights and autonomy proving that through history access to these spaces beautifies Toronto in a multitude of ways.²⁸

During the World Wars, the trend of community gardens continued both for patriotic reasons and to help with food growth and production.²⁹ The concept of Victory Gardens, patriotic vegetable plots, was planted during the First World War but the actualization of them did not sprout until the Second World War with the global support from governments.³⁰ Initially, the Department of Agriculture did not support these gardens as they felt that it would be a waste of seed supply and tools on inexperienced gardeners but by 1943 they became more supportive.³¹ Though 82% of these gardens were on private property, 15% of the Victory Gardens were planted on vacant lots and 3% were community gardens.³² Although there was an estimated 209,200 victory gardens in Canada growing fifty-two million kilograms of vegetables, in 1943 it was estimated that Toronto Victory Gardens only yielded 50% of what was cultivated during the Depression era relief gardens.³³ Nevertheless, the Canadian government continued to promote the benefit of

²⁸ “Women in the Park – Heritage Toronto,” Heritage Toronto, September 13, 2024, <https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore/women-in-the-park/>.

²⁹ Rebecca Lovell et al., “What Are the Health and Well-being Impacts of Community Gardening for Adults and Children: A Mixed Method Systematic Review Protocol,” *Environmental Evidence* 3, no. 20 (October 7, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1186/2047-2382-3-20>; Webb, “Inclusive Spaces: Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Community Gardens”; McClintock, “Why Farm the City? Theorizing Urban Agriculture Through a Lens of Metabolic Rift,” 198.

³⁰ Meredith MacLeod, “Canadians Are Digging into Victory Gardens for 2020,” *CTVNews*, May 16, 2020, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/lifestyle/canadians-are-digging-into-victory-gardens-for-2020-1.4941602>.

³¹ Ian Mosby, “Victory Gardens,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, November 12, 2015, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/victory-gardens>.

³² Mosby, “Victory Gardens.”

³³ Mosby, “Victory Gardens”; “Victory Gardens,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/victory-gardens-editorial>; Lorraine Johnson, “Opinion | Let’s Spark a City-grown Food Movement With a

these gardens as patriotic aid for the wartime efforts, helping with mental health as it brought families together, physical health benefits, and additional food. These mental, physical, and nutrition benefits are still prevalent in community gardening efforts today.³⁴

Since the 1970s, there has been worldwide growth in urban food gardens.³⁵ These gardens have different structures and different purposes. Learning, social interaction, being in nature, and food security are all reasons why individuals may want to start and participate in community gardens. Food security combines availability, use and access to food, and ensures everyone always has access to healthy food which meets their needs for a healthy life.³⁶ In Toronto, since the 1990s there has been support for community gardens through the City Council and Parks, Forestry, and Recreation.³⁷ Since then, various community food and garden organizations have been started and supported which continue to run to this day.

In 2020, during the pandemic, many articles encouraged the return of Victory Gardens or *Virus* Gardens, arguing “Let’s turn this growing *moment* into a growing *movement*.”³⁸ Gardening during a pandemic can be a therapeutic and mindful

‘Victory Garden’ Revival,” *Toronto Star*, May 4, 2020, https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/let-s-spark-a-city-grown-food-movement-with-a-victory-garden-revival/article_a6c358b3-7296-5454-bfd5-8a54397acf0b.html.

³⁴ Adam Aherns, “Garden Fresh History,” Heritage Toronto, July 9, 2020, <https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore/victory-garden-food-history/>.

³⁵ Barry J. Hake, “Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens,” *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* 15, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2017.1260369>.

³⁶ Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 164.

³⁷ “History of UA in Toronto.”

³⁸ Johnson, “Opinion | Let’s Spark a City-Grown Food Movement With a ‘Victory Garden’ Revival.”

activity as people are hands-on and become self-reliant easing their access to food security.³⁹ Even if people could not always be in proximity to one another due to COVID-19 restrictions, they could still share what they grew with their neighbours and engage from a distance.⁴⁰ Through community gardens, people can learn from one another and access green spaces in which to share and grow different foods to fulfill their needs.

Urban agriculture comes in different forms; community gardens are one of them. Generally, community gardens are publicly accessible spaces used to grow food for individuals and the local neighbourhood.⁴¹ In urban environments, there are three main types of community gardens: leisure gardens, privately owned or entrepreneurial gardens, and school gardens.⁴² Community gardens also have different structures, they are urban learning spaces which include but are not limited to household, service-based, shared-site, and contested spaces.⁴³ Allotment style gardens are a popular type of community garden in which individuals have their own plots, they are considered to be household learning spaces as they involve families socializing with each other and sharing knowledge.⁴⁴ Leisure gardens are easily accessed gardens located in a neighbourhood with a focus on socialization.⁴⁵ Shared-site garden spaces also aim to foster nonformal intergenerational

³⁹ Aherns, “Garden Fresh History.”

⁴⁰ Aherns, “Garden Fresh History.”

⁴¹ Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 155; Webb, “Inclusive Spaces: Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Community Gardens.”

⁴² Bice et al., “Community Gardens: Interactions Between Communities, Schools, and Impact on Students.” 3.

⁴³ Hake, “Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens.” 27.

⁴⁴ Hake, “Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens.” 27.

⁴⁵ Bice et al., “Community Gardens: Interactions Between Communities, Schools, and Impact on Students.” 3.

connections. They are typically situated in local communities with mutual community building, encourage participation in various associations, and neighbourhood projects.⁴⁶ Privately owned community gardens are usually located in urbanized areas, they are run by entrepreneurial organizations such as non-profits with a focus on socialization, low-income populations, and education.⁴⁷ Service-based learning spaces are usually hosted by public or private institutions including school gardens and aim to provide educational and social welfare activities.⁴⁸ School gardens are located on school property and are routinely focused on education as well as students' health providing physical activity and more knowledge about produce.⁴⁹ Community gardens are also contested sites as self-organized mutual aid social movements are taking a stand against gentrification and other stakeholders who threaten access to needed social services thus becoming a collective action gardening space.⁵⁰ Despite and thanks to their diverse structures, urban community gardens draw in diverse community members and benefit their well-being and food security. These diverse structures and purposes can have an impact on internal structures

⁴⁶ Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 32.

⁴⁷ Bice et al., "Community Gardens: Interactions Between Communities, Schools, and Impact on Students." 3.

⁴⁸ Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 29.

⁴⁹ Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 29.

⁵⁰ McLarnon, "Community and School Gardens Don't Magically Sprout Bountiful Benefits"; Kaylen Phillips. "What Do Community Gardens Have to Do with Gentrification?". Medium. (December 17, 2019). <https://medium.com/what-do-community-gardens-have-to-do-with/what-do-community-gardens-have-to-do-with-gentrification-43ccf7c4d87f>; Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 32-34.

of a community garden as participants may have their own visions for the space and may want to make changes.

Notes on the Sustainability of the Human Ecosystem of a Community Garden

Human ecosystem is a term that has been used for over a hundred years and attempts to encompass how social systems and resource systems are interconnected (see Figure 4).⁵¹ There are different interpretations and models for human ecosystems, but they often incorporate resource systems which include natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources and relate them to social systems including social institutions, social order, and social cycles.⁵² Some models also add more emphasis on human values and potential in providing the economic direction and expansion of human ecosystems as the structure of a human ecosystem, whether hierarchical or up and down management can affect individual human development and the innovation and expansion of the system.⁵³

⁵¹ Machlis, Force, and Burch, “The Human Ecosystem Part I: The Human Ecosystem as an Organizing Concept in Ecosystem Management,” 349-351.

⁵² Machlis, Force, and Burch, “The Human Ecosystem Part I: The Human Ecosystem as an Organizing Concept in Ecosystem Management,” 351-352.

⁵³ Moore, Rong, and Zhang, “The Human Ecosystem,” 63-64, 70.

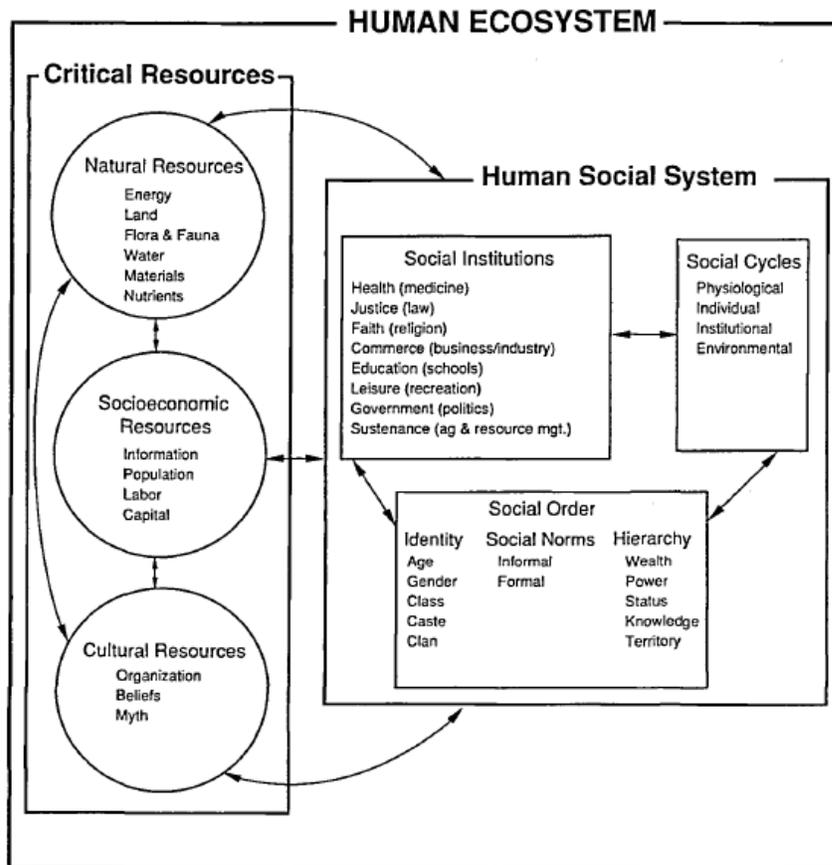


Figure 4. Diagram by Machlis et al., “Working model of the human ecosystem.”⁵⁴

In regard to community gardens, the resource systems involved include natural resources such as flora and fauna and the land used to grow them provide material and nutrient sources.⁵⁵ If the workers at a community garden are paid, such as at the PACT gardens, then they also would include the socioeconomic resources. Organizations, fall under the cultural resources as they create and sustain human social systems.⁵⁶ In the case

⁵⁴ Machlis, Force, and Burch, “The Human Ecosystem Part I: The Human Ecosystem as an Organizing Concept in Ecosystem Management,” 352.

⁵⁵ Machlis, Force, and Burch, “The Human Ecosystem Part I: The Human Ecosystem as an Organizing Concept in Ecosystem Management,” 354.

⁵⁶ Machlis, Force, and Burch, “The Human Ecosystem Part I: The Human Ecosystem as an Organizing Concept in Ecosystem Management,” 355.

of a community garden, they can also host workshops and participants who attend garden events or volunteer in the space may also hold certain beliefs. When it comes to human social systems, a community garden can be a sustenance and education social institution. The community garden and the community it is in can experience social cycles such as COVID-19 and the forest fires that were present dynamics during the 2023 season. Finally, depending on the structure of the community garden, there is a social order which can involve a hierarchy, different social norms, and personal identities.⁵⁷ These variables interact and influence within their own systems, and the different social and resource systems intertwine with each other.

It is important to note that often the benefits that come associated with community gardens and urban agriculture are presented when participants spend their time in them. However, not much research has been done when looking at the garden as a workplace. Rather, many articles promote workplace gardens as an additional aspect for employee wellness.⁵⁸ Often workplace gardens are marketed as wellness efforts, promoting physical activity and socialization as workers take a break and spend time outdoors which could help to increase their productivity.⁵⁹ But what happens when what is supposed to help our

⁵⁷ Machlis, Force, and Burch, “The Human Ecosystem Part I: The Human Ecosystem as an Organizing Concept in Ecosystem Management,” 351-352.

⁵⁸ Michelle Reynolds, “Workplace Gardens: Growing Camaraderie, Collaboration and Team Spirit,” HGTV, n.d., <https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/gardens/garden-styles-and-types/workplace-gardens--growing-camaraderie--collaboration-and-team-s>; Helen Burnett-Nichols, “Tending the Roots of Employee Wellness: A Look at Workplace Gardens,” Benefits Canada, December 19, 2017, <https://www.benefitscanada.com/news/bencan/tending-the-roots-of-employee-wellness-a-look-at-workplace-gardens/>.

⁵⁹ Reynolds, “Workplace Gardens: Growing Camaraderie, Collaboration and Team Spirit”; Burnett-Nichols, “Tending the Roots of Employee Wellness: A Look at Workplace Gardens.”

well-being actually hinders it? What if the workplace is the garden? This community garden is a non-profit workplace and with that comes non-profit challenges.

Organizational Structures: Mutual Aid and Non-Profit

Community gardens can have different organizational structures with different purposes. In this section, I focus on two organizational structures: mutual aid and non-profits. These organizational structures have distinct characteristics but are not always mutually exclusive.

Mutual aid organizations are most often for the people, and with or by the people. This means that the group is formed by community members who collectively aim to work together to meet the needs of the community.⁶⁰ Mutual aid involves collective self-organization to meet the needs of community members, as those from the community would know best what their needs are and how to cater to them.⁶¹ Mutual aid organizations can aid in overcoming government policies and infrastructure during a crisis, which often involve an inadequate one-size fits all approach.⁶²

Mutual aid is not a new term and was coined in the 19th-20th century by Peter Kropotkin who challenged Darwin's idea of survival of the fittest. Kropotkin argued that successful survivors are those "who mutually support their communities for the prosperity

⁶⁰ Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* (Verso Books, 2020). 39.

⁶¹ Aine Creedon, "The Growing Role of Mutual Aid - Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly," Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly, May 1, 2022, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/the-growing-role-of-mutual-aid/>. ; *Justice, Equity and Emergency Management*.

⁶² Creedon, "The Growing Role of Mutual Aid - Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly.>"; Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*. 40.

of the species as a whole.”⁶³ Mutual aid has also been present in Indigenous communities with “long-established practices of caring for each other for our survival.”⁶⁴ For instance, K’é is a Diné Navajo Kinship System emphasizing the reciprocal connections and intentionally maintained balance of everything in the universe.⁶⁵ Engaging with collectivism, rather than individualism, against colonial mindsets and for social justice.⁶⁶

Organizational structures of mutual aid organizations are more collective as they push to redesign leadership and decision-making through a horizontal or flat structure rather than a traditional hierarchical system.⁶⁷ In late 2020, Great Place to Work conducted a survey and found that employees in a non-hierarchical structure had approachable leaders and were treated as valued equal members who were able to provide feedback and express their opinions.⁶⁸ These types of organizational structures allow for adaptability in a

⁶³ Liv Collins, “Mutual Aid 101: History, Politics, and Organizational Structures of Community Care - CUFPI,” CUFPI, August 23, 2023, <https://cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org/news/2023/08/22/m>.

⁶⁴ Collins, “Mutual Aid 101: History, Politics, and Organizational Structures of Community Care - CUFPI.”; Rudy, “Zine: How to Start an Indigenous Mutual Aid COVID-19 Relief Project.,” April 28, 2021, <https://www.indigenouaction.org/zine-how-to-start-an-indigenous-mutual-aid-covid-19-relief-project/>.

⁶⁵ Collins, “Mutual Aid 101: History, Politics, and Organizational Structures of Community Care - CUFPI.”; “In The Navajo Nation, Anarchism Has Indigenous Roots | the Nation,” The Nation, September 26, 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/activism/anarchism-navajo-aid/>.

⁶⁶ Collins, “Mutual Aid 101: History, Politics, and Organizational Structures of Community Care - CUFPI.”

⁶⁷ Collins, “Mutual Aid 101: History, Politics, and Organizational Structures of Community Care - CUFPI.”; Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*.; Oli Mould et al., “Solidarity, Not Charity: Learning the Lessons of the COVID-19 Pandemic to Reconceptualise the Radicality of Mutual Aid,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 47, no. 4 (June 9, 2022): 866–79, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12553>.

⁶⁸ Lorena Martinez and Ed Frauenheim, “COVID-19 Reveals Why Flat Organizations Thrive: Steal Their Secrets,” Great Place to Work Philippines, January 2021, <https://greatplacetowork.com.ph/blog/covid-19-reveals-why-flat-organizations-thrive-steal-their-secrets/>.

frequently changing environment, such as during the pandemic. They also allow for a feeling of co-ownership which helps to prevent a sense of burnout and turnover.⁶⁹ It is important to note that Spade (2020) cautioned that financial concerns can make it more difficult for organizations to stay true to their cause. It can also begin to implement more hierarchy as paid members may have more responsibility and expectations as well as be from more privileged backgrounds, as compared to non-paid members.⁷⁰

However, non-profit organizations usually have a more traditional hierarchical structure with more accountability to others. These traditional structures can vary but typically have a top-down approach with a non-paid Board of Directors, overseeing the Director, followed by the managers of various programs, staff for those programs, volunteers and finally clients. This traditional hierarchy can be seen in Figure 5.⁷¹ They have a charitable mission and aim to address a social need. They often receive specific donations and grants which may be for specific purposes and fund the services their

⁶⁹ Collins, “Mutual Aid 101: History, Politics, and Organizational Structures of Community Care - CUFPI.”; Lynn Amerman Goerdt, “Organizational and Intervention Structures,” *Macro Practice for Community and Organizational Change*, n.d., <https://wisconsin.pressbooks.pub/macropractice/chapter/identifying-organizational-or-service-structure/>.

⁷⁰ Collins, “Mutual Aid 101: History, Politics, and Organizational Structures of Community Care - CUFPI.”; Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*. 26.

⁷¹ Karen Lee, “What Is the Hierarchy of a Nonprofit Organization?,” *Instrumentl*, June 23, 2023, <https://www.instrumentl.com/blog/what-is-the-hierarchy-of-nonprofit-organization/>; OrgChart Team, “Effective Nonprofit Org Charts: Strategies, Structures, Tips, and OrgChart Tools,” *OrgChart*, December 17, 2024, <https://theorgchart.com/effective-nonprofit-org-charts-strategies-structures-tips-and-orgchart-tools/>.

provide.⁷² They have a volunteer-based board of directors, by-laws, and often have to present a specific strategic plan for their funding.⁷³

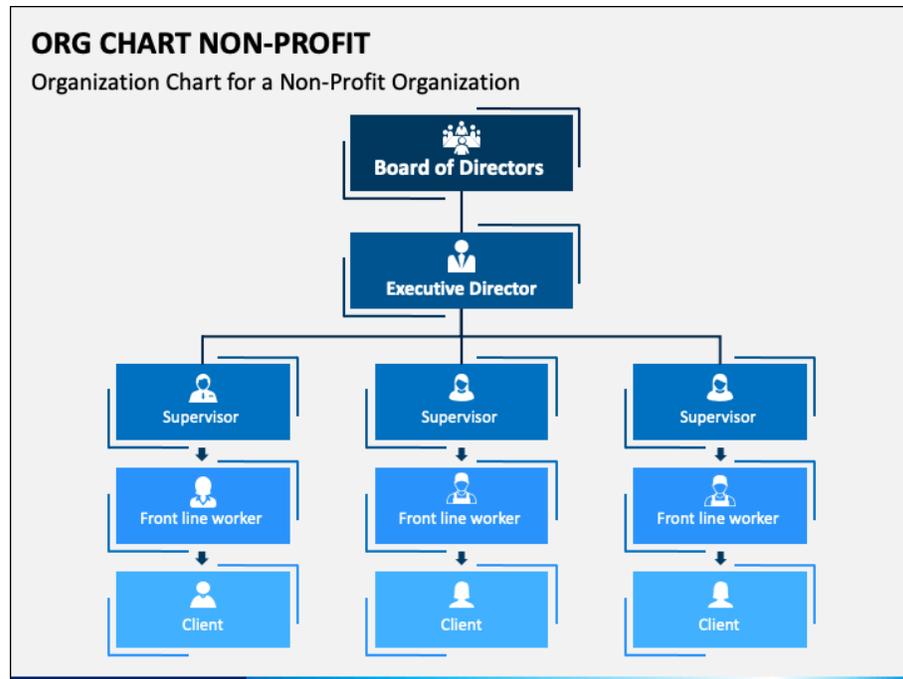


Figure 5. Diagram depicting the hierarchical organization chart for non-profits.⁷⁴

The hierarchical structure emphasizes varying decision-making models in non-profit organizations (see Figure 5). Sometimes it is the board making decisions, while in other organizations the executive director could also be making the main decisions with the board overseeing them. Sometimes, the specific programs within the non-profit have their own leadership, there can also be collective democratic decision making as well as a flat or

⁷² Goerd, “Organizational and Intervention Structures.”

⁷³ Kirstin Skinner, “What Is the Board Structure for a Nonprofit Organization?,” Aprio, March 27, 2024, <https://aprioboardportal.com/news/nonprofit-board-structure/>; Goerd, “Organizational and Intervention Structures.”

⁷⁴ Karen Lee, ORG CHART NON-PROFIT. Organization Chart for a Non-Profit Organization. “What Is the Hierarchy of a Nonprofit Organization?” June 3, 2023, <https://www.instrumentl.com/blog/what-is-the-hierarchy-of-nonprofit-organization>.

horizontal structure which is similar to mutual aid structures.⁷⁵ All of these structures have their own pros and cons and can affect the equity and the responsibilities within the organizational structure.⁷⁶

Just as there are many different types of community gardens, there are many different types of organizational structures with various benefits and goals. It is important to ensure that all members of the organization align with the structure to ensure that participants' roles and responsibilities are clear and can be met. "A garden is what a gardener makes it,"⁷⁷ thus the structure the garden follows will help to determine its priorities, goals, and organizational success. Figure 6 depicts an internal structure in which there is some separation between governance and management and management and labour and how the various data and information such as policies, feedback, practises, and environment can impact the different levels and hopefully initiate some change in action.⁷⁸ Through the flows of information in a garden setting for example, there are specific deliverables that may need to be met such as providing food for community and having events. They can gather information from feedback and expectations of what the community would like grown, this can also be impacted by environmental information, such as it being too hot to successfully grow a certain vegetable. Thus, outside factors (stakeholders and

⁷⁵ Social Work Portal, "Build a Stronger Nonprofit: Choosing the Right Organizational Structure," n.d., <https://www.socialworkportal.com/nonprofit-organization-structure/>.

⁷⁶ Social Work Portal, "Build a Stronger Nonprofit: Choosing the Right Organizational Structure."

⁷⁷ David A. Galbraith, "Chapter 2: Governance Models, Human and Financial Resources Development," in *From Idea to Realisation – BGCI's Manual on Planning, Developing and Managing Botanic Gardens*, ed. Joachim Gratzfeld (Botanic Gardens Conservation International, Richmond, United Kingdom, 2016), <https://www.bgci.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/BGCI%20Botanic%20Garden%20Manual.pdf>. 30.

⁷⁸ David A. Galbraith, "Chapter 2: Governance Models, Human and Financial Resources Development," 31.

environment) can have an impact on internal practices while still having to follow the organizational policies. Nevertheless, determining and following the organizational structure of the community garden and making adaptations when necessary is imperative for cohesion of the team, ensuring that tasks and responsibilities are met, whilst also providing for the community.

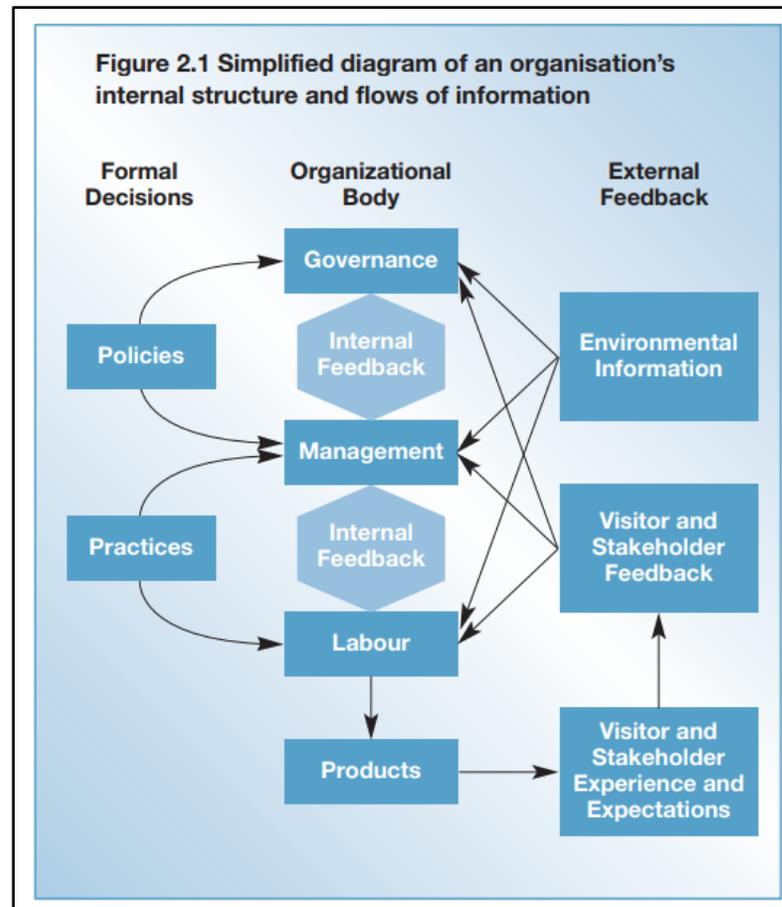


Figure 6. Diagram depicting a simplified internal structure and information flow of an organization.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ David A. Galbraith, “Chapter 2: Governance Models, Human and Financial Resources Development,” 31.

Benefits of Community Gardens – The Psychosocial Aspects

There are many different benefits of community gardens. They provide an accessible green space, food security, learning environment, as well as a space for social connection. Community gardens are gathering spaces which support people's interest to stay healthy and include a variety of individuals. My hope for this thesis was to demonstrate community gardens as social connection spaces in which a diverse community could experience psychosocial benefits and positive effects on well-being. Psychosocial aspects involve the relationship between the psychological and social aspects of a person and how this influences and affects how people interact with one another within community including individual, peer and family relationships.⁸⁰ The diverse people of different cultures and ages helps build a sense of community which can help to increase participants willingness and openness to learning.⁸¹ Community gardens are spaces where people can collaborate and volunteer together, as they work together on the land and communicate their gardening visions and their stories, they share their knowledge and learn from one another, thus benefiting their physical and psychosocial well-being.⁸²

⁸⁰ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, "Psychosocial Support and Social and Emotional Learning (PSS and SEL)."

⁸¹ Judy Maan Miedema, Ellen Desjardins, and Kevan Marshall, "'Not just a Passing Fancy' How community Gardens Contribute to Healthy and Inclusive Neighbourhoods," *Google Docs* (Region of Waterloo Public Health, May 2013), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BgrR8iVdpYrf-2uac07DqiZKx4KT89za/view>; Webb, "Inclusive Spaces: Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Community Gardens."

⁸² Xiaolan Wang, Ron Wakkary, Carman Neustaedter, and Audrey Desjardins, "Information Sharing, Scheduling, and Awareness in Community Gardening Collaboration," *C&T '15: Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Communities and Technologies* (New York, United States of America: Association for Computing Machinery, June 27, 2015): 79. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2768545.2768556>.

Research has shown that spending time in community garden spaces increases social connectedness.⁸³ Social connectedness is the sense of belonging, which includes meeting one's needs for different relationships and supports.⁸⁴ Social connectedness can improve the quality of relationships which helps offset the effects of loneliness and social isolation leading to healthier lives and well-being. Social connectedness connects people to their communities, helping them feel safe, welcomed, and trust each other which could also increase well-being.⁸⁵ Providing community garden spaces for connection allows people to locally mitigate the ecological disconnect between humans and nature, by interacting with one another, connecting with each other, and connecting with nature.⁸⁶ Sharing stories, and different ways of being in nature allows people to socialize and connect with one another in different ways. Gray et al. (2022), and Cochran and Minaker (2020) have shown the social impacts of community gardens through increased social interactions, social

⁸³ Tonia Gray et al., "Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in Social Housing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection," *Local Environment* 27, no. 5 (March 7, 2022): 570–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2022.2048255>.

⁸⁴ "Social Connection," CDC - U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 27, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/social-connectedness/about/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/emotional-wellbeing/social-connectedness/index.htm.

⁸⁵ Plan H and Ministry of Health, "Social Connectedness - Local Government Action Guides for Healthy Communities" (BC Healthy Communities, January 2018), https://bchealthycommunities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/socialconnectedness_ag_v2_1_web.pdf; Risa Wilkerson, "Design Inclusive Public Spaces to Strengthen Social Connections | Healthy Places by Design," Healthy Places by Design, March 23, 2021, <https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/design-inclusive-public-spaces-to-strengthen-social-connections/>.

⁸⁶ McClintock, "Why Farm the City? Theorizing Urban Agriculture Through a Lens of Metabolic Rift," 199, 201; Dehaene, Tornaghi, and Sage, "Mending the Metabolic Rift: Placing the 'urban' in Urban Agriculture."

cohesion and community building.⁸⁷ Various studies (in Australia, North America, and the UK) have suggested that the food production and community engagement in gardens have helped contribute to community development and social capital. A concept introduced by Hou (2009) called Community Commons describes how community gardens in which neighbours interact “may contribute to placemaking, neighbourhood resilience, autonomy, and pride.”⁸⁸ As community members connect with each other and with nature, this increase in social connection and collaboration experienced within garden spaces allows participants to have a sense of belonging and improve community well-being.⁸⁹

With a diverse population accessing community garden spaces, the inclusion of people with a variety of different backgrounds, ages, income levels and needs, people are able to learn from one another, share their knowledge and build a personal social network.⁹⁰

Within community gardens, individuals are there for a shared purpose and being in a shared

⁸⁷ Gray et al., “Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in Social Housing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection.” 572-573; Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 163.

⁸⁸ Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 163-164.

⁸⁹ Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 163; Bice et al., “Community Gardens: Interactions Between Communities, Schools, and Impact on Students.” 4-6; Webb, “Inclusive Spaces: Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Community Gardens.”

⁹⁰ Miedema, Desjardins, and Marshall, “‘Not Just a Passing Fancy’ How Community Gardens Contribute to Healthy and Inclusive Neighbourhoods.” 4, 17; Kirti Das and Anu Ramaswami, “Who Gardens and How in Urban USA: Informing Social Equity in Urban Agriculture Action Plans,” *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 6 (July 6, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.923079>; South Zone Community Gardens, “Cultivating Friendships: The Social Benefits of Community Gardens.”; Mejia, Bhattacharya, and Miraglia, “Community Gardening as a Way to Build Cross-Cultural Community Resilience in Intersectionally Diverse Gardeners: Community-Based Participatory Research and Campus-Community-Partnered Proposal.”

space often creates a relationship. Many participants in community gardens will keep coming back. Some members at the JPCI garden attend because their friends come and even if there are gardens closer to their homes, they take public transit to get to the garden. Others, especially younger members, will meet and create intergenerational relationships which are beneficial for both parties to combat loneliness and to learn from one another. Within these garden spaces, different types of interactions, collaborations, and shared experiences occur which can be beneficial to the psychosocial aspects of a person's well-being. Well-being is overall also being addressed here as it "refers to physical, emotional, social, and cognitive health. [...] Aspects of wellbeing include: biological, material, social, spiritual, cultural, emotional, and mental."⁹¹ Within this thesis, I focus on psychosocial well-being and attempt to explore how relationships within the community garden space may affect them by asking questionnaire participants about whether the community garden has improved their well-being (material, social, spiritual, cultural, emotional, and mental).

Yet, these benefits are not guaranteed. Some findings suggest that outdoor spaces are not intrinsically associated with social connectedness but rather it may be dependent on the activities being conducted within these spaces.⁹² Though gardens can be exclusionary spaces, green spaces in which people are included and can participate in activities improve a number of social aspects including interactions, networks, and capital through bonding.⁹³ Activities in these community spaces also improve participants' gardening knowledge and

⁹¹ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, "Psychosocial Support and Social and Emotional Learning (PSS and SEL)."

⁹² Elise Rivera et al., "Outdoor Public Recreation Spaces and Social Connectedness Among Adolescents," *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1 (January 24, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-12558-6>.

⁹³ Scherer, "Places, spaces, social connection and people's wellbeing".

skills, as well as physical health, and nutrition thus improving overall (biological and psychological) individual and (social and environmental) community well-being.⁹⁴

Community Gardens as a Non-Profit Organizations: Employee Well-being

YMCA WorkWell conducted a 2024 Workplace Well-being Report investigating employee well-being in Canadian non-profit organizations. They found that at least half of the non-profit sector was burnt out as 58% of employees and 71% of leaders felt burnt-out.⁹⁵ In addition, their findings demonstrated that those who did not feel their work was recognized and valued were four times more likely to feel burnout. Based on Statistics Canada data from 2021, 74% of non-profit employees attended a post-secondary institution compared to 56% of Canadians, nonetheless, their income is 26% less than the Canadian average.⁹⁶ In addition, a 2011 report on developing employability within urban agriculture projects from London, England found that there is potential to attain and sustain employment by supporting the development and training of transferable skills and workers confidence.⁹⁷ Taking these factors into consideration, it is not surprising that the YMCA

⁹⁴ Scherer, “Places, spaces, social connection and people’s wellbeing”; Stewart Martin, “Places, spaces and social connection: five years of new learning”. *what works wellbeing*. (February 2, 2023). <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/places-spaces-and-social-connection-five-years-of-new-learning/>; McClintock, “Why Farm the City? Theorizing Urban Agriculture Through a Lens of Metabolic Rift,” 201; Dehaene, Tornaghi, and Sage, “Mending the Metabolic Rift: Placing the ‘urban’ in Urban Agriculture.”

⁹⁵ “Insights to Impact: 2024 Workplace Well-being Report,” YMCA WorkWell, n.d., <https://www.ymcaworkwell.com/insights-to-impact-2024>.

⁹⁶ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, “The Daily — Non-Profit Organizations and Volunteering Satellite Account: Human Resources Module, 2010 to 2021,” September 18, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230918/dq230918c-eng.htm>.

⁹⁷ Olivia Varley-Winter, City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development, and Capital Growth, “Roots to Work: Developing Employability Through Community Food-growing and Urban Agriculture,” *Sustain*, October 2011.

WorkWell impact report found that one in five non-profit workers considered leaving their role in the next six months.⁹⁸

Unsurprisingly, non-profit turnover rate is high. YMCA WorkWell found that 61% of employees seek other roles due to pay, followed by 41% because of feeling burnout, and 37% for feeling under-appreciated.⁹⁹ Despite minimum wage and salaries rising in the past years, the fact that garden work is seasonal, may also add to the higher turn over rate in outdoor non-profits and the need for more safety training every season. In 2013, the International Labour Office (ILO) found that social protection and social dialogue were global issues in urban agriculture, specifically workers have safety, decent working conditions, and support from local governments and organizations.¹⁰⁰ They argued that, “agriculture [was] one of the three most dangerous occupations” and that workers needed to be protected by health and safety measures.¹⁰¹ They also discussed social protections in that agriculture workers needed to have access to unemployment, sick leave, and injury coverage.¹⁰²

Community garden work and food security work often has high emotional demand and insufficient compensation but is nonetheless passion-driven work. In addition, there may be more responsibilities without always more compensation nor recognition as only

⁹⁸ “Insights to Impact: 2024 Workplace Well-Being Report.”

⁹⁹ “Insights to Impact: 2024 Workplace Well-Being Report.”

¹⁰⁰ Peter Hurst et al., *Labour Issues in Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture: Information and Resource Guide*, 2013, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---integration/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_568945.pdf, xviii.

¹⁰¹ Hurst et al., *Labour Issues in Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture: Information and Resource Guide*, 27.

¹⁰² Hurst et al., *Labour Issues in Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture: Information and Resource Guide*, 29.

5% of non-profit workers feel a healthy level of recognition and low burnout, 10% lower than the Canadian average.¹⁰³ This passion and social engagement can be draining as roles can be public-facing to meet community needs whilst also being understaffed and taking on more responsibilities which can also add to the burnout and increase turnover rate. Implementing social systems described by the ILO ensures that there are additional trainings, social protections, inter-organizational social dialogues and compensation. This helps to establish a space in which urban agriculture workers' employment, safety, and well-being are met leading to sustainably meeting community needs and furthering organizational success.

¹⁰³ “Insights to Impact: 2024 Workplace Well-Being Report.”

Intergenerational and Intercultural Learning Space

Community gardens are social connection spaces which bring together a variety of individuals. These spaces can be great for intergenerational and intercultural interaction and knowledge sharing. Collective urban gardening involves intergenerational cooperation through which knowledge is transferred about community values and guidance for environmental stewardship.¹⁰⁴ As an open, inviting, and safe space, with individuals participating in a shared activity, a community garden allows people to more freely connect to one another. People gather in the garden for various reasons, to socialize, to learn from one another, to connect with the land, physical activity, and access to food.¹⁰⁵ Looking at the space as a place for engagement, specifically for intercultural and intergenerational learning and sharing of culture, we can see that community gardens grow not only produce, but communities and human ecosystems which extend outside of the garden space.

Urban community gardens in which learning takes place can be referred to as urban learning spaces.¹⁰⁶ Even in allotment gardens, where people work on their own plots, there is intergenerational and intercultural passing on of knowledge.¹⁰⁷ There is a diverse population of people who differ in age, ethnicity, and sociodemographic status who all access community gardens.¹⁰⁸ Many of these individuals are older adults, minorities, and

¹⁰⁴ Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 34.

¹⁰⁵ South Zone Community Gardens, "Cultivating Friendships: The Social Benefits of Community Gardens."

¹⁰⁶ Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 27.

¹⁰⁷ Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 29.

¹⁰⁸ Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 28; Gray et al., "Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in

women in low-income families trying to provide fresh food for their families.¹⁰⁹ Collective urban gardening can include service-based and shared site garden projects which have a focus on intergenerational relationship building and learning whilst changing the way an urban space is regarded and utilised from possibly threatening and run-down space to a thriving garden space.¹¹⁰ These collective spaces are able to address both formal and informal learning whilst being beneficial in a multitude of ways for the individuals who access and participate in the space.

Community gardens are local learning environments filled with place-based education and shared experiences through formal and non-formal learning.¹¹¹ Sharing lived experiences, such as stories, language, and culture, helps individuals understand and engage with each other to create deeper community bonds. These interrelational experiences can also increase interest in environmental stewardship and civic engagement.¹¹²

Social Housing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection.” 573.

¹⁰⁹ Hake, “Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens.” 29.

¹¹⁰ Hake, “Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens.” 31-32.

¹¹¹ Gray et al., “Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in Social Housing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection.” 572-573; Ranjan Datta, “Community Garden: A Bridging Program Between Formal and Informal Learning,” ed. Rebecca Maree, *Cogent Education* 3, no. 1 (April 29, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2016.1177154>; Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 163.

¹¹² Gray et al., “Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in Social Housing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection.” 572-573.

Community-based and land-based learning helps people to connect to place and to learn more about the land and each other.¹¹³ These social interactions aid in community development through cultural integration, people learn about each other, embrace their differences, and take steps towards sharing power through food security, and environmental activism.¹¹⁴ Through these shared experiences, the community builds social capital and trust, as there are more intercultural and intergenerational bridging opportunities within the human ecosystem.¹¹⁵ This revitalization of intergenerational and intercultural knowledge networks helps to build a sense of ownership towards the garden space and sustainable food systems as they work to build and grow with one another.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Datta, “Community Garden: A Bridging Program Between Formal and Informal Learning.”

¹¹⁴ Datta, “Community Garden: A Bridging Program Between Formal and Informal Learning.”

¹¹⁵ Datta, “Community Garden: A Bridging Program Between Formal and Informal Learning.”

¹¹⁶ Mariaelena Huambachano et al., “Knowledge Networks to Support Youth Engagement in Sustainable Food Systems,” *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 6 (September 26, 2022): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.867344>; South Zone Community Gardens, “Cultivating Friendships: The Social Benefits of Community Gardens”; Mejia, Bhattacharya, and Miraglia, “Community Gardening as a Way to Build Cross-Cultural Community Resilience in Intersectionally Diverse Gardeners: Community-Based Participatory Research and Campus-Community-Partnered Proposal.”

Chapter 3: Outline of the PACT GTL Gardens

The community garden in which I conducted my research is different from a typical community garden. It is run by PACT ("Peace, Actualization, Community, Transformation") Urban Peace Program, a non-profit organization, and is located on Toronto District School Board (TDSB) property. Specifically, this garden, the David Wilson Memorial Garden is located at John Polanyi Collegiate Institute and is thus referred to as JPCI. The PACT Grow-to-Learn (GTL) gardens are privately owned service-based sites on school grounds.¹¹⁷ There are paid garden staff who often are not from the neighbourhood and community volunteers. Since the garden is located on high school property, there are student volunteers as well. This chapter introduces the neighbourhood in which the research space is situated, it explains more in-depth about the PACT organization, and examines the changes that have occurred to the GTL program due to COVID-19 as they attempted to meet community needs.

¹¹⁷ Bice et al., "Community Gardens: Interactions Between Communities, Schools, and Impact on Students." 3; Hake, "Gardens as Learning Spaces: Intergenerational Learning in Urban Food Gardens." 29.

The Garden in Relation to the Neighbourhood

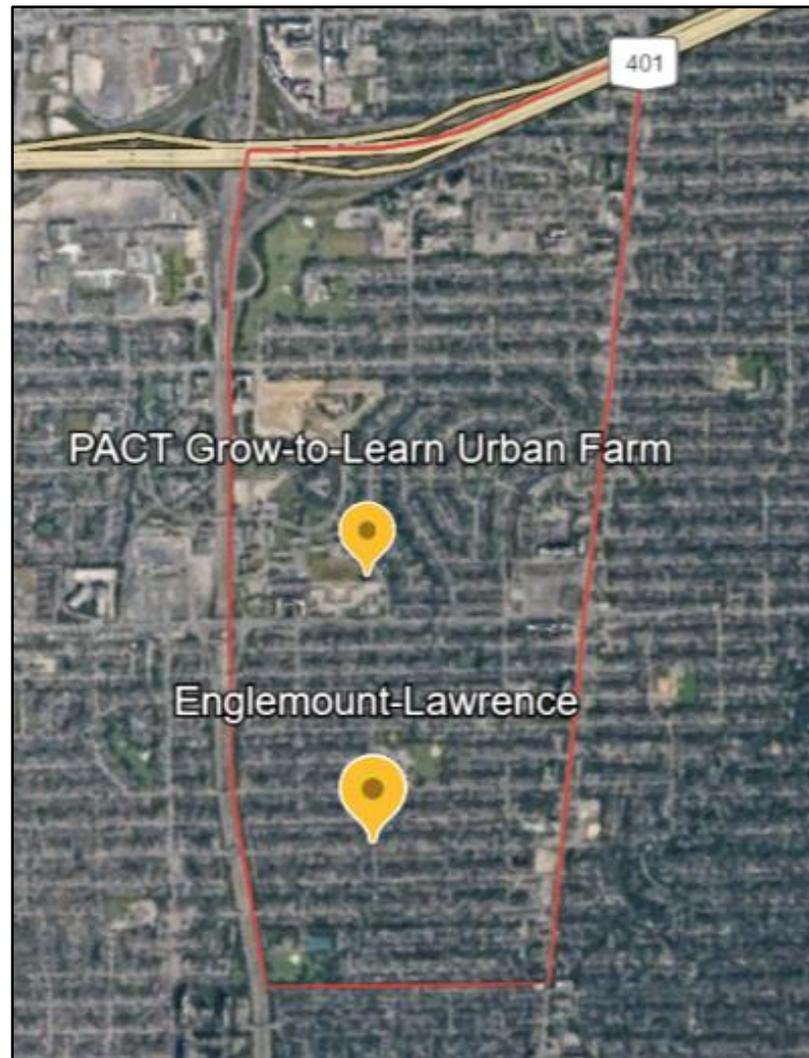


Figure 7. Aerial view of the Englemount-Lawrence Neighbourhood within the red border. It also depicts the PACT GTL Urban Farm, specifically the JPCI location.¹¹⁸

The JPCI garden is located in a large urban setting in Toronto, Canada near the intersection of two major highways. The neighbourhood is called Englemount-Lawrence

¹¹⁸ Aerial View of the Englemount-Lawrence Neighbourhood, Google Earth, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://earth.google.com/web/search/Englemount-Lawrence,+North+York,+ON/>.

or Lawrence Heights (see Figure 7). There are some small malls and plazas nearby, and there is a diverse array of community and subsidized housing on some nearby streets and million-dollar homes on others. The PACT JPCI community garden represents a diverse range of community members. In my research, I did not include people under 16 years old or those who identified as TDSB students. Nevertheless, based on my questionnaire findings, the population using the community garden is similar to the population of the neighbourhood as per the City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles which were created using Statistics Canada census findings from 2021. It also includes information from the 2016 census, which helps to compare some of the changes in the community.

The neighbourhood in which the PACT JPCI garden is located is demographically diverse. Based on the information collected in the neighbourhood profile, the average age of the people in Englemount-Lawrence is 38.4 years old, with a growing population.¹¹⁹ In the census, based on data that excludes children and youth, there were more adults than seniors with 57% adult respondents (working age [25-54 years]) and 26% seniors (65+ years).¹²⁰ There is a similar mix of housing types in Englemount-Lawrence with 57% of the community renting their homes. Apartment buildings are a main type of housing with 68% of the population in this neighbourhood living in them.¹²¹ Not many apartment-buildings have a green space, especially midtown.¹²² In addition, many seniors live in the

¹¹⁹ “Neighbourhood Profiles - City of Toronto - Englemount-Lawrence (32),” Tableau Public, November 4, 2024, Snapshot, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/city.of.toronto6715/viz/NeighbourhoodProfiles-CityofToronto/Snapshot110>.

¹²⁰ “Neighbourhood Profiles - City of Toronto - Englemount-Lawrence (32),” Snapshot.

¹²¹ “Neighbourhood Profiles - City of Toronto - Englemount-Lawrence (32),” Housing.

¹²² Ziyue ‘Davia’ Dong and Eric J. Miller, “Socio-spatial Disparities in Urban Green Space Accessibility: The Existing Challenge for Toronto in Its Aspiration to Be a

neighbourhood with 50.3% of them living alone. Compared to the previous census conducted in 2016, this is an increase of 8.1% in the number of seniors living alone.¹²³ Based on results from my questionnaire, seniors represented 53% of garden participants and 36% of participants identified as adults. Thus, socializing in the garden could be beneficial to them to get together, share a meal and share stories in nature.

The neighbourhood is comprised of 45.6% immigrants, and 38.7% of the population in the region's mother tongue is not English with 21.7% speaking a non-official language at home.¹²⁴ Tagalog was the language spoken most often, followed by Spanish and Russian.¹²⁵ In my questionnaires, community members filled in the various languages they spoke. Through my research 32% of community garden participants spoke a language other than English in the garden. Community members spoke Tagalog the most followed by French and Spanish. Based on the census, most of the immigrants were from the Philippines and other than Canadian, Filipino was the most commonly self-identified culture and nationality. As a result, not everyone who comes to the garden speaks English. Due to the increase of Ukrainian immigrants and refugees, I unexpectedly spoke Russian quite a lot to help translate for them to be able to access services and resources. Other staff members knew Spanish and were able to help community members access services. In 2023, John Polanyi Collegiate Institute also hosted English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. I am not sure if the ESL classes were running in 2021, the year the census

Liveable City," *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 47, no. 1 (May 14, 2024): 51, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1111344ar>.

¹²³ "Neighbourhood Profiles - City of Toronto - Englemount-Lawrence (32)," At a Glance.

¹²⁴ "Neighbourhood Profiles - City of Toronto - Englemount-Lawrence (32)," At a Glance.

¹²⁵ "Neighbourhood Profiles - City of Toronto - Englemount-Lawrence (32)," Language.

information was collected, nevertheless coming to the garden to connect with one another, socialize, and practice English could be beneficial.¹²⁶ Given the census and my questionnaire findings, I believe continuing to encourage community engagement and intercultural and intergenerational social connection and exchanges would continue to be beneficial for community development and social harmony.

What is PACT and GTL?

The PACT Urban Peace program is a non-profit organization whose goal is to support “systemically under-resourced communities.”¹²⁷ They develop and deliver various community programming with experiential learning opportunities including youth life coaching and mentoring, and food security initiatives.¹²⁸

PACT’s mission statement and vision are:

Our Mission: To strengthen community wellness by supporting and empowering youth, families, and seniors within nurturing, inclusive, and accessible environments. We develop, deliver, and scale our best-practice community programming, food security initiatives, youth life coaching and mentorship, and experiential learning opportunities. PACT creates strategic community partnerships with organizations that share our values and goals.

¹²⁶ Gray et al., “Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in Social Housing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection.” 572-573.

¹²⁷ “About GTL | Grow-to-Learn | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto.”

¹²⁸ “About GTL | Grow-to-Learn | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto.”

Our Vision: Vibrant, thriving communities that are inclusive and accessible so that every person has the opportunity to reach their full potential.¹²⁹

The organization has been running for 30 years and has created and implemented various programs in this time. In 2023, in addition to their PACTMusic and Life Plan Coaching programs, there was a focus and emphasis on GTL programming. Their GTL gardens have been running for 17 years in partnership with the TDSB's EcoSchools program. EcoSchools promotes environmental education and action by supporting student and staff learning.¹³⁰ As PACT is an Educational Partner, their main mandate is to facilitate programming for school classes. The JPCI location is the longest in operation which has been running for 15 years. The TCI location was also running in 2023, and I had the opportunity to visit once in the summer of 2023. There is also a location at Elmbank Junior Middle Academy that used to be an orchard with 62 fruit trees and is now an accessible garden with raised beds.¹³¹

Almost all of my time the summer of 2023 was spent at JPCI, as I worked and researched there every weekday, thus I will be focusing on the garden space there. JPCI is a 1.75-acre outdoor experiential learning and community engagement space.¹³² It used to

¹²⁹ "About GTL | Grow-to-Learn | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto."

¹³⁰ "EcoSchools," Toronto District School Board, n.d., <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/environment/Home/EcoSchools>.

¹³¹ "2018 Year in Review – Annual Impact Report," *PACT Program*. (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2018), 6, https://www.pactprogram.ca/files/ugd/dafc25_bcdddf8d68814acea1d101e4573d2378.pdf

¹³² "2017 Annual Report – Our Year in Review," *PACT Program*. (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2017), 10, https://www.pactprogram.ca/files/ugd/dafc25_e9c88c8b0b164b76ae3e06fdc89c845b.pdf

be a vacant lot but through a lot of work and dedication, it was transformed into a green space for outdoor experiential education, community connection, nature connectivity, and food. The PACT Garden reclaimed a space that was not being used and created a green space with diverse purposes which adapted to the needs of the community. This community garden made me think of Cronon’s article “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” reminding us of the nature that we have near us, in an urbanized setting.¹³³ The JPCI garden was designed by Tim Murphy, a horticulturalist and landscape artist, it contains 15 fruit bearing trees and 150 fruit bearing shrubs.¹³⁴

¹³³ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3985059>.

¹³⁴ “Annual Impact Report 2023,” *PACT Program* (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2023), 3, https://www.pactprogram.ca/files/ugd/dafc25_260cd2864f7f4a7b90c5f3f64aea8533.pdf.

Describing the JPCI Garden in 2023 from Fieldnotes



Figure 8. Photograph of a garden sign painted in 2022 that hangs on the inside of the garden gate. June 6, 2023.

Welcome to the JPCI Garden!

As you approach the garden you see four raised beds with beautiful flowers as well as edible herbs for community members to harvest. Along the fence, there are raspberry bushes which can be accessed from outside the garden and from within. When you enter the garden there are tall cup flowers which create a hallway into the ‘secret’ garden. If you could see behind the cup flowers or take the path to your right as you enter, you would see a field of greens. To your left is the Indigenous Garden, in 2023, there was a big mound in the middle representing Turtle Island. There were four mounds around it representing the Medicine Wheel, all growing the three sisters, corn, squash, and beans. There was also an arrowhead garden with medicinal herbs, sage and tobacco. Finally, there is a row of berry

bushes which everyone likes to snack on. Native pollinator gardens can be found throughout the garden space.

As you continue through the garden, you can see one of the pollinator gardens, a circular one, with tall flowers, and edible herbs. You will see a big, covered seating area, an outdoor kitchen with a cobb oven and working sinks, as well as additional seating areas throughout the garden. If you walk through the area, you will see more rows of vegetables, and two raised beds with hot peppers. This area also features an original Kensington market car with multi-coloured poppies and other flowers growing out of it. To your left, there is a red barn that used to have a chicken coop! Behind the barn, there is another educational space with a yellow fabric tarp providing some shade.

Thank you for joining this garden tour!

Aerial View of the Garden

The images in Figure 9 and Figure 10 help to provide a visual representation of the Garden space, its layout, and some of the surroundings.



Figure 9. Aerial View of the JPCI Garden. Most likely from 2021 after digging up the space and covering with tarp for solarization.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Aerial View of the JPCI Garden, Google Earth, accessed January 29, 2024. <https://earth.google.com/web/search/PACT+Grow-to-Learn+Urban+Farm,+Varna+Drive,+North+York,+ON/>.

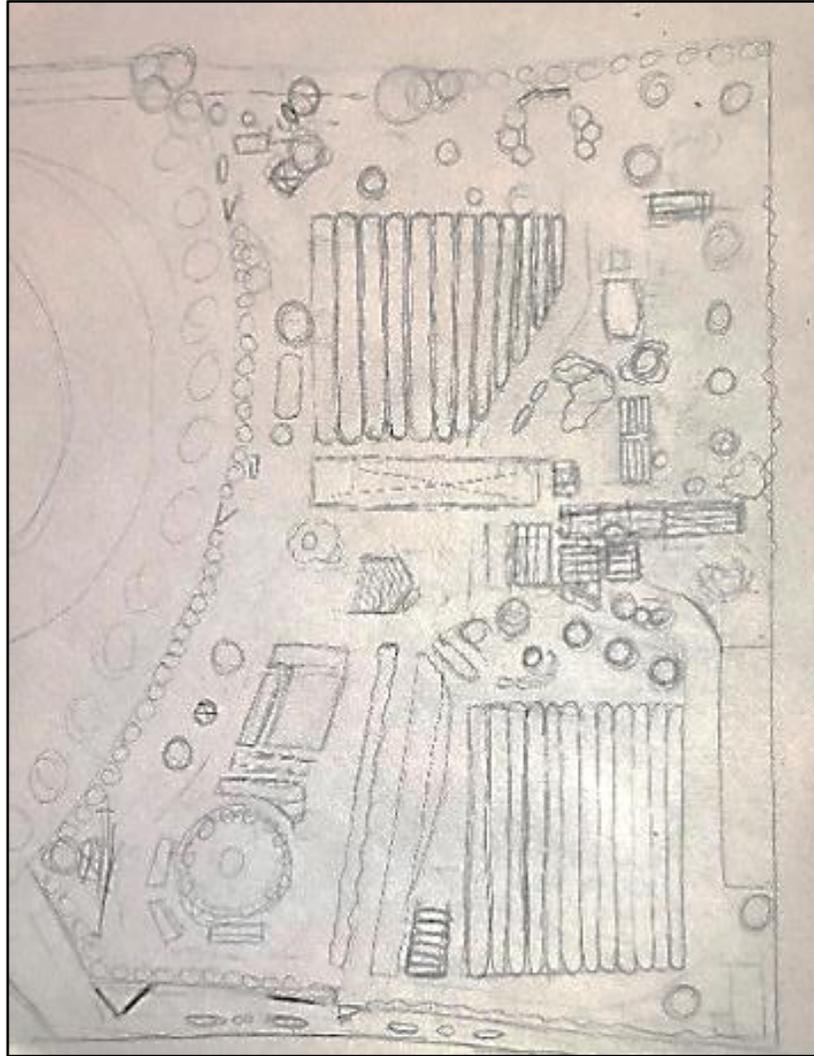


Figure 10. Sketch of the JPCI Garden found in the Google Drive most likely from 2022 as it has the Indigenous Garden (SGE:NO Garden) created by the Indigenous Gardens Coordinator (Cayuga, Six Nations of the Grand River) in thirteen moon mounds on the bottom left. (Accessed January 28, 2024).

Structure and Governance

As there are many different types of community gardens, it is important to note the unique structure of this community garden. As PACT is a non-profit organization, the organization is privately owned but the community gardens are located on leased school grounds. There are different stakeholders and hierarchical structures involved which include paid employees with diverse roles. For the GTL program, there was a Program Director, Garden Site Managers, and Community Engagement Coordinator. These are all paid positions, with different pay and negotiated contracts. In 2023, at the JPCI Garden, there were two Site Managers, one Community Engagement Coordinator, and one Indigenous Garden Coordinator. The staff members that worked at the garden in 2023 were all returning for their second year, only one of the workers from JPCI stayed for 2024. They had only seen the garden during and post-COVID but not how it was before. In addition to paid employees, there is a non-paid Board of Directors which consists of longstanding staff members of PACT with a variety of backgrounds and specialties for different programs and aspects of operation including education, life coaching, communication, and program development.¹³⁶

During the summer of 2023, thanks to various organizations and grants, the GTL program had additional student employees through Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ), Focus on Youth (FOYT), and co-op students from post-secondary institutions. Canada Summer Jobs is a program that helps provide wage subsidies for youth 15-30 years of age. For non-profits, the Canada Summer Jobs program can cover up to 100% of provincial minimum

¹³⁶ “Our Team | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto,” PACT Program, n.d., <https://www.pactprogram.ca/our-team>.

wage for young workers.¹³⁷ Focus on Youth is a program created and paid for by the TDSB for students who are experiencing socioeconomic disadvantages, and systemic racism.¹³⁸ This year, at the JPCI garden, there were three CSJs (including myself), one FOYT student that started later in the summer, and one college co-op student.

Figure 11 is a visual representation of PACT hierarchy specifically focused on the JPCI garden. It helps to visually depict the aforementioned hierarchy and the different levels of communication and diverse programming. It includes the unpaid Board of Directors, the Directors of Operations and Funding and Program development. Then the graph splits into the various programs that PACT offered in 2023, focusing on the hierarchy within the JPCI GTL program. It depicts the role of the Program Director, which has since been removed and then shows that within the JPCI garden, there are two branches, the Farming side, with the Lead Farmer and Site Manager, the Assistant Farmer, the Farm Hands, and the volunteers. As well as the social side, with the Community Engagement and Educator, their Assistant, and the Co-op student. This is the main structure for the summer, with no FOYT, CSJ, or Co-op students in the fall. Community members and volunteers also sometimes assist in the fall to help with the gardening or some events if allowed. This chart does not include community consultations (when it comes to what plants to plant), the corporate volunteers, nor does it include the educational relations with the TDSB that may impact some of the hierarchy.

¹³⁷ “Canada Summer Jobs Applicant Guide Screening for Eligibility,” Canada.ca, November 21, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/canada-summer-jobs/screening-eligibility.html>.

¹³⁸ “Focus on Youth - 2024,” n.d., <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/Community-Use-of-Schools/Focus-on-Youth>.

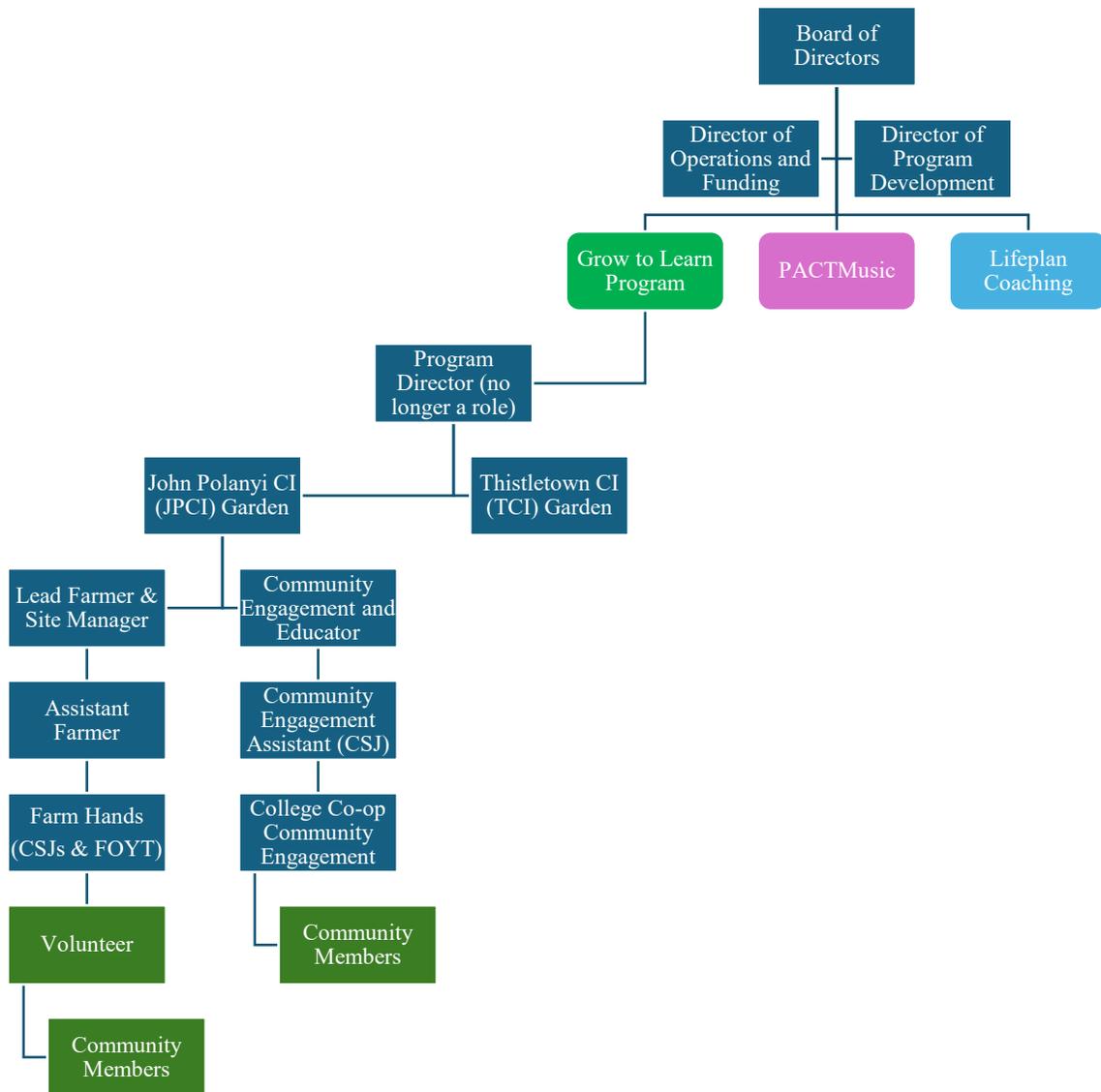


Figure 11. Diagram depicting author’s interpretation of PACT’s organizational structure in 2023 with a focus on the JPCI Garden structure.

Some of the summer student staff had previous history with PACT and GTL. I am a community member and had participated in Community Markets and community meals prior to COVID-19. In addition, in 2022, I had volunteered with PACT for their Fresh Food

Box (FFB). The 2023 co-op student had participated in the PACTMusic program for years and helped them as well. The FOYT student attended JPCI and had previously volunteered at the garden. One of the CSJ's parents knew the founder and was able to work at the garden through this connection. Having some knowledge of and history with the programs may have benefited garden staff to stay motivated throughout the season as they knew and had seen the big picture and impact of helping the community.

In addition to the paid garden staff, there are community volunteers. The volunteers have often been in the neighbourhood before the garden existed and have seen how it changed through the years. Some volunteers travel from far as their friend or an event introduced them to the garden. Many of the community volunteers are older adults so as the years go by, they may not be able to do as much garden work, however the younger volunteers still enjoy working with them and listening to their stories. During my interview with Brooke, a longstanding staff member, on September 18th, 2023, we discussed that community members who have been there since before the pandemic, they may have their own ways of being in the garden and reminisce on how the garden used to be. As they are often there for longer than the paid gardeners, they sometimes also feel a sense of ownership over the garden space as well. Brooke shared that, there is “a strong community presence and this community feels just strong connection and a sense of ownership [and pride over] of this space.”

The volunteering aspect of the garden is divided into three sections of volunteers: community volunteers, student volunteers, and corporate volunteers. In my thesis and fieldnotes, I focus mainly on interactions of community volunteers during the summer months. Volunteers come to the garden for different reasons: to socialize, exercise, be in

nature, connect, and for their volunteer hours. For community members, tasks are often weeding, harvesting, preparing for distribution, and cooking. Student volunteers are most often high school students from JPCI looking to complete their mandatory 40 hours to graduate. Some students come because they heard about the opportunity from their friends, others from their teachers, or their class came out to the garden. Student volunteers have varied tasks including weeding, digging, painting, and afterschool cooking programming. In 2023, there was a total of 2,358 volunteer hours (including student and community volunteering) compared to 3,111 hours (including student and community volunteering) in 2019 which demonstrates that COVID-19 did have some impact on volunteering.¹³⁹ Corporate volunteers usually come in large groups so they may have a tour of the garden and are often tasked with weeding, harvesting, and digging garden beds. As there are many of them and they can often focus a bit more than student volunteers, a lot can be accomplished in a short period of time. Most volunteer groups often will have a snack or lunch break, and the groups are scheduled at different times to keep them separate from each other. In 2023, seven corporate companies volunteered compared to 16 companies at the height of 2019.¹⁴⁰ This demonstrates a drop in numbers but for the first year back, it seems as though they are rebuilding the corporate and community relationships. In 2024, GTL accumulated 2,572 volunteer hours (including student and community volunteering)

¹³⁹ “Annual Impact Report 2023,” 9,12; “2019 Yearbook – Annual Impact Report,” PACT Program. (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2019), 8, https://www.pactprogram.ca/_files/ugd/dafc25_5f074c0dde5b41599eb5a988b219e196.pdf.

¹⁴⁰ “Annual Impact Report 2023,” 13; “2019 Yearbook – Annual Impact Report,” 16.

and engaged 10 corporate groups indicating an increase from 2023 and demonstrating continued commitment to community partnerships.¹⁴¹

Money Matters

As a non-profit, PACT receives tax-deductible donations. The exact number is not disclosed to the public, but by evaluating their Annual Impact Reports, one can deduce a minimum range. As they do not provide financial statements in their Annual Impact reports but rather list tiers of funders and thank them for their donations, in Table 1, I have gathered the minimum amounts from the tiers and combined the numbers with all of the donors, including grants, to calculate the minimum amount that was fundraised that year. For example, if the tier lists \$1,000-\$4,999, I will count it as \$1,000. If the tier is \$5,000-\$14,999, I am counting it as \$5,000. This will provide a very approximate minimum amount that was donated to the foundation. In addition to this, based on my understanding, most corporate groups that volunteer do donate, usually \$1,000, but the cost may vary, and I am not sure when that began. It seems that in earlier years, a lot of the donations were made through fundraising and the help of friends and social networks.¹⁴² These numbers also do not indicate whether the funds were specifically allocated to certain purchases/costs. Although it seems as though they have less funding than prior to the pandemic, they are steadily fundraising more through the years. In 2023, they surpassed their 2019 fundraised amount (prior to COVID-19), and in 2024, their numbers dropped a bit, however they continued to engage with more donor partners than prior to COVID-19.

¹⁴¹ “Annual Impact Report 2024,” 7, 11.

¹⁴² “2017 Annual Report – Our Year in Review,” 18.

Table 1. Table depicting the minimum donation, fundraising, and grant amounts through the years of 2017-2024. It also shows the number of organizations and individuals that contributed to this amount. ¹⁴³

| Year | Amount | Donors |
|-------------|---|---------------|
| 2017 | No government funding. Mostly financial assistance from businesses, foundations, and fundraising. | 13 |
| 2018 | \$610,000 | 32 |
| 2019 | \$418,000 | 24 |
| 2020 | \$163,000 | 19 |
| 2021 | \$230,000 | 29 |
| 2022 | \$873,000; \$500,000 is from an estate donation. | 48 |
| 2023 | \$422,000 | 51 |
| 2024 | \$394,000 | 46 |

This money is used to fund the various programs that PACT runs. PACT ran three programs during the summer of 2023; this number varied through the years. Each program has a set of deliverables, things that the program needs to provide, sometimes the funding also comes with restrictions and specific ways it needs to be spent. Based on my fieldnotes, PACTs JPCI funding and partnership with TDSB required them to provide workshops for classes and provide opportunities for volunteering, hiring FOYT may have also been part of this partnership. In addition to this, one of the main deliverables for the community was that PACT had to host at least three events a season with food for community. For Life Coaching, in 2023 JPCI hosted bi-weekly or monthly meeting space. For some corporate

¹⁴³ “Annual Impact Reports | PACT Program.”

volunteers, part of their donation included team building activities and workshops. In my interview with Brooke, she mentioned how funders impact the direction a non-profit organization takes. As the public interest had shifted and more social issues came to light during COVID-19, funding interests and availability also shifted to different types of programming. These factors, the running of the various programs, and the restrictions on how some funding is used, may affect how PACT is able to provide for the community and the type of services that are prioritized.

The GTL Program Through the Years

Originally the GTL program was geared towards grade 1 to grade 12 students. PACT facilitated environmental education curriculum-linked lessons and workshops for thousands of students from different schools.¹⁴⁴ In 2017, they also hosted a free summer camp for youth.¹⁴⁵ In 2018, they hosted programs for 18 different schools.¹⁴⁶ In 2020, the year of the pivot, due to the strict COVID-19 requirements, there was no hosted programming. Thus in 2021, when programming resumed, there was less programming, four virtual detailed educational videos were created, and all programming from then has been focused on the students at JPCI and TCI (high school students).¹⁴⁷ In 2022, more in-person programming occurred and the focus on achieving this mandate has increased in 2023 as well. Comparing numbers pre-pandemic (2019), and post-pandemic (2023) allows us to see the impact of COVID-19 on providing an accessible outdoor education space. Table 2 contains data collected from the Annual Impact Reports, it depicts the changes through the years. GTL has not reached its pre-pandemic program numbers but is definitely increasing their focus on ensuring educational programming is provided consistently at both the JPCI and TCI locations.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ “2017 Annual Report – Our Year in Review,” 6, 10.

¹⁴⁵ “2017 Annual Report – Our Year in Review,” 12.

¹⁴⁶ “2018 Year in Review – Annual Impact Report,” 2, 3.

¹⁴⁷ “Annual Impact Report 2021 – A Year of Revitalization and Reflection,” *PACT Program*. (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2021),

10, https://www.pactprogram.ca/_files/ugd/dafc25_cfb2533ce72c4c58b6ad8667eae1a4af.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ “Annual Impact Reports | PACT Program.”

Table 2. Table depicting the GTL program's number of students hosted, the number of workshops, and the workshop hours.

| Year | Number of Students | Number of Workshops | Workshop Hours |
|-------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2017 | 4,800 | 175 | N/A |
| 2018 | 3,281 | 192 | N/A |
| 2019 | 3,830 | 135 | N/A |
| 2020 | No Data | No Data | N/A |
| 2021 | 661 | 37 + 4 virtual | N/A |
| 2022 | 1,845 | 161 | N/A |
| 2023 | 1,863 | N/A | 1,979 |
| 2024 | 1,158 | 51 | 1,275 |

Community Markets and Community Meals

Prior to the pandemic, Community Markets were a weekly occurrence. Once a week, the community would be invited and welcomed into a beautiful greenspace. They could come in and enjoy a warm meal made by volunteers and staff in the garden kitchen and socialize with their friends and neighbours. If they were interested, they could also participate in the Community Compost Exchange program. The Community Compost Exchange was started at PACT in 2015 by Fianna Dirks and they continued to develop it until 2018.¹⁴⁹ It involved community members bringing their vegetable scraps (in provided compost bins and bags) (see Figure 12) to the garden and trading them in for fake garden money, “Market Bucks,” which could be used for organic vegetables that were grown in the garden.¹⁵⁰ As they put it, this was an exchange of, “Kitchen Scraps for Garden Goods.”¹⁵¹ This would help reduce waste, create compost for the garden, and allow low-income individuals to have access to fresh vegetables.

¹⁴⁹ Fianna Dirks, published as Adam Dirks, “A Community Compost Exchange Manual: reconnecting municipal organic waste and soil management” Major Project, York University, 2021. <https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/items/279f3138-b034-4b11-a9c3-2069c1c89f87>.

¹⁵⁰ “2018 Year in Review – Annual Impact Report,” 11.

¹⁵¹ “2018 Year in Review – Annual Impact Report,” 11.



Figure 12. Photograph of portraits of some community garden members with compost bags that participated in the Community Compost Exchange program featured in Dirk’s book. My grandmother is on the *bottom left*.

As one volunteer put it, “The garden is truly a special place. It’s not everyday that you’re able to break bread and share stories with so many different people, young and old.”¹⁵² The community markets provided a social, environmental, educational, and accessible way for community members to be outside. It was a safe place for families to come, explore and learn about nature (they even had chickens and butterflies at one point!) and enjoy delicious food. In 2017, the JPCI garden had an update which included covered seating for 50 people and a cooler (these can be seen in Figure 13 and Figure 19 respectively).¹⁵³ This helped ensure that no matter the weather (as long as there was no

¹⁵² “2017 Annual Report – Our Year in Review,” 11.

¹⁵³ “2017 Annual Report – Our Year in Review,” 12.

lightning) community members could still come to the garden, enjoy nature, and a hot meal. The cooler allowed for earlier harvesting and a place to keep the vegetables fresh for the market. From June to October, the JPCI garden was able to provide weekly meals and vegetables to over 100 families.¹⁵⁴

Behind the scenes, the markets took a lot of work and workers. There were staff collecting the compost in exchange for Market Bucks, others were wheeling the compost to the compost bins. At the community meals section, mostly volunteers oversaw cooking and distributing food. For the markets, there were market stands with different vegetables as well as baskets for members to put their veggies in whilst shopping, garden staff were at the stands and at checkout. During all of this, there were usually also a few garden tours during which a staff member, community members, and volunteers could join. All in all, the community markets and community meal were a whole team effort which required a lot of preparation, dedication, and hard work, but was also the highlight of community members week. Due to the pandemic, the community markets had to be put on pause. There was a collective decision made post-pandemic that despite the community's interest in markets continuing, it was unsustainable for PACT. The JPCI garden decided to stick to the FFB model, described in the section below, that they began during the pandemic as there were more participants the garden was trying to feed directly. In 2023, the TCI garden held markets, but community members had to pay to purchase food. In 2024, however, TCI held markets and brought back the Community Compost Exchange including Market Bucks, thus community members could access produce without paying. JPCI continues to

¹⁵⁴ “2017 Annual Report – Our Year in Review,” 6.

focus on the FFBs and providing free fresh produce on a weekly basis to community members.¹⁵⁵

Pivot to FFB

Due to the pandemic, a lot of programming had to stop, during my interview with Brooke on September 18th, 2023, she described the shift to more food security initiatives. 2020 was the year of the pivot, also known as “the Year of: Change, Community, COVID Caring.”¹⁵⁶ Due to TDSB and Toronto Public Health guidelines, there were restrictions on the number of people that could be in the garden. The Community Markets switched to an Emergency Fresh Food Box. Garden staff and volunteers packed bags of fresh vegetables, both garden-grown and bought, as well as meals for community members who had signed up for the Emergency Fresh Food Box. In 2020 there were also \$20,000 in PC gift cards given out,¹⁵⁷ and in 2021 there were several hundred Swiss Chalet coupons distributed to people experiencing food insecurity (or *clients*, as PACT staff were trained to call them)¹⁵⁸ In 2021, the program was expanded to serve more people in the community from June to October as the pandemic “[made] it difficult for almost half of [their] clients to access the grocery store.”¹⁵⁹ More recently, the Emergency Fresh Food Box has shifted to the Fresh Food Box (FFB), as it became more standardized and meant to fill a need rather than an

¹⁵⁵ “Annual Impact Report 2023,” 8; “Annual Impact Report 2024,” 6.

¹⁵⁶ “2020 Annual Impact Report – The Year of the Pivot,” *PACT Program*. (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2020), 4, https://www.pactprogram.ca/files/ugd/dafc25_2ba6904f1b8f4cfea277cb77cf1a0751.pdf.

¹⁵⁷ “2020 Annual Impact Report – The Year of the Pivot,” 8.

¹⁵⁸ “Annual Impact Report 2021 – A Year of Revitalization and Reflection,” 13.

¹⁵⁹ “Annual Impact Report 2021 – A Year of Revitalization and Reflection,” 12.

emergency response, and the number of participants has grown exponentially as word about the program spread and more participants signed up.

Participants shared that “The program was fantastic and reliable”¹⁶⁰ as it occurred weekly and provided staple foods such as potatoes, onions, carrots, and greens. The FFBs were also accessible as they provided deliveries for those who, for various health reasons, could not come to the garden with “delivery personnel who were very prompt, courteous, and supportive,”¹⁶¹ which helped provide fresh food to those who could not come out to the garden. Most of the deliveries were to communities near the garden locations with some exceptions. It was beneficial to provide accessible fresh food to participants, in addition to this, deliveries provided an opportunity for interaction to check in and talk with community members who may not have anyone else to talk with.

The FFB is structured in a way that is meant to be low-barrier. Very few questions are asked, mainly it is the person’s contact information and the number of people in their family/household to determine the size of bag that would be packed for them. In previous years, participants could also request a larger size if they needed more food, and some individuals would leave behind food for others if they could not eat it. In 2024, these requests were no longer accommodated, however, the bag sizes remained as small (1-2 people), medium (3-4 people), and large (5+ people).

The FFB consists of bought vegetables usually from a wholesaler or a nearby store and garden-grown vegetables. Staples are usually bought including: potatoes, onions, carrots, beets, and a fruit (apples or oranges). There are also rotating additions such as

¹⁶⁰ “Annual Impact Report 2021 – A Year of Revitalization and Reflection,” 12.

¹⁶¹ “Annual Impact Report 2021 – A Year of Revitalization and Reflection,” 12.

cucumbers, bok choy, sometimes sweet potatoes, corn, and green beans. In addition to this, there is also what is grown in the garden which gets harvested, cleaned and prepped for packing. Participants would receive a full bag of produce that they “wouldn’t normally be able to always afford” whilst also interacting with staff, volunteers, and community “seeing friendly faces.”¹⁶²

Most often, the FFB is a three-day system. Tuesday morning staff and volunteers harvest vegetables and begin to prep them for distribution. Staff continue this task into the afternoon as fresh produce deliveries arrive. Wednesday morning everything except for the greens gets taken out and brought to the garden tables. The food items are counted for approximate numbers and then calculations are made for correct distribution into the designated colour and size bag. Everything is packed and back in the cooler for distribution. During distribution, the correct size/colour bag is selected for the participant and additions are added (usually the greens but sometimes tomatoes as well). Thursday morning, FFB deliveries are packed and delivered for those who cannot attend distribution thus enabling more community access to fresh produce.

Table 3 depicts the trackable data of the value and service that the FFB provide to the community. Through the years, they have continued to increase the accessibility to the community and continuously tried to meet community needs by increasing the amount of FFB made available. They have more than doubled the amount of FFBs delivered and the participants that have access to the program. They have also continued to increase their

¹⁶² “2022 Annual Impact Report,” *PACT Program*. (PACT Urban Peace Program, 2022), 9, https://www.pactprogram.ca/_files/ugd/dafc25_a4edec3786f54c52bd8da51afa0de201.pdf.

production value; in 2023, they distributed 42% more than the previous year.¹⁶³ In 2022 they grew 335% more pounds of vegetables in the garden than in 2021, and in 2023, despite only using two out of three of the gardens, their production only dropped by 2%.¹⁶⁴ The FFB production seems to be steadily rising as they continue to strive to meet community needs.



Figure 13. Photograph of set up for packing FFB. July 12, 2023.

¹⁶³ “Annual Impact Report 2023,” 7.

¹⁶⁴ “2022 Annual Impact Report,” 9; “Annual Impact Report 2023,” 7.

Table 3. Table depicting the progression of the FFB through the years. ¹⁶⁵

| Year | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| FFB distributed and delivered | 3,415 | 5,372* *1,830 were delivered | 6,930* *1,869 were delivered | 7,929* *1,901 were large bags which aim for double the food. | 7,772 |
| Monetary worth of distributed food | No Data | \$55,000 | \$59,482 | \$84, 330 | \$89,668 |
| Pounds of grown vegetables | 14,700 fresh distributed | 936 | 4,075 | 3,966 | 5,458.6 |
| Hot meals distributed | 1598 | N/A | N/A | 570 participants at food-centred events. | 350 participants at food-centred events. |
| Monetary worth of produce grown | No Data | \$16, 000 | \$19,713 | \$23, 823 | \$31,931 |
| Weekly participants | 382** **68% of which were children & seniors. | 321 | 398 | 802 | 450 |

¹⁶⁵ “Annual Impact Reports | PACT Program.”

PACT Garden Changes Over Time

Through the years, the PACT Urban Peace Garden at JPCI has gone from being a vacant lot to a community green hub, a way of survival for food security, and now is on the way to providing for the physical and psychological well-being of community members through access to the green space and by providing fresh produce. In 2021, they did a lot of reflection on how they will be going forward, they also cleared up the space to return to full production capacity.¹⁶⁶ In 2023, production at the JPCI and TCI gardens also increased to meet community needs. Even though by pounds the amount grown decreased, the monetary value increased due to the varieties grown. The amount of people in the FFB also increased by more than 400 people—more than double the previous years.¹⁶⁷ As shown in the Table 3 above, and throughout their Annual Impact Reports, they depict that despite the challenges that the pandemic and societal changes may present, they continue to adapt to be able to attempt to sustainably meet community needs.

In 2022, PACT also converted one-third of the JPCI garden into an Indigenous Garden named SGE:NO Garden (Peace Garden).¹⁶⁸ This allowed for more connection to the land, learning, and growing heirloom seeds using traditional mound methods. This also depicted a transition as the Indigenous person in charge used to be a community member and now had a paid role as the Indigenous Gardens Coordinator in the garden. It is also possible to read this move in continuity with the wider Land Back movement.¹⁶⁹ TCI

¹⁶⁶ “Annual Impact Report 2021 – A Year of Revitalization and Reflection,” 1.

¹⁶⁷ “Annual Impact Report 2023.” 7.

¹⁶⁸ “2022 Annual Impact Report,” 4.

¹⁶⁹ Ronald Gamblin, “LAND BACK! What Do We Mean?,” 4Rs Youth Movement, November 4, 2019, <https://4rsyouth.ca/land-back-what-do-we-mean/>.

created signage with QR codes for people to have an accessible audio explanation of the space and the vegetables grown. TCI also had a small Indigenous Garden planted expanding the SGE:NO Garden across Toronto. It is important to note that as of 2024, the Indigenous Garden has been paused due to personal issues.

In 2023, PACT continued to work on increasing accessibility to and events in the gardens. TCI held “twelve markets this season, selling vegetables, cut flowers and value-added products made by TCI’s culinary students, including salsas, jams, jellies and other preserves.”¹⁷⁰ JPCI did not host any markets in 2023 as their focus was on ensuring there was enough for the FFB and to host class workshops in the garden. A community member previously shared that “PACT has helped me see that colourful food is not only good for the body, it can also become soul food when shared with care.”¹⁷¹ GTL did host four community events with food made in the garden with garden grown vegetables, garden tours, music, and even tie-dye! A total of 570 community members participated in the community events.¹⁷²

Overall, PACT and GTL have demonstrated their continued passion and perseverance as they strive to strengthen community wellness. Looking at this program through the four dimensions presented by the World Food Summit in 1996, access to food, stability, availability, and utilization, there is some access to the garden space, and it does provide low-income residents low-barrier access to food.¹⁷³ They also try their best to

¹⁷⁰ “Annual Impact Report 2023,” 8.

¹⁷¹ “2020 Annual Impact Report – The Year of the Pivot,” 8.

¹⁷² “Annual Impact Report 2023,” 10.

¹⁷³ Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 164.

utilize the space and lower food waste by using what is grown and donating any excess food to the neighbourhood through other food security initiatives, specifically North York Harvest which has a location across the field, and to the school itself during the fall season. PACT continues to provide varied programming and meeting community needs through experiential learning, food security initiatives, and mentoring. Despite the changes and restrictions that the pandemic presented, they were able to adapt to sustainably meet community needs and intertwine with the social fabric of the community. Undeterred by the COVID-19 restrictions, they were able to shift to provide for the community and continue to engage to enable the GTL program to be a green social hub. Encouraging more garden markets and community events in a maintainable way will help to support community gardens as social connection spaces.

Chapter 4: Methodology

As explained in the introduction, the memory of, and my experiences in, the PACT community garden at John Polanyi Collegiate Institute (JPCI) in 2019 is what inspired me to further research intergenerational and intercultural relationships in community gardens. I observed the social and environmental connections, knowledge and food sharing, and the positive feeling participants experienced being in the space and wanted to further explore this. As I had volunteered with PACT during the summer of 2022, when I stopped by in the fall for their volunteer appreciation event and I asked whether I could conduct my research at the garden, they seemed very excited. Thus, our research relationship began, and the PACT Grow-to-Learn (GTL) program at JPCI became my research site for the summer and fall (the growing season) of 2023.

To answer my research questions, I used a mixed-method approach to short-term ethnography incorporating questionnaires and supplementary photographs. I observed and wrote fieldnotes based on my experiences in the garden. I also created questionnaires and questions for semi-structured interviews to obtain more first-hand information from participants. Consent Forms, Questionnaire questions, and Interview questions can be found in Appendix B, Appendix C, and Appendix D respectively. In addition to this, I photographed participant's hands as a helpful visual to the intergenerational and intercultural interactions in the garden as well as to depict what it is like in the garden. These photographs are a supportive visualization of the additional data collected; some of my photographs can be found throughout this thesis.

Research Questions

Based on my previous experiences at the garden, I began with some preconceived notions of what community gardens could be, as they provide accessible outdoor social meeting spaces which benefit community members in a multitude of ways. Specifically, my goal was to look at the intergenerational and intercultural relationships that are nurtured within the community garden space and their effects on psychosocial well-being. Often community gardens are explored in terms of food sovereignty and environmental impact; my hope was that looking at the people and relationships in the garden would help with long term meaningful community engagement and knowledge sharing. Further exploring the various components of the human ecosystem of the garden would be beneficial to understanding the effect that nurturing intergenerational and intercultural interactions has on community well-being. In addition, looking at the garden as a non-profit worksite could be beneficial in further understanding the constraints and priorities of this specific urban agriculture site as it pertains to community commons and aspects of psychosocial well-being.

My mixed-method short-term ethnography focused on answering the following research questions:

Question 1: How has engagement changed in the community garden, post-pandemic?

Question 2: How do the intercultural and intergenerational interactions in the garden space affect participants' psychosocial well-being and knowledge sharing opportunities?

Question 3: How does the organizational structure, as a non-profit community garden, impact community commons and the participants' psychosocial well-being?

My questionnaires, interviews, and participant observation focused on questions and situations that could answer Question 1 (Q1) and Question 2 (Q2). Through my participant observation, I realized that the garden was a worksite, thus it is mainly through my fieldnotes that Question 3 (Q3) is answered. The supplementary photographs throughout the thesis aim to visually depict the socio-cultural distinctions of garden participants to help answer Q2.

Seasons of Research – The Development of this Mixed-Method Ethnography

PACT offered me a job for the summer of 2023, Community Engagement Assistant, to help with different aspects of community engagement and have access behind-the-scenes. At first, I began my ethnographic research by observing interactions at the garden between coworkers and community members, but quickly I started recognizing that some things were not well-structured and often there were not systems in place to help the operation run better. Due to me being an employee, I felt that I should help more; however, I never received a job description, so I was not sure what to do.

Ethnographic research is a type of qualitative research with roots in anthropology that looks at the social interactions within groups (including communities and organizations) and their perceptions and behaviours.¹⁷⁴ As the researcher immerses themselves in the environment, participant observation and interviews aid in the goal of providing a holistic point of view.¹⁷⁵ Part of this holistic research is seeking to understand,

¹⁷⁴ Scott Reeves, Ayelet Kuper, and Brian David Hodges, “Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography,” *BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.)* 337 (August 30, 2008): a1020, 512, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a1020>.

¹⁷⁵ Reeves, Kuper, and Hodges, “Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography,” 514.

thus needing to intervene in peoples lives and ask questions, not simply to observe.¹⁷⁶ By intervening, and getting involved, the research environments become, “entanglements through which ethnographic knowing emerges.”¹⁷⁷ As I had a history with PACT, I did not need to do a long-term ethnography to be an “apprentice,”¹⁷⁸ as I had already developed relationships with community members and the organization. The short-term ethnography that I conducted of the season in 2023, provided me with more insights as I could draw on my past involvement and connect with the participants needs, thus bridging the experiences through memory.¹⁷⁹

Being that I did not have a defined role, I began to do more and take on new projects to help the organization. My positionality as both a researcher and an employee encouraged active participant observation. This involved being in the garden, observing interactions, how people engaged with each other and the space.¹⁸⁰ However, as I was also working in the garden, the lines between researcher and employee became more blurred as I worked with the organization to ensure they were able to meet community needs and achieve their deliverables. I was still observing, but I was also stepping in more and felt unsure of where my roles as employee, community member, and researcher intersected and differed. As I saw that a staff member often had a larger workload, I decided to step in and began creating systems to help streamline different processes within the Fresh Food Box (FFB) operation.

¹⁷⁶ Pink and Morgan, “Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing,” 353.

¹⁷⁷ Pink and Morgan, “Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing,” 354.

¹⁷⁸ Pink and Morgan, “Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing,” 356.

¹⁷⁹ Pink and Morgan, “Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing,” 356.

¹⁸⁰ Government of Canada, Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2018) – Chapter 10: Qualitative Research,” September 23, 2019, https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-epc2_2018_chapter10-chapitre10.html.

This included colour coding the distribution sheet to match the colours of the FFB bags to help with distribution and deliveries, as well as tying together bags when there were multiple bags to be delivered to clients. I also initiated taking inventory of supplies so that we were better prepared for events.

Though I was doing participant observation, which is part of ethnographic research, I was partially guided by participant action research (PAR), a method of joint learning in which the researcher engages with the researched and solves a problem with them.¹⁸¹ I felt that because I was being paid by the organization and consulting mostly with the organization, that I was working for the organization rather than with the community.¹⁸² I was also a community member and interacted with various community members and staff members, thus, I hoped that my research questions would help to meet both stakeholders needs. During my participant observation, as a researcher, I felt that I had become a bit more of an active part in the studied environment, being an employee and a community member, thus allowing for balanced subjectivity.¹⁸³ Working with the organization allowed me to ensure that both my research goals and their organizational goals were met as I was able to use my knowledge to implement systems (colour coding and inventory) to help them meet community needs. The community members wanted to get back into the garden, access the space, and socialize together like before. PACT wanted to know more about the

¹⁸¹ Stig Ottosson, "Participation Action Research-: A Key to Improved Knowledge of Management," *Technovation* 23, no. 2 (February 1, 2003): 90-91, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0166-4972\(01\)00097-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0166-4972(01)00097-9).

¹⁸² Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*. 26.

¹⁸³ Ottosson, "Participation Action Research-: A Key to Improved Knowledge of Management." 92; Reeves, Kuper, and Hodges, "Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography," 514.

benefits of community engagement and were excited to bring events to the community post-COVID.

Keeping these entanglements in mind, looking at the ethnographic site could be helpful as there may be larger systems at play than the single site.¹⁸⁴ As PACT is a non-profit organization, there are hierarchical systems and various stakeholders to keep in mind. Yes, JPCI is a community garden, but within it there is a paid team, community members, and community volunteers. JPCI is part of GTL and thus has specific educational deliverables and is located on school property, though this was not explored within this thesis as that may have involved youth participants, it is still an important dynamic. Finally, JPCI is run by PACT which is a non-profit organization and has to report to funders and community needs. These are all systems within which the JPCI community garden is located, in addition to the dominant capitalist and colonial systems of society.¹⁸⁵ There are local knowledges at play, and following the conflicts, that the researcher becomes a part of allows for more in-depth understanding, and in the case of PACT, there was the continued and evolving tensions between old and new ways of being within the garden space.¹⁸⁶

Exploring the dynamics within the boundaries of the community garden spaces could help to reveal larger power relations.¹⁸⁷ Solely observing the individual interactions

¹⁸⁴ George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 110, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2155931>.

¹⁸⁵ Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," 111.

¹⁸⁶ Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," 110-111.

¹⁸⁷ Matthew Desmond, "Relational Ethnography," *Theory and Society* 43, no. 5 (2014): 556, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43694733>.

may take away from the relational analysis of the internal organizational struggle and structure.¹⁸⁸ In this thesis, I explore the various interactions as they pertain to social connection and knowledge sharing, but as the chapters progress, I dive deeper into the larger human dynamics and ecosystems within the confines of the garden space. As PACT is a non-profit organization, it has certain constraints it must navigate and though many aspects may be positive, there are workplace tensions at play.

When working and researching in urban agroecology, the researcher is fully immersed in the social and institutional relationships.¹⁸⁹ Participant observation provides an opportunity to be both inside and outside the research environment allowing for greater understanding and access to unspoken information which can help test theories and develop new guidelines.¹⁹⁰ I had the support from the organization to continue my research and present at conferences when new information that was not part of my investigation came to light through observation and participation about the human dynamic aspect of the community garden (further explored in Chapter 5: Research Results and Discussion). Due to my positionality, despite doing participant observation, I felt that as a researcher, I had to take sides,¹⁹¹ and as you will see in the section below, I often wondered, whose side was I on? I tried my best to find a balance and work towards a common goal as I conducted my research. As someone with a multifaceted positionality, I tried to push for events both yes for my research and also because the community wanted to have events to socialize and

¹⁸⁸ Desmond, "Relational Ethnography," 556.

¹⁸⁹ Bowness et al., "Navigating Urban Agroecological Research with the Social Sciences," 278.

¹⁹⁰ Ottosson, "Participation Action Research-: A Key to Improved Knowledge of Management." 93.

¹⁹¹ David, "Problems of Participation: The Limits of Action Research." 16.

get back into the garden. The organization also had deliverables and wanted to continue to promote community engagement. Through participant observation, I hoped to facilitate my research goals, and the overall goal of community engagement.

Positionality - Blurred Lines and Diverse Entanglements

Having been a community member, a volunteer, a researcher and now working for PACT would put me in a unique position in that I would have to “wear multiple hats.” I had seen how the garden was before the pandemic, and how the community had benefited from the FFB. As a volunteer, I helped pack FFBs but did not stay for distribution as I felt that would be crossing a boundary. During the summer of 2023, I was still a community member, and participants recognized me, but I was also a researcher and working for the garden. Thus, I became involved in more facets of the organization and had interactions with community members. To help with the “multiple hats” aspect, I embroidered a hat that said, “Garden Research” (see Figure 14). This, along with some “Researcher in the Garden” posters (see Appendix A), allowed people to know that I was researching and to ask more questions.



Figure 14. Photograph of author wearing a KN-95 mask due to an air quality warning because of smoke from forest fires, and a "Garden Research" hat. June 28, 2023.

Part of the multifaceted positionality sometimes made it difficult for me to interact. I was given a job title, but no a job description, so sometimes I felt that I was doing too much but also as if I could not always speak up when I saw something wrong. There were some potentially problematic interactions with community members and staff where I did speak up and stand up for the community members as I felt there had been a miscommunication. This sometimes made me worry that I may receive job related repercussions later and as though these interactions and overstepping could negatively impact my relationship with the gardeners.

Sometimes there were tensions about garden rules. For example, from my field notebook, I recount a time when Bobby, a community member, asked to trade certain vegetables that he could not eat. I thought that was a fine request, as emails that participants receive stated that participants could receive extra food no questions asked. Bobby could not eat the food so his request to trade made sense. Mary, the Program Director, on the other hand, did not agree and kept emphasizing that as Bobby only had two people in his family, he could not request more. I spoke up for Bobby, citing the email again and urged him to also email the administrator who sends out the emails. After this experience, in my fieldnotes, I later wondered about the transparency of communication within the organization as I was not sure if the staff knew what the emails said. I also wondered if it was okay for me to speak up for a community member and contradict what a manager was saying. Did my positionality allow me a more holistic access to the organization? But also, is my position as a researcher positively or negatively affected by this? I was not sure.

Being a community member myself, I felt that I could push for more events and ensure that they happened as well as ensuring that individuals received food from the FFB. I remembered how things used to be, and I saw how community members kept asking to get access to the garden and have more events. But as the core garden staff did not have those memories, they appeared to conceive of these events as a hassle and lots of stress and moving parts rather than a joyous coming together of community. Whilst pushing for events to occur, I sometimes wondered whether I was doing this for the community or to ensure that I was able to complete some research. I recognized that, ultimately, I believe that everyone should have access to the community garden as a social and environmental connection space, especially in the urban environment in which it is located.

Research Tools and Data Collection Methods

I conducted a mixed-method short-term ethnography. As previously stated, I had already had a relationship with PACT prior to COVID-19 and had witnessed their transition through COVID-19. I knew I wanted to continue to observe and to conduct interviews to acquire more information from diverse participants. To obtain a broader view of participants' experiences and first-hand accounts, I also incorporated questionnaires to reach a wider population, who did not frequent the garden as often and with whom I may not have had the opportunity to develop a relationship. In addition to this, I took photographs, mainly to visually depict the intergenerational and intercultural interactions I was seeing and focusing on for Q2. Most of my data was aimed at answering Q1 and Q2 which were the original focus of my thesis. As my observations progressed, Q3 was developed and was mainly answered through my observations and fieldnotes.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were a first step to collecting direct data from participants. They were a mix of multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, Introductory Questions to situate the participant, Garden Experience questions to learn more about their experiences, and Additional Comments. The Introductory Question section asked participants about their age group (multiple choice), culture/nationality (fill-in self-identify), languages spoken (fill-in self-identify), and number of years at the garden (multiple choice). The Garden Experience section also held a mix of open-ended questions involving participants feelings in the garden (fill-in), favourite memory (fill-in), whether

they shared or learned something with others (fill-in and multiple choice), how they feel about the events (fill-in), if they think the garden is a learning space (multiple choice), and what type of any benefit to well-being they feel (multiple choice). The Additional Comments section provided a space for participants to share extra details or comments.

Events were the main times during which questionnaires were distributed. They allowed me to reach more community members that did not attend volunteering but still wanted to come to the garden to socialize and share a meal together. During events, questionnaires were available on paper and virtually through the QR code. After events, a link to the virtual questionnaire was sent out to participants for those who did not get a chance to answer in person.

For the first event, the questionnaires were set a bit to the side so not many were completed, the area also had a lot of plant growth which may have impeded access. I learnt from this and set up the questionnaires in a more accessible location (the tables in the meeting space and in a cleared area) as seen in the images below (see Figure 15 and Figure 16). I was able to collect a total of 51 questionnaires. Of the 51 responses, six of the responses were from garden staff members. Three of the participants responded two to three times, thus I received responses from 44 different participants. This included staff members, volunteers, and mostly community members. Most of the questionnaires were completed during the community events hosted at JPCI – Community Social, July 18th, 2023; Storytelling and Dumpling Making, August 24th, 2023; Garden Closing Meal, October 5th, 2023. The questionnaire questions are available in Appendix C, and the promotional event marketing materials are also available in Appendix E. It is important to note that event times could have affected the responses as events usually began during work

hours. Youth and student did not attend many community events as there were designated events and afterschool volunteering for students which were not included in my research. As I was not engaging youth, the intergenerational connections I focused on were self-identifying adults, older adults, and seniors. Questionnaires were completed on paper and virtually through Google Forms. Paper questionnaires were later input into Google Forms to aid in analysis.



Figure 15. Photograph of initial survey set up for Community Social. July 18, 2023.



Figure 16. Photograph of final survey set up for Garden Closing Meal. October 5, 2023.

Interviews

It was difficult to obtain interviews, so they did not begin until late summer and into the fall. The interviews were held with the premise that the interviewee had already completed a questionnaire to have some foundational knowledge about them. Interview questions can be found in Appendix D. I wanted to interview participants who represented different community garden stakeholders, including paid staff members, returning volunteers, new volunteers, and community members to have a more holistic perspective. The interviews were meant to be semi-structured, but most participants mainly answered the prepared questions. The interviews had five sections: Relationships in the Garden; Eating in the Garden; Learning in the Garden; Questions for Returning Volunteers / Garden Staff; and Concluding Questions. The questions were asked in hopes of learning more about individual and collective experiences in the garden, the nurtured relationships, and the changes that the space may have incurred.

I conducted a total of seven interviews. Table 4 describes the participant demographics and their relationship to the garden. Pseudonyms have been used for interviewee's confidential participation. One interviewee was a staff member, three interviewees were returning volunteers, two interviewees were new volunteers, and one interviewee was a community member. Three of the interviews were conducted virtually and four were conducted in-person. The interviews were transcribed to help with the analysis.

Table 4. Table depicting interview participant pseudonyms, demographics, relationship to the garden, and type of interview.

| Interviewee Name | Age | Culture | Relationship to the Garden | Type of interview | Date of Interview |
|-------------------------|------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Alicia | Adult | No information provided. White presenting. | New Volunteer | Virtual | 08/14/2023 |
| Nellie | Senior | Czech/Canadian | Long-time Volunteer | In-person | 08/22/2023 |
| Hannah | Adult | White Canadian with Ukrainian, Irish, Scottish, and English heritage. | New Volunteer | In-person | 08/24/2023 |
| Beckie | Senior | Jewish | Long-time Volunteer | In-person | 09/05/2023 |
| Brooke | Adult | Canadian, Jewish | Longstanding Staff Member | Virtual | 09/18/2023 |
| Sienna | Senior | Indonesian/Chinese/Canadian | Community member | Virtual | 09/18/2023 |
| Dora | Senior | Korean | Long-time Volunteer | In-person with Google Translate (Korean) | 09/19/2023 |

Fieldnotes

I took daily fieldnotes, summarizing what occurred that day and any notable interactions or shared stories, in addition to some reflections on the occurrences and interactions. I concluded with 77 pages of notes that were organized by week and day, a total of 23 weeks from May 28th, 2023, to October 31st, 2023. I tried to add some reflections and some quotes when I could. Usually, I took notes throughout the day, and then on Fridays when I worked mostly virtually, I would type them up. Initially, I was not sure what I should note, so I took notes on everything, then I became more specific, increasingly focusing on relational power dynamics between staff and gardeners. I realized that community members only had limited access to the space during community volunteer hours, and the few events, so I tried to focus my more detailed fieldnotes for those days when possible. As I took notes during my participant observations, I also realized that there were human and power dynamics that I had not initially anticipated. Thus, I took note of tense interactions amongst garden staff members and between garden staff and community members. Though initially focused on answering Q1 and Q2, my fieldnotes and observations are what helped me develop and answer Q3. Fieldnotes are mainly integrated in Chapter 5: Research Results and Discussion, to help to depict the observations and participant interactions in a cohesive way.

Photographs

Throughout this thesis, you can find some of the photographs that I took, specifically of people's hands during volunteering to try to demonstrate that people worked together. These photographs focus on visually depicting Q2 and are a supplementary visual aid. As a disclaimer, I did not often take photographs as some people had negative experiences with people taking photos of them, so I always asked for consent, there were also posters up that informed people that photography may be happening. Most of the photographs that I have included are of two or more people in a scene to demonstrate the diversity of people using the garden. I did have photographs of individuals but to include less images I chose the ones that contained multiple participants. I realized the first time I took a picture that I may have made a mistake (see Figure 17). I forgot that people usually wear gloves whilst gardening so it would not always be possible to capture the images I desired to depict the intergenerational and intercultural interactions that occurred as gloves covered those features in hands. Gloves unified participants in the garden but they hid the demographic features and stories. Thus, a limitation to this is that there were interesting photos that were taken that were not included, many gardening tasks are often preformed wearing gloves, so this also limited the photo taking opportunities. In addition, I know that I wanted to also participate in tasks and did not want to disturb people so sometimes I also did not take a picture. Nevertheless, I did manage to get some images when people were picking berries, snap peas, and cooking. These photographs depict the visual story of the garden and are supplementary visual imagery to help the reader understand and visualize the intergenerational and intercultural sharing and connections that occurred in the community garden space.

I used my photographs as a supplementary visual aid, they help to depict the details of the interactions that people may not notice everyday.¹⁹² The photographs can also be used as a source of data and can be used as a way to further analysis,¹⁹³ but it is important to keep in mind the aforementioned, that they do not depict every moment in the garden, rather select moments, and thus may not depict the full picture of the range of interactions within the garden space. I took photographs for narrative exposition rather than analysis. During my five-month observation period, I took over 1,100 images in the garden. This included photos of people, photos of hands, photos of the space, and animals. I use my photographs to help tell the story of the garden space and the interactions within it. Throughout this thesis, they help to set the scene and give the reader more context to better understand through visual information.¹⁹⁴ The photographs also help to visually answer Q2, as they depict the interactions and collaborations between volunteers, and staff and volunteers.

¹⁹² Pink and Morgan, "Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing," 353.

¹⁹³ Lisa-Jo K. Van Den Scott, "Visual Methods in Ethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 47, no. 6 (November 7, 2018): 721, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241618806972>.

¹⁹⁴ Van Den Scott, "Visual Methods in Ethnography," 723-724.



Figure 17. Photograph of staff member, *left*, and volunteer, *right*, planting kale. June 6, 2023.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted both on paper and electronically. Google Forms was helpful in analyzing some of the quantitative data collected from questionnaires and in-put them into pie charts. I also analyzed the questionnaires by hand by printing them and going through them to look for similarities and keywords. I cross-referenced my findings by double-checking the numbers on the Google Forms spreadsheet that contained the questionnaire responses. For the more open-ended questions such as feelings in the garden and memories shared, I searched for key words and emotions, and noted down how often they were repeated, turning the qualitative data into quantitative data.

For the interviews, after transcribing them, I went through them coding for different themes and key words. This helped to identify key themes which included eating together,

combatting loneliness, sharing knowledge, and cost of living. The fieldnotes were similarly coded with themes and key words to help guide and identify some of the observations during analysis. The initial key words were Memory, Idea, and Reality as those were words that I felt described some of my phases with the garden space but also the perception transitions the garden space and PACT as an organization were experiencing. The more specific key words included but were not limited to: intergenerational, intercultural, intragenerational, interaction, dynamic, tension, boundary, negative, miscommunication, hierarchy, roles, and ethics. I also used colour coding and bold font to identify themes, and important ideas. Names of participants were also a different colour to aid in the transition between participants within the fieldnotes. Later, I went through the notes and changed the colour of information I deemed as not necessary to light grey, to not take away from the main observations.

Limitations to Data Analysis

Some of the limitations to my data analysis involved issues of planning and structure. My questionnaires and interview questions were developed before I began my participant observation. I somewhat wish I could have developed the questionnaires after the observation period began as I learned more from observing. I wanted the participants to be able to share as much as they wanted to and I initially wanted more open-ended responses. Looking back, I should have had a bit more structured responses, at least when it came to the age categories and cultures so that the results could be better analysed and connected with the census. Though I wanted to look at cross-cultural interactions, it became somewhat difficult to analyze when individuals had hyphenated identities as census data is not always structured this way. I understand as I also have mixed Eastern European

ancestry due to my parents being from different countries of the former Soviet Union, being Jewish, and being a first generation Canadian. One of the participants had written “Human” under culture when asked to self-identify, which though true, does not aid the analysis of intercultural interactions.

Methods Concluding Thoughts

The transition from community member and volunteer to staff member and researcher allowed me a look behind the curtain. I was able to see what happened behind the scenes and the challenges that the garden staff and volunteers faced both with each other and the community members. I was also able to see community members reactions when exploring the garden and meeting with their friends which still pushes me to continue to see the benefit of gardens despite the improvements that may need to occur. Having a multifaceted positionality allowed me to have a holistic viewpoint of the human ecosystem of this community garden.¹⁹⁵ I held a space within many systems of stakeholders at the garden whilst also being outside of it as a researcher allowing me to more fully observe and understand the various interactions and entanglements within this ecosystem.

Using mixed-method short-term ethnography, I collected data from multiple data sources including fieldnotes through participant observation, interviews, researcher-designed questionnaires, and supplementary photographs. Through first-hand data, observation, and visual images, I depicted the participants experiences within the community garden space. They also helped to answer my research questions and further

¹⁹⁵ Reeves, Kuper, and Hodges, “Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography,” 514; Pink and Morgan, “Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing,” 353.

my understanding of community gardens as social connection spaces. Through my fieldnotes, and participant observations, I was able to better understand the need to navigate human dynamics and the tensions that arise in a such a contested space. Despite the tensions and challenges, my questionnaires, interviews, photographs, and fieldnotes also help to demonstrate that the PACT JPCI community garden is a space in which intergenerational and intercultural interactions occur.

Chapter 5: Research Results and Discussion

The PACT JPCI garden provides many benefits for the community. Participants experience intergenerational and intercultural connections, knowledge exchange, and socializations. Participants also have access to the Fresh Food Box (FFB) which provides low-barrier access to fresh produce and food security resources. These experiences in this space help to positively impact the community's psychosocial well-being. The purpose of this study was to learn more about the relationships and connections made in the garden. This helps to better understand the impact and potential benefits of gardens as intergenerational and intercultural social connection spaces for community members, and participants at PACT Grow-to-Learn (GTL) gardens. Situating the PACT garden in the sphere of non-profit worksites also helps to better understand the human ecosystem of the garden space and the dynamics involved.

In this chapter, I will bring my findings into conversation with what is already known in the literature. Specifically, I will discuss my findings on the community garden's changes in engagement post-COVID and the garden space as a way to combat loneliness, and to encourage intergenerational and intercultural connections. I will also explore the human dynamics and power structures within the human ecosystem of the garden, how the people interact within it and in relation to the outside world. The community does not determine the direction the garden takes, although they may have some input, ultimately, it is the non-profit, PACT, that dictates the management of and access to the space based on funding and staff. Thus, a clear organizational structure and vision is needed to be able to ensure that participants who engage in the garden space are able to benefit psychosocially and have opportunities to share knowledge across cultures and generations.

Overall Findings

The results of a descriptive analysis of the data suggest that for many, the garden is a source of improved well-being. Intergenerational and intercultural social connection occur in the garden with some knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing regarding recipes as seen in Figure 36 and ways of growing plants. The questionnaire findings demonstrate that 60% of participants (or 77% of respondents) indicated that the age and/or culture of the person with whom they shared information differed from theirs. In addition, as depicted in Figures 21 and 22, different age groups participate in the garden and diverse languages are spoken, this does not indicate interaction, but it does show that the different populations come together in the space. The results also suggest people experience positive psychosocial benefits related to being in the garden and having shared experiences in the space. The most prevalent theme throughout the responses was that participants appreciated the sense of community created by the garden and the events. Nevertheless, as PACT is a non-profit organization, certain human dynamics of the hierarchical structure of this specific non-profit came to light including tensions between the organizational staff and between staff and volunteers which partially negatively impacted their well-being. This resulted in garden staff expressing the need to have some boundaries and limiting participant access to the garden space to volunteer hours and events which not all past participants were pleased about causing some additional stress.

In an urban environment, such as Toronto, although there may be opportunity to connect and to access food security, there are not always multi-purpose spaces in which individuals can connect, access resources, and benefit from a designated green space. At the PACT gardens, although there has been a shift from weekly community engagement

efforts to weekly food security efforts, for participants who engage with the space, they are able to benefit in a multitude of ways. Participants prioritize accessing the space and coming to events at any opportunity (rain or shine) as engaging with the PACT gardens provides community members with diverse benefits. These benefits include not only food security through weekly FFBs and community events, but also access to nature and green space, and most importantly a space to connect and socialize.

Question One: How Has Engagement Changed in the Community Garden, Post-Pandemic?

Prior to COVID-19, the JPCI Community Garden looked different. As discussed in the previous chapter, there used to be weekly markets with free vegetarian meals and time for community members to socialize in the space. The pandemic brought a shift to this reality with social distancing in place as well as a shift in the focus of funding which influenced PACT's focus. The organization continued to provide weekly low-barrier access to food to community members through distribution of FFBs and in 2023, were finally able to bring back some community events. This shift and transition period both within the organization and socioeconomically did not go unnoticed by the PACT community members. The section below uses excerpts from interviews, questionnaire participant comments and data, as well as fieldnotes from events to depict some of the felt engagement changes in the community garden post-pandemic.

Experienced Changed in the Garden Space: The Atmosphere and Financial Realities

In interviews of participants who were part of the garden prior to and during the pandemic, there were some mentions of change, how things used to be, the memory of the garden, and the current reality. Nellie, a longstanding volunteer, shared that prior to the pandemic, there was a "free spirit kind of the easy flow," "you really felt it" and that with COVID-19, the community garden "went for the worse," the free spirit was "more or less stifled." Part of the reason for this may be that due to the restrictions during COVID-19, less volunteers were able to come out. There have also been less events as some of the priorities may have shifted due to funding and the needs of the community.

Interviewees also mentioned the cost-of-living crisis, food security, and thefts. In the summer of 2023, Metro, one of two big chain grocery stores in the area, was closed for a month due to a strike. This made it more difficult to access food locally. In addition, the cost of food has gone up substantially which adds to the pressures on food banks. There was much more need present in 2023 it seemed and the food bank in the area also had empty shelves with their usage tripling. During her interview, Nellie had shared that she wanted PACT to do more outreach towards people in the community and single mothers in need. After attending the Storytelling and Dumpling Making event on August 24th, 2023, and speaking with another community member, Matthew, she said that PACT has started to do a lot of the things she hoped the organization would do to address food insecurity. Matthew often came to the garden during events and played music, and during distribution. Nellie approached me, almost started crying as she said, “I feel so bad that this young man has disabilities and obviously needs the food and the space, and to take food home because his mother is bedridden.” There were already food security issues prior to COVID-19, and it exacerbated the problems. Brooke, a longstanding staff member, stated that, “There is a cost-of-living crisis [...] it was just this natural progression from COVID in terms of [what] generally people were going through.”

During the summer of 2023, there were also thefts in the garden, at least on three separate occasions with half the garlic being taken and other vegetables as well. This was poorly received by garden members. As Beckie, a longstanding volunteer, stated, “We all feel part of this community,” and “they know that if they need something they can come here and just ask for it and get it there’s no need for stealing.” There is a sense of community, and a sense of ownership as when individuals witnessed the theft, they tried

to report it to the garden staff. In the Additional Comments section of the questionnaires, a senior community member shared, “I’ve been observing cars/vans stealing your soil, composted soil...I confront them sometimes and personally talked to police...I informed the garden personnel about it... I love this garden [...]!!! Thank you!!!” Community garden participants know that the food that is grown is for everyone. Some community members mentioned that if they witnessed a theft and they felt that it was safe to approach the person, they would talk to the thief. If they do not feel it is safe, they make note of it and inform the garden staff members.

Community Engagement during Distribution

Most of the weekly interactions with community members occurred during distribution. We could see many faces of different community members and how the need for low-barrier access to fresh food spanned across race, age, sex, and ability. Many people signed up for the FFB and picked up bags for themselves and their families. Community members who were unable to come to the garden to pick up were able to access a free delivery service; this allowed them to connect to staff and for garden staff to connect to participants, and to get to know and explore more of the community if they were not from it.

Every week, many community members are very grateful for the food saying thank you and I would thank them for coming as well. One community member in particular always stood out due to his vibrant and colourful outfit which can be partially seen in Figure 30 his outfit, long pants and long sleeve shirt, had different strips of neon yellow and orange fabric along with black fabric. He wore the bandanas on his wrists and also used them as a mask. He often wore sunglasses, and rode into the parking lot on his motorcycle. He always

said, “You saved my life. Bless you!” and we would see him working out in the school field and resting in the sun and always encouraged him to take extra food. During distribution, extra bags and extra produce were brought out for participants to take if they needed. There was one week when we had run out of extras and community members kept asking about them saying that it was nice to have some selection and mentioning that Metro, the grocery store, being on strike and the food bank shelves being empty were an inconvenience. We realized how many people really needed extra and access to food in the neighbourhood. The pandemic significantly impacted food security for residents of Toronto; from March to July 2020, some food banks reported a 200% increase in demand.¹⁹⁶ These food access barriers only seem to increase as in 2023 food insecurity affected one in four households in Toronto.¹⁹⁷ PACT also saw an increase in FFBs in the post-pandemic years as demonstrated in Table 3 with a 127% increase in participants between 2020 and 2024.

During distribution, community members also enjoyed socializing. They would come with their friends or meet with their friends and talk. They would also interact with staff and ask how they were doing and discuss the garden and community stories. It was nice to see people checking in on each other to see whether they arrived and how they were. On August 18th, 2023, one of the community members’ grandchildren came and “wanted

¹⁹⁶ Jenelle Regnier-Davies et al., “Preparing for Food Security After COVID-19: Strengthening Equity and Resilience in Future Emergency Response in Toronto,” report (Centre for Studies in Food Security, 2022), 5.

https://www.torontomu.ca/foodsecurity/projects/activity_covid/.

¹⁹⁷ City of Toronto, “Food Insecurity in Toronto,” City of Toronto, May 23, 2025, <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/poverty-reduction-strategy/food-security-in-toronto-poverty-reduction-strategy/>.

to see/say hi to grandpa's friends." That same day, another community member had found a digging tool outside of the garden and said "it was like God pointed him in the right direction." He signed up to volunteer. It was nice to have the community interact with us and see them interact with each other. Community members used distribution as a meeting space, connecting with friends, and sharing stories.

Below, Figure 18 and Figure 19, are some images of packing for distribution and the distribution set up in 2023. In 2024, a decision was made to pack the bags outside of the garden gates, near the cooler. This helps to alleviate the need to carry all the food into the garden space and back out to the cooler. This also leaves the staff in the open when packing which can lead to potentially being exposed to more incidents, and leads to more (both positive and negative) community interactions. From my experience volunteering to help pack the Fresh Food Bags in 2024, these interactions were mostly neutral or positive as community members asked about buying or accessing the food and/or saying hello to community members that pass by the area.



Figure 18. Photograph of preparing FFBS for transport to the cooler. September 20, 2023.



Figure 19. Photograph of the set up for distribution. July 26, 2023.

Community Engagement through Events

Prior to COVID-19, community members had weekly access to the garden with community social meals and fresh produce. These weekly meals and markets provided access to the garden, food security (through free meals and market buck produce), and time and space to socialize. With 50-100 participants weekly, it was a great green hub in which participants could socialize. Post-COVID, there was a shift, as previous staff who led events either were no longer at the non-profit or were hands-off, so the goal was to have at least three events with food in 2023 as that was the main deliverable for a portion of the funding. Though there were only three main events this season, this was when we saw the most community engagement and connection. Table 3 includes a section on distributed hot meals. In 2023, 570 meals were distributed during the three events which is 190 meals per event. In 2019, pre-COVID they served 2268 hot meals during Community Markets, mid-July to mid-October, which is approximately 142 meals for 16 weekly events.¹⁹⁸ Although not demonstrating more engagement as there were fewer events so people may have made more effort to attend, it does demonstrate that the numbers per event have remained pretty consistent despite the pause in events.

Even with the challenges of the pandemic and events being put on hold, participants shared that they wanted more events in the space to socialize with other community members as often as they used to prior to COVID-19. Despite not having hosted events for three years, Figure 20 demonstrates that engagement seems to have remained strong with 75% of respondents being returning community members and 25%, new community members (13 of the 51 questionnaire respondents). Furthermore, 61% (31 of 51

¹⁹⁸ “2019 Yearbook – Annual Impact Report,” 9.

questionnaire participants), were garden participants prior to COVID-19 (2020) demonstrating that although there was a pause in community engagement, community members continue to return to the garden space.

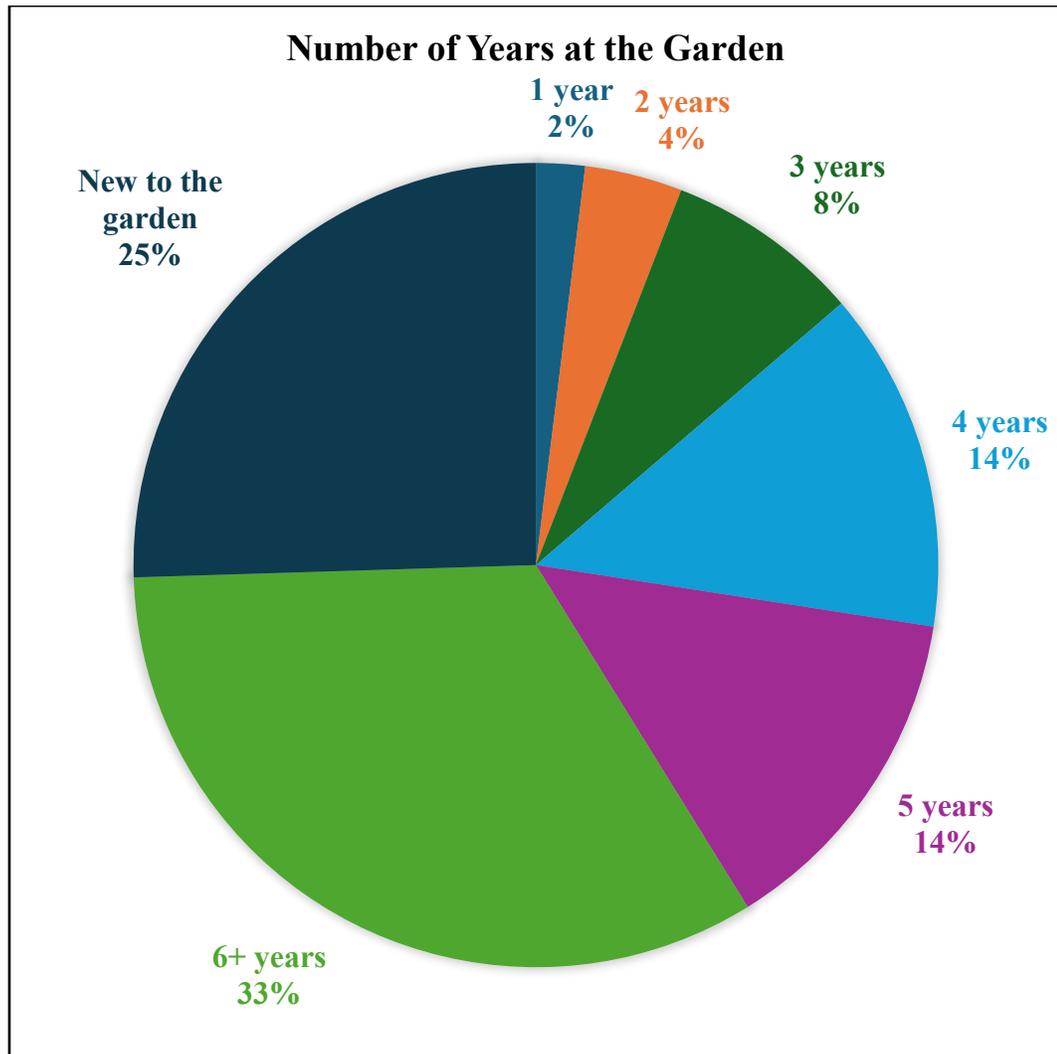


Figure 20. Pie chart depicting the number of years participants have been part of the community garden.

Events not only allowed community members access to the garden, but they also provided time to talk with the garden staff, to meet neighbours, and to socialize. During some of the interactions that occurred, participants discussed community engagement and

changes in the garden. For example, during the Community Social on July 18th, 2023, there were some interactions with community members and staff about how things were in the past and the changes. One community member had asked about the chickens that they used to have in the garden, and though the staff were different at the time, the current staff were able to explain the changes. The community member shared that it was nice to see that people appreciated the garden space and acknowledged that they do not know what goes into it all.

Another example of community engagement occurred during the Storytelling and Dumpling Making event on August 24th, 2023. My research helped some of the longstanding staff members to reflect on the impact the organization has had on the community and on themselves, but it also helped to facilitate their goals.¹⁹⁹ Through consultation with the organization, we were able to determine that they needed help with community engagement, thus I organized this event. I originally began by creating weekly recipe posts to engage with community virtually and share recipes based on the FFB produce of the week. Later, as we saw some of the logistical and organizational struggles of the first event of the season (more thoroughly discussed when I address Q3 later in this chapter), the Director of Operations suggested that I take over for the second event to host an event more overtly dedicated to connection. I planned a hands-on intercultural and intergenerational event which is further described when I explore Q2. This event brought some of the old vision of the garden back as participants worked together to make dumplings and perogies, discussed their recipes and folding techniques as well as getting

¹⁹⁹ Matthew David, “Problems of Participation: The Limits of Action Research,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570110098037>.

the chance to explore and appreciate the garden space. The end of the event really showed some of the community members' motivations for attending. Some people had stopped by later, as the event was ending and there was not much food left. "I just came to socialize," said Bobby, a community member. One of the ladies brought her grandchildren and they explored the garden. A few people had gotten the event times mixed up, so they arrived after the event ended, we gave them whatever food was left and they shared that they had come to socialize, not for food but were grateful, nonetheless.

Community Members' Experiences

Through the Additional Comments section, questionnaire participants could share more about their experiences in the space. Many participants shared positive experiences in the garden and as a new senior community member shared, their thanks for "organizing for the community." They stated that the garden was "a very pleasant place for everyone" with a "terrific atmosphere" in which they "get to know more neighbours, get to sample different food, [and] ways of making food." A senior participant also shared that they are "all about breaking the isolation. I want its present, provide, prepare people to enjoy, learn, and care about living healthy!" Another senior that had participated in the garden for five years called the garden "an oasis in the city [and] regrets [that] COVID has put a stop to the ability to walk around the garden." These quotes demonstrate the positive engagement within the garden and how both old and new volunteers appreciate the space and encouraged increased connection.

A final quote that shapes my thinking for the sustainability, and the vision of the garden is from a senior community member and volunteer who was later interviewed. "The more open and welcoming a garden is, the more people begin to care about one another

and their welfare.” In 2023, many community members shared both in-person and through questionnaires that although they were grateful for the food security aspect, they would like more access to the space and for events and previous markets to continue. Having open discussions with the community members to ensure that the vision and needs of the community for social engagement and the mission of the organization align would be beneficial. The quote above speaks to an observation of the new boundaries presented by current staff as a change from pre-COVID to a more restricted access to the garden and potentially a need to bring community members and volunteers into the sustainability and change discussion.

These responses are from a range of participants, including new community members and staff members, as well as returning community members and volunteers. They also include perspectives from adults, seniors, and older adults. These quotes demonstrate the various aspects of the PACT community garden and community gardens in general serve as green spaces for connection and spaces that have the potential to promote well-being. Though participants noted many benefits, there is still space for improvement and participants did note changes to the openness and restrictions due to the pandemic and new staff guidelines.

Epidemic of Loneliness

I did not specifically look at loneliness in my questionnaire and interview questions. I was exploring the psychosocial effects of being in the community garden with people and the effects of well-being. What I did not recognize at the time was that my search for the benefits of social connections in this green space intersected with the epidemic of

loneliness that is continuing to spread throughout the nation.²⁰⁰ Three participants I interviewed mentioned loneliness, but you can find it as an underlying thread through all participants answers as they continue to share the positives of being in the community and connecting to others. Yes, they share a meal in the garden, but these community meals are an incentive for them to come to the space, be outside, and to socialize with other community members. Loneliness was there before the pandemic, but the separation and physical distance that COVID-19 required amplified the psychosocial disconnect. In 2023, 39% of Canadian seniors reported feeling lonely, and 41% of Canadians over 50 reported feeling socially isolated.²⁰¹ Canada ranked the loneliest of the 11 participating nations, with no comprehensive national plan to address this problem.²⁰² Despite this issue also being prevalent prior to COVID-19, a Region of Waterloo Public Health study conducted in 2016 found that individuals who had feelings of belonging to a community experienced positive effects on their health.²⁰³ Eighty-eight point one percent of individuals who experienced a strong sense of belonging in their communities, felt satisfied with their mental well-being compared to 58.1% of those with a weak sense of belonging.²⁰⁴ In conclusion, encouraging

²⁰⁰ Katie Dangerfield, “The Loneliness Epidemic: How Social Isolation Can Damage Our Minds and Bodies,” *Global News*, May 14, 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9684469/loneliness-crisis-canada-covid/>.

²⁰¹ Women’s Age Lab, Women’s College Hospital and Rachel Savage, “Recommendations for Action to Tackle the Loneliness Epidemic Among Older Adults in Canada,” *Women’s Age Lab*, (March,2024): 4.

²⁰² Women’s Age Lab, Women’s College Hospital and Savage, “Recommendations for Action to Tackle the Loneliness Epidemic Among Older Adults in Canada.” 2.

²⁰³ Stephanie Watson, and Katie McDonald. “Mental Health Promotion: Let’s Start Speaking the Same Language.” *The Knowledge Development and Exchange (kde) Hub*. Region of Waterloo Public Health & Emergency Services. June 2016, 36. https://kdehub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/MentalHealthPromotion_Report.pdf.

²⁰⁴ Watson and McDonald. “Mental Health Promotion: Let’s Start Speaking the Same Language.” 36; Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 164.

social connectedness enhances the social fabric of the community as it helps to build trust and strong friendships thus easing some of the negative effects of loneliness.²⁰⁵

The data I collected through my questionnaires showed that being in the community garden improved participant well-being, specifically social, mental, and emotional well-being (see Figure 33). In my questionnaire, 53% of memories participants shared about the garden involved people, thus encouraging continued connections is imperative to continue fighting the epidemic of loneliness (see Figure 32). In 2021, a Centre for Addiction and Mental Health survey found that 49% of those who said they were lonely also reported poor mental health, specifically increased anxiety and depression,²⁰⁶ thus encouraging social connection and nature connection could be beneficial.²⁰⁷ In the garden, participants felt “Relaxed,” “Love,” and at “Peace” (see Figure 34). These positive emotions motivate the continued push for social connection which will not only help combat loneliness but also help improve well-being. Although not demonstrating specific post-COVID changes, it does demonstrate the positive effect of the garden space and how individuals are affected by participating and interacting within and with the space.

²⁰⁵ Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 164.

²⁰⁶ “Anxiety, Feelings of Depression and Loneliness Among Canadians Spikes to Highest Levels Since Spring 2020,” CAMH, January 25, 2022, <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/anxiety-depression-loneliness-among-canadians-spikes-to-highest-levels>.

²⁰⁷ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, “The Daily — Canadian Social Survey: Loneliness in Canada,” November 24, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124e-eng.htm>; Dangerfield, “The Loneliness Epidemic: How Social Isolation Can Damage Our Minds and Bodies.”

During my interview with the Director of Operations, Brooke, she shared some experiences of working on the frontlines during the pandemic and delivering the FFBs to senior community members. She shared that this experience gave her the opportunity to connect with people from other generations, which she did not usually get to do, and this really helped her see first-hand the experienced isolation and loneliness that was occurring during COVID-19. She stated that the experience was very eye-opening and “impacted the way I go about my interactions with older people in life” and so, although with some modifications post-COVID, she continued to ensure that PACT continued to engage with community both in and outside of the garden space.

For community members to obtain more social and engagement benefits from the PACT community garden space having more access and time in the garden to socialize and connect with one another would be valuable for community engagement post-COVID. Through the Community Markets, PACT provided weekly meals to 100 families in 2017 compared to providing 802 FFBs weekly in 2023.²⁰⁸ Although not specifically addressing community engagement, this shows a drastic shift in the garden’s capacity to meet food security needs. Unlike other food security Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), PACT does not simply focus on providing food for the community. The organization engages with the community’s need for socialization and access to a green space in an urban environment aiming to provide access to this social connection space in a sustainable way.

²⁰⁸ “2017 Annual Report – Our Year in Review,” 6; “Annual Impact Report 2023,” 5.

Question Two: How Do the Intercultural and Intergenerational Interactions in the Garden Space Affect Participants' Psychosocial Well-Being and Knowledge Sharing Opportunities?

Through my ethnographic research, I found that there were varied aspects to the PACT community gardens. They were indeed spaces of intercultural and intergenerational connection and knowledge sharing. Participants enjoyed socializing during events, and they described their psychosocial well-being as improved through the engagement with their community and within the community garden space. I decided the focus of my fieldnotes should be on volunteer days and community events, because this is where we see the most social interaction in the garden as that is when community members have access to the garden. As this was the main research question, both questionnaires and interview responses also informed my findings.

Participant Demographics

Based on the questionnaire, most of the people participating in the garden were seniors and adults (see Figure 21). Many community members had been coming to the garden for years, however there were also many (25%) new members (see Figure 20). My questionnaire was set up in a way where people could self-identify their culture and ethnicity background as well as the languages, they spoke. Only the age-related question was somewhat like the census as it had three distinct groups for adults. The questionnaire, found in Appendix C, had the categories for Adult, Older Adult, and Senior, whereas the census had the categories Working Adult, Pre-Retirement, and Senior. The other self-identifying questions were fill-in-the blank in which participants could identify their own cultures and ethnicities. This led to 13 participants holding hyphenated identities and 15

participants spoke multiple languages. In line with the census, other than Canadian and English (16 people), Filipino and Tagalog were the most present identities and language spoken, with 10 people self-identifying as Filipino and 11 people speaking Tagalog / Ilocano. When asked if participants spoke another language in the garden, 32% said yes, 64% said that they had not, and 4% did say that they would like to (see Figure 22).

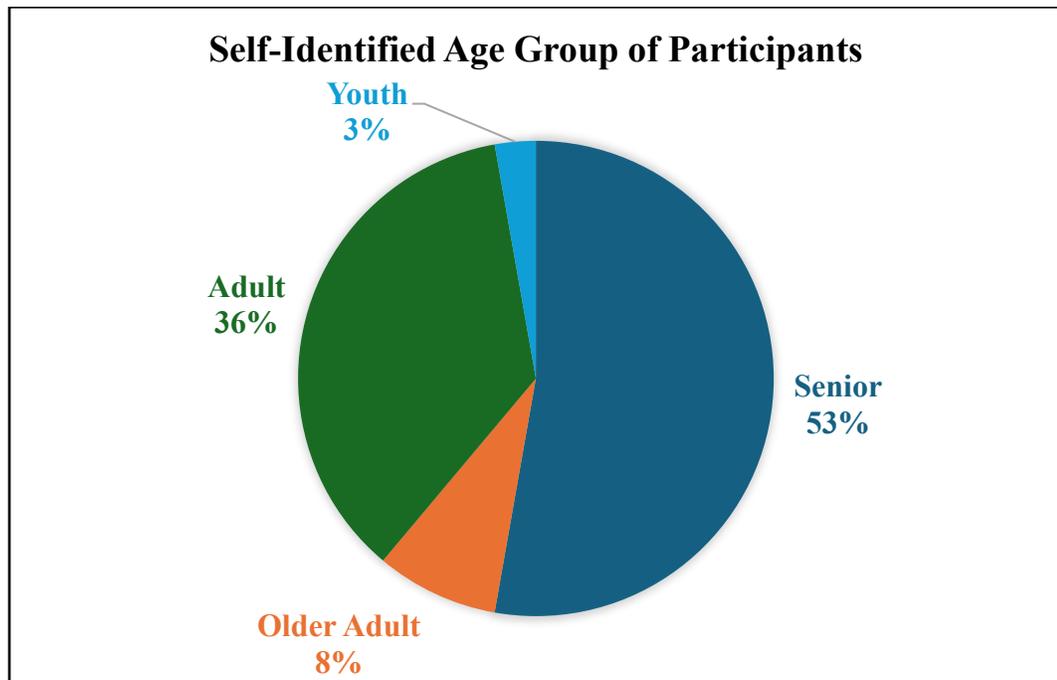


Figure 21. Pie chart depicting the self-identified age group of participants.

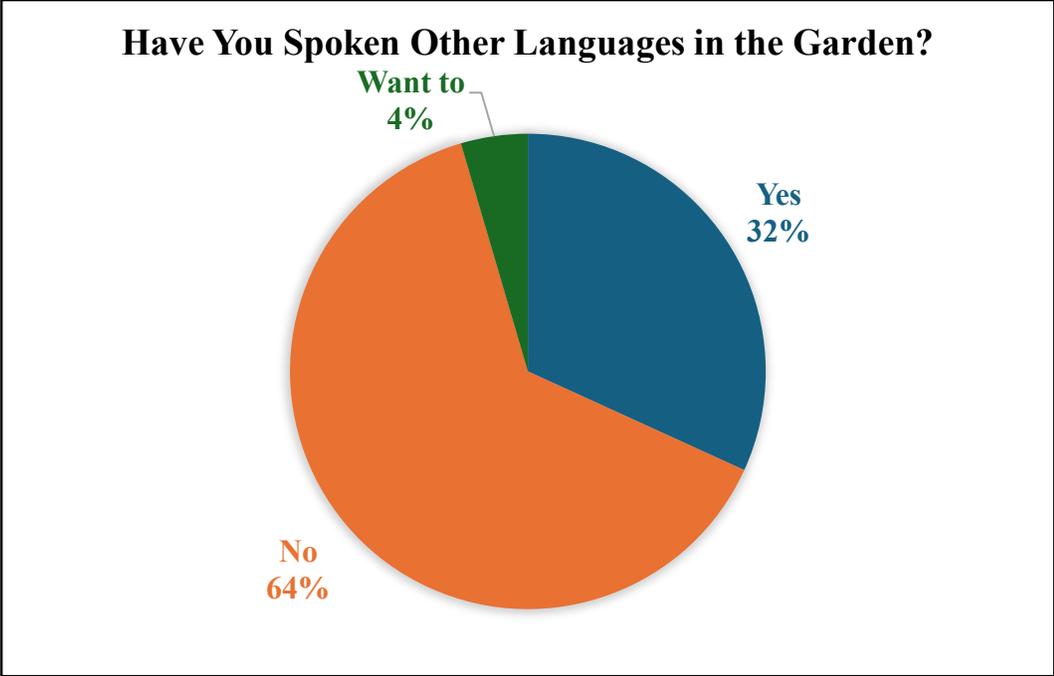


Figure 22. Pie chart depicting whether participants have spoken another language in the garden.

Intergenerational and Intercultural Connections During Community Volunteering

Community volunteering occurred once a week for community members throughout the growing season and there were separate times for student volunteers. Community volunteers sign up and go through a training of garden rules as well as workplace safety on how to lift things or weed properly. Community volunteering was held midday on a weekday allowing time for volunteers to come from the neighbourhood or commute to the garden and to bring their lunch and stay to socialize and enjoy the garden space as well. Depending on the task of the day, volunteers could take home some edible weeds or extra harvested produce.

There were about one to five community members that were regular volunteers in the summer of 2023. The restrictions during the pandemic added to the negative impact of

lost social connection,²⁰⁹ and this affected the engagement of volunteers. Volunteers were also often older adults and so some either moved during the pandemic (to other parts of the city or country) or had aged and thus had some mobility restrictions. In addition, community volunteering occurred once a week, on Tuesdays, for three hours, from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. which was not always an accessible time for interested individuals. At the beginning of the season and throughout the summer, this is when you could see and experience a lot of intercultural and intergenerational connections occurring.

Usually the Garden Manager, Cora, would identify a few tasks in the morning that needed to be completed and then volunteers would work on them together or separately. This involved weeding the garden beds, picking and harvesting fruits and vegetables, and preparing the food for the next day distribution. It was helpful to have so many people in the garden and to work as a team. When people worked together, they would often talk to each other about their lives, knowledge of gardening, and different recipes, and I got the chance to listen to and be part of some of the conversations. During group berry picking, for example, volunteers talked amongst themselves and shared more about their lives. Volunteers worked on their own, such as to pick some lavender, but also came back to the group activity. Some volunteers also preferred to work alone as they saw gardening as a type of workout, and as a way to recenter themselves and to connect to nature away from people. Having options allowed participants to work different tasks that were of interest to them.

²⁰⁹ Catherine Lowe et al., “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Canadian Social Connections: A Thematic Analysis,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 40, no. 1 (February 2023): 76–101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075221113365>.

July 4th, 2023, was one such community volunteer morning during which intergenerational and intercultural connections and interactions occurred. Some volunteers worked together to pick snap peas, whilst a few others worked alone. One pair that worked together were Nellie, a Czech senior, and Jenny, a Caribbean senior (see Figure 23 below). They both grabbed some milk crates to help them sit more comfortably and discussed the different plants they grew when they were back home in their countries and in their gardens in the city. Later, Annie, a Chinese-Indian senior, arrived and wanted to help, but was not up to being in the sun as the heat was giving her a headache. So, Annie and Miriam, the Community Engagement Coordinator, prepared some snacks and drinks for the other volunteers in the shade. I was excited to see the different interactions and how although volunteers had different mobility and physical needs, they were still able to come to the garden to help and harvest food for the community. Individuals of different ages and cultures were able to come together and collaborate on a greater goal whilst also connecting with each other and sharing their stories and knowledge.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Wang, Wakkary, Neustaedter, and Desjardins, “Information Sharing, Scheduling, and Awareness in Community Gardening Collaboration.” 79.



Figure 23. Photograph of two volunteers, Nellie, *left*, and Jenny, *right*, chatting and picking snap peas. July 4, 2023.

Another day that demonstrated genuine and diverse interactions was August 22nd, 2023, a community volunteer day. Makena, the Farm Assistant, and I set up for the volunteers delegating different tasks around the garden. On this day, Nellie, a Czech senior, brought her grandson who was visiting from the Czech Republic, Nick, to the garden. He brought some lively energy with him into the garden space as he climbed trees and picked fruit with Miriam, the Community Engagement Coordinator. On this day, Andy, the Indigenous Garden Coordinator, was also at the garden. Andy and Nick had the opportunity to paint together and worked on building a structure for the Indigenous Garden. As they worked together, Andy shared more about the Indigenous growing technique he used that year of growing three sisters, beans, corn, and squash, on mounds. They also painted together a sign for the Two Row Wampum, the Gasweta (the word has different spellings) (see Figure 24) symbolizing a living treaty of Indigenous and European peoples living

together in peace, with respect of each others' ways and meeting in the middle to discuss issues that may arise.²¹¹ It seems as though this collaboration also embodied the agreement as Andy and Nick harmoniously cared for the land and mutually respected one another and the garden space. Nellie shared that she liked seeing Nick work with and spend time with Andy as they connected interculturally and intergenerationally even though they were from different parts of the world. Andy also shared that he enjoyed working with Nick, "He is a smart one, he knows nature. I like his ideas - he is slick." At the end of the community volunteering, Nick exclaimed, "I can't wait to come back!"

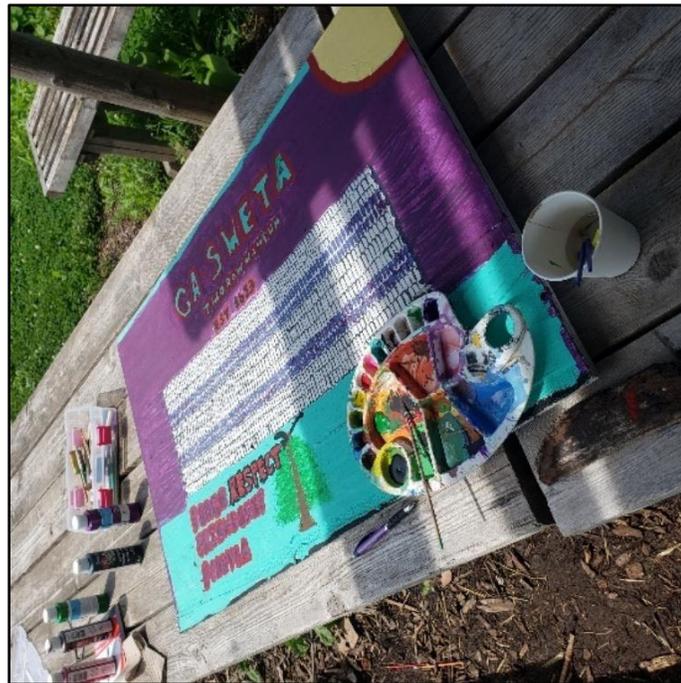


Figure 24. Photograph of painting Nick and Andy were working on representing Gasweta, The Two Row Wampum. August 22, 2023.

²¹¹ "Guswentha: Two Row Wampum Belt," Indigenous Values Initiative, June 11, 2017, <https://indigenousvalues.org/decolonization/guswentha-two-row-wampum-belt/>; "Two Row Wampum – Gaswéñdah," Onondaga Nation, November 2, 2022, <https://www.onodaganation.org/culture/wampum/two-row-wampum-belt-guswenta/>.

These were the type of days and interactions I had hoped to witness and experience throughout the growing season. They unfortunately only occurred during the restricted hours of community volunteering, and events. Encouraging continued community engagement through volunteering and events can hopefully allow more access to the community garden space and nurture more intergenerational and intercultural connections.

In the fall, there were less people in the garden but still a great need from the community and for the FFB. Many of the volunteers went back home to a different country, to travel, and back to work. Both the Canada Summer Job (CSJ) and the college co-op students' contracts ended as well. Thus, there was less interaction and community engagement on a weekly basis in the garden. Nonetheless, community events continued into October, and community continued to socialize and engage with them.



Figure 25. Photograph of staff member, Miriam, *left*, and volunteer, Dora, *right*, preparing the leeks. September 5, 2023.

I included the image above, Figure 25, as it shows some of the preparation that went into processing the produce for the FFB. On this day, only one community volunteer was present. In the fall, students return to school and volunteers get busy. In 2023, a couple of the regular volunteers had planned to travel together to the Czech Republic, and another went back to the Caribbean as it was warmer, this resulted in fewer volunteers. Nevertheless, this image depicts intergenerational and intercultural collaboration as the staff member and the volunteer worked together in close proximity. Dora, the Korean senior, in the photograph made it a priority to come to the garden and help. Although, she did it mostly for her physical well-being, she would often emphasize that she would be happy to come in more often to work out and be in nature as she used to prior to COVID-19.

Intergenerational and Intercultural Connections during Events

Every event allowed community members access to the garden green space, they were invited to re-experience the garden or experience it for the first time. Events usually had tours or time for people to wander the garden. There was also always a food element, either pre-prepared or prepared together. And thus, there was a lot of socializing at the table about the food, and recipes, alongside getting to know neighbours and the greenspace. Sienna, a senior who participated in the garden for six years and was later interviewed shared that, “the pleasant space encouraged conversations, getting to know people I have not met before, and it is truly worth spending the hours or so that we can spend there.” It was lovely to see community members who we saw during distribution and the FFB but also new faces and their families. This was when the garden came to life as individuals from different walks of life, socioeconomically, culturally, and generationally could come

together to interact with each other, with nature, and share a meal. Promotional material for events can be found in Appendix E.

Community Social – July 18th, 2023

The Community Social on July 18th, 2023, was the first event of the summer and the first event post-COVID. It included live music from a cello player one of the staff knew, chili and salad, a tie dye station, and garden tours. Staff and volunteers cooked together. People shared that they really enjoyed the event and being back in the space. They expressed that it was nice to see community members reconnect and interact with one another, and I agreed with the feeling. They wandered around the space and looked at the different flowers and plants that were growing and took pictures.

The tie dye station was an interesting addition, as people were curious about it and wanted to learn more. It allowed people to try something new which they had never done but it was also a place for both young and old to connect and to create their own wearable art pieces. For the Community Social, I was put in charge of the Tie Dye Station and took note of the different interactions that occurred.

At the beginning of the event, other CSJs and I demonstrated various tie dye techniques and explained the process. We had bought white shirts in different sizes for participants to use in case they did not bring any. I had the opportunity to observe people of different ages and cultures tie dye. Many people were curious about tie dyeing as they had never done it, so it was great that we brought some shirts. Halfway through, Ali, the TCI Garden Manager, had gone to get some socks as we had run out of things to dye, and people enjoyed dyeing socks. As Annie, a (Chinese-Indian senior) volunteer was cooking, she brought over some towels for the CSJs and I to have fun being creative through tie dye.

During the event, there was an older (Filipino) lady that had learned how to tie dye at the beginning and had called her friends over to show them how to do it and they tie dyed together. There was also an older (Persian) man with his wife, with a smile, he shared that it was his first time tie dyeing, and he was very proud of his colourful shirt. This demonstrated that people were learning across generations and cultures and were grasping the knowledge to share with others. Tie dyeing, as with gardening and cooking, does not need words to demonstrate techniques and learn from one another, so individuals of different ages and languages were able to understand and benefit from the acquired knowledge through their wearable art. The tie dye station also provided a space away from the crowded dining area for people to bond and connect over a hands-on activity in the garden.

Community members and staff brought their children to the garden space as well. Cora, the JPCI Garden Manager, brought her family and after eating some of the food, they dyed some socks and a onesie together. There was also a Jewish family, and the mother and older daughter were tie dyeing whilst the youngest was offering chips from the food station to staff members. This brought in more of an intergenerational aspect as community members of different ages were able to experience the garden, share food, and explore the art of tie dye. This also helped to create tangible memories, other than produce, through community interaction of the garden space.

This event allowed me to see that there was still potential in the garden serving as a social connection space. For part of the event, as community members of different cultures were conversing and eating together, there was also a cello player for participants

to enjoy. People came for the food and for being in the space, but mostly people came to socialize and connect with neighbours they may not have seen in a while.

Storytelling and Dumpling Making – August 24th, 2023

For the second event of the season, I was encouraged to organize an event, partially to meet PACT deliverables, partially so that I could gather more data collection opportunities for my research purposes. I decided on a dumpling making event. I thought that it would be a way to create intercultural conversations as many cultures have their own types of dumplings and it would be a way for people to connect with one another. I borrowed some dumpling storybooks and a dumpling technique comic cookbook from the library and thought it would be nice for everyone to flip through while we wait to eat the dumplings.



Figure 26. Photograph of four friends chopping chives for dumplings and perogies.

During this event, we made perogies and then dumplings with mushrooms and garden greens. As we were preparing ingredients, we ran out of time and participants came in, but everyone was eager to help and chop veggies. People walked around the garden and took pictures. Depicted in the photographs Figures 26, 27, and 28, people working together and creating food. The women in Figure 26, varied in age and culture, were laughing as they were having fun chopping chives and chatting. Tracy (an older community member) offered to finish mashing potatoes and chopped the swiss chard. In Figure 27, participants were assembling their perogies and asking one another about their folding techniques. Figure 28 depicts some completed dumplings awaiting boiling and more dumplings being made. One of the books I took out from the library was a comic book cookbook, so it had pictures of folding techniques, some people flipped through, but most simply worked together and showed each other different folds. Trying new foods and sharing stories and techniques fostered intercultural learning. People were able to bring their past experiences and ancestral knowledge into the garden and share it with others whilst also acquiring new knowledge and understanding. I chose a dumpling making event as many cultures have a pastry or dough with a filling that is fried, boiled, or baked. Dumplings are a common ground with a global presence which I had hoped to pull on to create a shared experience for garden community members. Many older community members were able to reminisce on their past of making dumplings and perogies and share their stories and folding techniques with others. Participants were also able to connect with the garden as they made food using garden-grown produce. They were also able to share the meal they made together whilst learning and connecting with one another thus fostering a deeper sense of belonging in the garden space.



Figure 27. Photograph of community members making perogies.



Figure 28. Photograph of community members making dumplings.

People were in the space, socialized at the table, explored the garden, and even read and shared stories. They also brought children and friends to be in the beautiful green space and to socialize with each other. Participants expressed that they really enjoyed the food and asked about the different sauces and the kimchi that Dora, a (Korean senior) community member and volunteer, made. Nellie, a (Czech senior) community member and volunteer, was very intrigued by the kimchi and asked about it a lot. I tried to explain that it was a Korean fermented vegetable, in this case, a garden-grown cucumber and chive kimchi. Another (Asian) community member also shared that it was a type of spicy fermented vegetable and included some more detail on the added spices. It was an interesting exchange as I had base knowledge of the process and the garden-grown vegetables as I was there when Dora gathered them, and the community member had more thorough knowledge of the process of making kimchi. Nellie's curiosity created an opportunity for additional food-based cultural exchange based on genuine interest and the yearning to understand as there are fermented foods with various processes around the world. This exchange allowed Nellie to learn more about a different fermenting process and new ingredients. She was also able to share about the pickles she makes at home, concluding that other than the spices used, the main difference was the brine, as one type includes putting vegetables into the brine whereas kimchi creates its own.

As I was observing the interactions during the event, I had the opportunity to listen to one of the conversations between Nellie and Sienna, a (Indonesian/Chinese/Canadian senior) community member who was later interviewed. Sienna shared her reflections on how beautiful the garden is and looked back on her life as it was before. She shared her migration story and the different places she had lived. In one of those places, she recalled

with some feelings of aversion, how she used to collect butterflies and now wondered why she killed such beautiful creatures. She shared that she was glad that she got to see them fly around the garden. She also spoke of her journey growing up in Indonesia and flying with her parents to Hong Kong and then taking a train through Siberia to Germany. Nellie and Beckie, a (Jewish senior) community member, who was also later interviewed, were both very shocked and impressed by the story that Sienna shared with them about her life. The three women connected through their migration stories, their shared love of nature, and the community garden space.

As Nellie was at the event, she also brought her grandson Nick who was very excited to work with Andy, the Indigenous Lead, again. It was Nick's last time at the garden until next year, and I reflected on how he had changed this summer. Earlier this season, although Nick liked gardening, he was not really interested in coming to the garden as it was a long subway ride, but now he really enjoyed the experience again and expressed that he liked working with Andy and being in the space. For his part, Andy remarked that "Nick is smart and a really hard worker." Their intergenerational and intercultural connections and working relationship allowed them to connect and learn from one another as Andy shared Indigenous Knowledge and Nick provided a more lighthearted and free-spirited attitude. They were able to connect over their shared love of gardening and creating. Near the end of the event, Andy also later played the drum with another community member, Matthew, joining him on the shaker (see Figure 29).



Figure 29. Photograph of Indigenous Lead, Andy, *left*, and community member, Matthew, *right*, making music, August 24, 2023.

These interactions speak to the benefit of these connections to psychosocial well-being. They demonstrate the community need for a social gathering space and the desire for the PACT JPCI garden to be that accessible green space. My fieldnotes and observations demonstrate that these interactions, collaborations, knowledge sharing, and relationships were fostered within the community garden space. The connections and deeper understanding between community members is found through the sharing of stories and socialization. These relationships, which sometimes extend beyond the garden enclosure, positively impact participants lives and psychosocial well-being.

Garden Closing Meal – October 5th, 2023

The Garden Closing Meal on October 5th, 2023, was the final community event of the season. We tried to make the event less stressful, so staff cooked the meal (lentil curry), on October 3rd, 2023, and made salad in the morning. The focus of this event was mainly for people to enjoy the space, have some food, and socialize.

Community members arrived at the event early and offered to help if needed. Many took the opportunity to explore the garden before the event was in full swing. When we began to serve food, people expressed that they really enjoyed the soup and the salad with many of them returning for seconds and thirds. For this event, I placed my questionnaires on the table where community members sat, so participants were able to fill them out as they ate. As the questionnaires were more accessible, I received more responses and was able to answer any questions participants may have had. As the event progressed, community members wandered around the garden, took photos with the flowers, and harvested vegetables to take home. In the dining area, participants continued to enjoy the music that was playing from a speaker and chatted amongst themselves. Community members took the time to socialize with one another, they discussed the garden and volunteering in it, they also shared stories and remarked on how delicious the food was. Many participants expressed that they were very happy and grateful for the event and were looking forward to more events in the garden next year.

Overall, this was the best event experience as staff were prepared, and it went smoothly. Other events were more stressful as there were more aspects to them with activities and themes, this event mainly focused on participants being in the space and sharing a meal. There was some relief on the part of the garden staff that this was the

concluding meal, and this would be the last time this season so many community members would be in the garden before staff could focus on closing the garden for the season.

This was an event during which people of different cultures sat together, shared a meal, and shared stories (see Figure 30 and Figure 31 below). There were new faces at the garden excited for the next season and many who had been at the garden for many seasons prior. It felt like a good end to a hectic summer. Below are some photographs from the Closing Meal Event, October 5, 2023. They depict participants sharing a table and a meal together. People talked to one another in a common space, sometimes meeting community members that they may not have otherwise met, getting to know their neighbours, and the nature in their urban environment.



Figure 30. Photograph of two community members eating together.



Figure 31. Photograph of community members eating together.

Participants' Psychosocial Well-being

The most informative questions from the questionnaire as it pertains to addressing the psychosocial aspects of the community garden would be the ones about how participants assess what aspects of well-being were affected by the garden, their favourite memories in the garden, and how they felt in the garden. Aspects of well-being which participants identified as most improved by being in the community garden space were social, mental, and emotional (see Figure 33). The aspects of psychosocial well-being included social, material, cultural, spiritual, mental, and emotional. Participants were able to select all that they felt were improved by participating in the community garden space (see Figure 33). In addition, participants shared a number of their favourite memories in the garden with different themes; the themes that were most often mentions were memories with people in the garden and sharing food (see Figure 32). Finally, many different feelings were shared about being in the garden; most were overwhelmingly positive with only a few

negative ones which seem to be from those who work at the garden (see Figure 34). The most noted feelings in the garden were “Relaxed,” and “Love,” both receiving eight different participant responses, followed by “Peace,” with six respondents. This depicts positive psychosocial aspects of being in the community garden space.

Though not explored in this thesis, working and volunteering in the garden space is also beneficial to physical well-being as participants are in nature and usually do physical activities such as squatting to weed or using wheelbarrows. One of the garden volunteers I interviewed with the help of Google Translate, was Dora, a longstanding garden volunteer, who did not speak much English. During her interview on September 19th, 2023, she shared that she enjoyed being in the garden as the physical activity and helping people was healthy for her. Dora did not interact much but still tried to help and demonstrate different techniques.

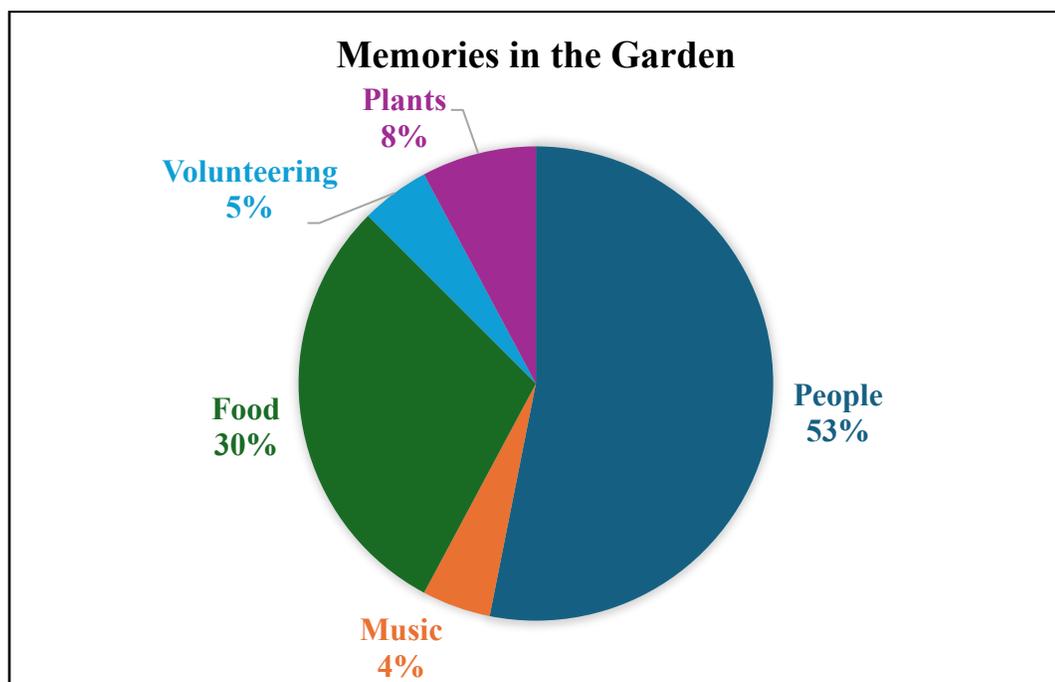


Figure 32. Pie chart depicting the themes in memories participants shared in the garden.

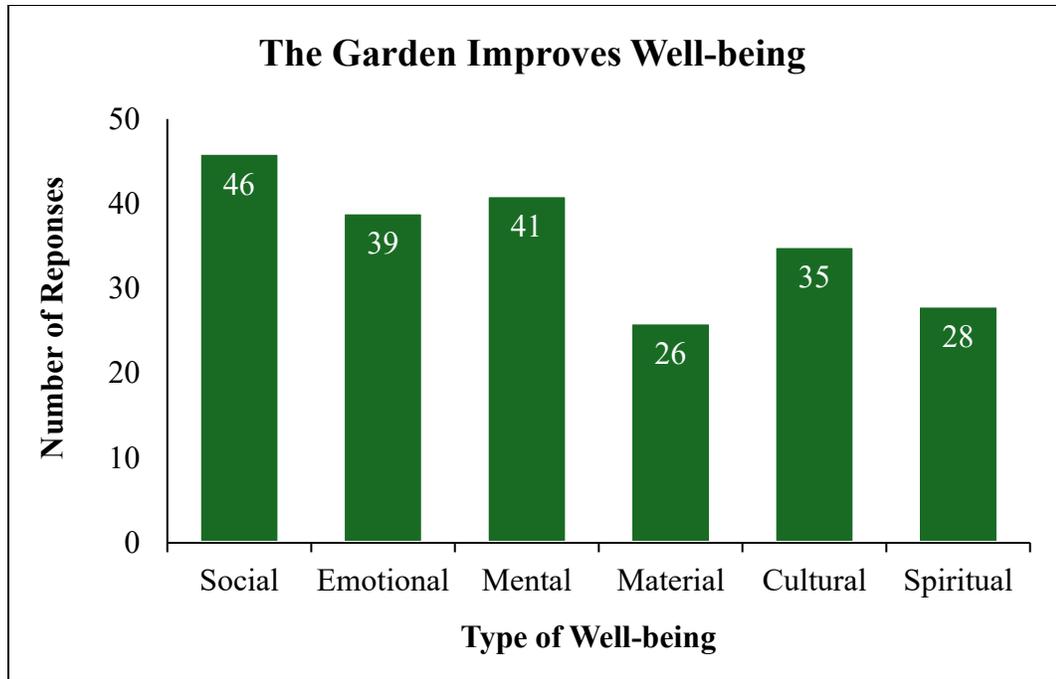


Figure 33. Bar graph depicting participant’s selection of the ways in which their well-being has improved within the garden space.

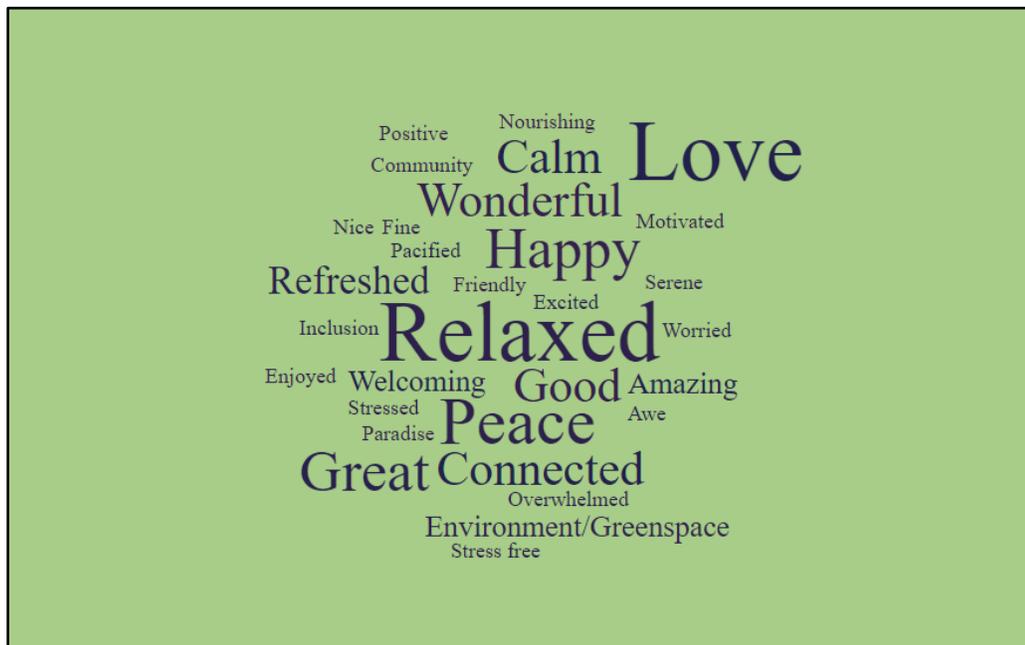


Figure 34. Word art created with *Word It Out* based on the feelings participants shared about being in the garden. The greater the frequency, the bigger the word.

During community volunteering, participants were also able to interact with one another and build their social circle for a positive psychosocial impact on their well-being. An example of this was shared by Nellie on July 4th, 2023. At lunch, Nellie spoke of the summer of 2022 when her grandson (Nick) was at the garden, and he had helped Dora with her mental health. She shared that, “Nick and Dora had somehow connected and worked well together. They both cried when it was time for him to go back home” to the Czech Republic. I remembered Nellie’s grandsons from the summer of 2022, and they were always excited to help and try different berries. I did not know about the connection between the grandson and Dora; their relationship demonstrates that some people are able to connect through language barriers and age differences.

Another such example of intergenerational connection occurred on August 1st, 2023, a community volunteer day. During volunteer hours mostly adults and seniors worked together, but this was a rare occasion in which adults, seniors, youth, and children were present. There was a lot of interaction, storytelling, and teamwork as volunteers picked chokeberries and pulled weeds. Dora (Korean senior), Alicia (White-presenting adult), Nellie (Czech senior), Nick (Nellie’s grandson), and Eveline (high school student related to a community member) chatted while they picked berries. I took some hand photos of people picking berries (see Figure 35). Dora, who usually works alone, looked happy to see Nick, after they had met and worked together last year. Alicia shared memories of her father who used to be a gardener. He died when she was younger, and she was taking the summer to recharge. She shared that coming to the garden allowed her to reconnect to her childhood. Alicia stated that she liked working with the older women and

learning from them. She had also shared that one of her son's was Nick's age, so they organized a get-together, and she drove Nick and Nellie home.

These everyday gardening interactions demonstrated that individuals of different cultures and ages (Alicia and Nellie are from different age groups and backgrounds) who met at the garden connected outside of the garden space. Beckie, a volunteer and community member that I interviewed on September 5th, 2023, also knew Nellie for many years and traveled with her. She said that outside the garden, some people may simply say hello as they do not have much in common or "sit down and have a coffee with them" and catch up. This sense of connection within the garden, continues out of it and into the community, hopefully combatting the loneliness and reminding community members of good times and the summer to come.



Figure 35. Photograph of two volunteers Alicia, *left*, and Evelin, *right*, picking berries for jam. August 1, 2023.

Intergenerational and Intercultural Knowledge Sharing

Intergenerational and intercultural knowledge sharing occurred in the garden during community volunteering and events, when participants had the opportunity to access the space. Both older and younger volunteers shared their food production knowledge exchanging techniques, discussing different methods, as well as different uses for the various plants and produce. Community members enjoyed spending time in the garden, but they also enjoyed connecting with others and the sense of community within the space that also extended into their neighbourhoods.

As only two of the interviewed volunteers were new, Alicia and Hannah, there was a lot of mention of the garden in previous years and different transitions. The new volunteers spoke more of the intergenerational and intercultural connections they were making. I was able to interview Alicia on August 14th, 2023, she was a new volunteer and had come to the garden to learn more and connect as her late father used to garden. The garden allowed her to expand her community and to give back. When speaking about knowledge sharing, she replied, “I have learned a lot. Mostly from older women from all over the world. They are kind, inclusive, extremely knowledgeable. I have also learned from the students. Both have advantages.” The other new volunteer, Hannah, had more knowledge about edible plants and gardening; she came to this space to be outside and connect with likeminded people in a safe and positive way. When I interviewed her on October 24th, 2023, she shared her thoughts on food and agroecological knowledge sharing:

I think increasing knowledge is the first thing you have to do to decrease fear about food. There are so many plants that are considered weeds that actually have been important food sources throughout history. Or like plants that were introduced from Eurasia to the Americas or plants that were a food crop for Indigenous peoples of the Americas that just don't get used because they're not recognizable to that colonial system.

Though both women lived far from the garden and at opposite ends of the city, they chose to travel to the PACT garden and to connect to the land, and the people. These interview excerpts suggest that for some participants, intergenerational learning has occurred specifically in terms of different ways of food production and preparation with knowledge usually shared by adults and senior women. Based on interview responses, these interactions and knowledge sharing positively impacted participants psychosocial well-being.

Older volunteers and the staff member also talked about intergenerational and intercultural connections. They shared that they learnt a lot from others in different cultures while gardening and even created some relationships that went outside of the garden, coming over to each others' houses and helping with gardens, and even inviting each other over to visit their countries. Older volunteers both shared their knowledge and learned from younger ones, even though one longstanding volunteer that I interviewed on August 22nd, 2023, Nellie, stated that: "I'm bossy I suppose. I don't like when the work is not done properly and then I just hate it, why [waste] your time." The longstanding staff member, Brooke, also shared many stories which occurred during the pandemic of connecting to the

community and creating a chosen family. During her interview on September 18th, 2023, she called them her “Hub of Old Ladies” and still emails with them.

It’s so cute I have like twenty surrogate grandmothers [...] someone knit me a baby blanket because they knew I was pregnant. [It’s] just crazy, I really do feel connected more so to the community in ways that I wasn’t before. Because, again, I have friends who are my age and from my culture and it’s different and then the people who I interact with are women who have become part of my, I guess, social circle.

Sharing a Meal and Recipes Together

Many volunteers who came to the garden often brought food made from garden produce. Sharing a meal together allows people to be more open to each other, connect with one another and spend more time in the garden. During her interview on September 18th, 2023, Sienna, a community member, shared that “Eating together is essential in building relationships in a way that other activities cannot accomplish.” Beckie, a volunteer and community member who was interviewed on September 5th, 2023, also expressed that, “I think people socialize around food. Being ethnic, I think that that is important. [...] we’re all socialized around the table.” For those who volunteer in the garden, having a chance to take a break and eat together could allow them to get to know and speak to someone they were not working with in the field.

In my questionnaires, I was able to ask participants whether they shared recipes with other people at the garden; of the 78% of those who provided an answer, 77% responded that the person with whom they shared this knowledge was a different age and/or

culture than them (see Figure 36). This helps show some of the intercultural and intergenerational aspects of relationships in the community garden.

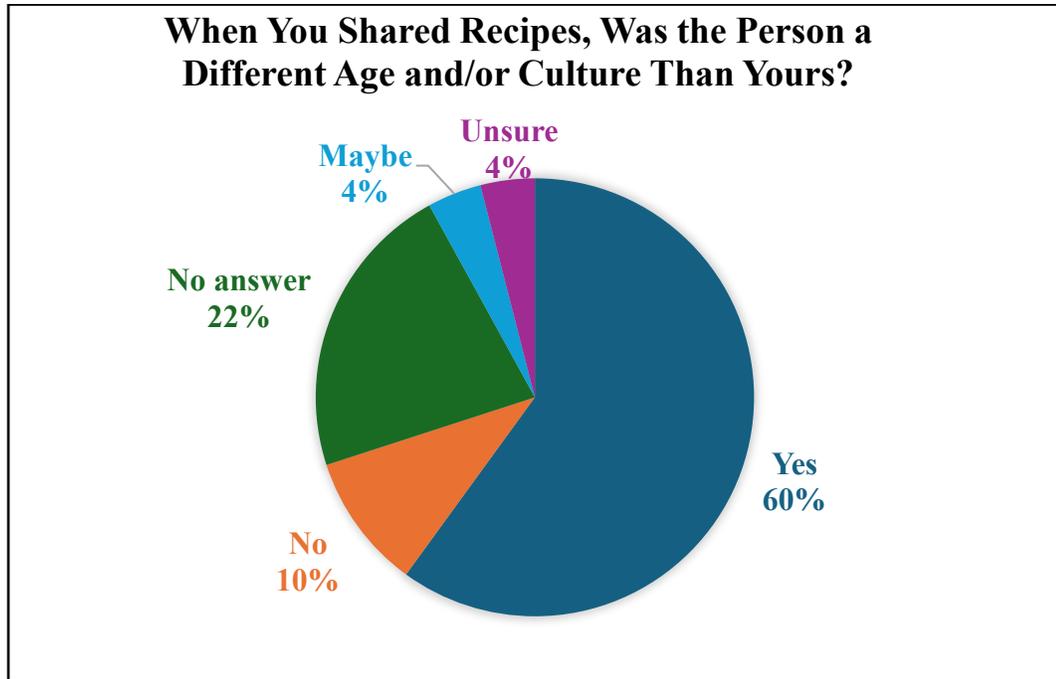


Figure 36. Pie chart depicting whether the person with whom participants shared recipes was of a different age and/or culture.

Community volunteering was an occasion during which community members could build intergenerational and intercultural relationships whilst working together and sharing their knowledge. An example of volunteers working together for food production occurred on August 1st, 2023. As described above, volunteers were picking chokeberries. Both Dora and Nellie (different cultures) took some berries home to make jam. Miriam (Community Engagement Coordinator) tried to make an experimental jam with the choke berries, honey, and lemon juice. John (CSJ) and Nathan (FOYT) picked some plums and apples to add and Kimmie (CSJ) picked some lavender to put in as well. It was quite tart. Nevertheless, this was a nice group activity. Though not all working together to make the jam, this

demonstrates that gardeners of different ages had similar ideas to try to experiment and make a jam with a berry they had not previously used.

Another such example occurred later that month on August 22nd, 2023, Alicia (white-presenting adult) came to the garden and brought home-made cookies, Dora (Korean senior) and I both wanted to know the recipe. This demonstrates an intergenerational and intercultural connection as we shared recipes. During this volunteer session, Dora wanted to focus on weeding. She collected purslane for the event and then mustard greens for kimchi. She asked for a few cucumbers to make some cucumber kimchi for the Dumpling Making event. Though Dora did not attend the event, she was able to bring the kimchi to be shared during the event. As described in the events section above, many community members had the opportunity to try it, and they enjoyed it. Eating together and sharing recipes are ways to connect interculturally as well. Food is a universal language through which community members can connect across language barriers as they share their creations and learn recipes and techniques from one another. The community garden provides a unique space as participants can share a meal in a place where many of the ingredients used to prepare the shared foods are grown. Some volunteers and community members brought kimchi made from cucumbers and mustard greens, cinnamon maple apple jelly, curry with potatoes and carrots grown in the garden and given out in the FFB. Staff members would sometimes make some food and roast some vegetables in the cobb oven or make some teas from herbs and jams. Sharing foods made from produce in the garden allows participants to have a deeper connection to each other and to the land.

The Community Garden as an Intergenerational and Intercultural Social Connection Space

Through community engagement initiatives, community gardens provide an array of benefits to meet community needs. They may aim to fulfill public health concerns regarding physical and psychological well-being through food security efforts, enriched nutrition, and diverse socioeconomic relationships.²¹² Although I do not believe the PACT JPCI GTL community garden was organized for this purpose, looking at the garden as an intergenerational and intercultural social connection space with psychosocial benefits on well-being was the purpose of my research and my findings confirm what the literature has shown. Often, when there were community members and volunteers in the garden, both intercultural and intergenerational interactions occurred during community volunteer hours and events which helped promote engagement and connection. The garden space provided a unified setting in which participants could nurture their well-being through psychosocial connection and biophilia, the connection to nature. Participants worked together towards a common goal and connected through nature as they shared their histories with plants and food with one another whilst nurturing their well-being. People would work near each other and would talk and share stories. They would also share recipes and explain why they are gathering a certain weed and what they would make with it now or back home. Some volunteers came to learn and reconnect to their pasts with gardening, others came to help, and some simply liked getting outside and getting in some exercise. During events, people connected, they came with their friends and families and met neighbours and community

²¹² Bice et al., “Community Gardens: Interactions Between Communities, Schools, and Impact on Students.” 4.

members they would not have otherwise met. Their love of nature, a need for connection, and free food encouraged them to come out and experience the space. By being in nature and socializing with others, participants benefited in a multitude of ways when it came to psychosocial well-being as is demonstrated through the questionnaire responses in Figure 33 as well as some of the interactions shared from fieldnotes.

Urban gardening embraces intergenerational relationships as they collaborate with one another, share knowledge of collective values, and care for and connect to the land.²¹³ People have different ways of being in the garden, some come to learn, some come to chat, others just come to be in the space. My findings showed that 60% of people who shared recipes, 31 of 51 survey participants, shared them with someone from a different culture or of a different age (see Figure 36). Often during volunteering, volunteers would share different techniques and plants they grew back home and how it was different here. Events also allowed people who did not know much about the garden to take tours and see behind the scenes what it took to grow the food they eat. Some participants even picked weeds during events and asked if they could take them home because they used to eat them back home (in their native countries) and did not have access to them in stores. As one of the staff members observed during my first day in the garden, “a weed is just a plant growing somewhere we don’t want it to.”

Ninety percent or 46 of 51 questionnaire participants said that their social well-being benefited from being in the garden (see Figure 33). Research has shown that as

²¹³ Gray et al., “Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in Social Housing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection.” 572-573.

community members work together and connect to the environment, their mental well-being improves.²¹⁴ My findings align: 41 out of 51 respondents, 80% of questionnaire participants, indicated that their mental well-being was improved by being in the garden (see Figure 33). In addition, 67% or 34 of the community garden memories shared were about people and volunteering (see Figure 32). Whether positive or negative memories, these numbers help to show that the community garden is a social connection space and, with the data from Figure 33, may benefit participants psychosocial well-being. Based on the diversity of the neighbourhood and the garden participants, the JPCI garden is an ideal place to encourage community engagement and promote intercultural and intergenerational exchanges.

Despite the benefits depicted within this chapter, this community garden remains an enclosed space with limited accessibility to the public. Community members can only access the space during designated community volunteer hours and community events. This boundary helps to maintain the garden staff's ability to continue to meet community needs and provide a green space for learning and food production. Tensions arise between community members and garden staff as they attempt to navigate the sustainable continuation of this community garden space through the expressed need for boundaries in an ever-changing world. With a growing demand for food security initiatives and the desire to access the green space, these human dynamics need to be addressed to collaborate for sustained community engagement and continued benefits to psychosocial well-being for all stakeholders.

²¹⁴ Bice et al., "Community Gardens: Interactions Between Communities, Schools, and Impact on Students." 4-5.

Question Three: How Does the Organizational Structure, as a Non-Profit Community Garden, Impact Community Commons and the Participants' Psychosocial Well-Being?

As described throughout this thesis, Q3 was developed during the research period. During my time at the garden, I observed individuals, specifically those within the hierarchical structure of the non-profit garden impacting the efficiency in which it can be run. I inferred that the individual and their relationship dynamics impact the sustainability of the PACT program being run to meet community needs. In addition, the non-profit aspects, such as funding deliverables, of the PACT GTL gardens impact the community commons aspects as they provide for the community and attempt to incorporate community wants. The tensions that impact the human dynamics involved also impact staff members' and volunteers' psychosocial well-being. My exploration of question three is informed through participant observations and fieldnotes as well as some quotes from interviews and questionnaires answered by participating staff members.

Non-Profit Organizational Implications

Working with others and collaborating comes with its challenges. Collaboration can raise issues of control, different language, and ownership.²¹⁵ Issues of control and access to the garden space can be complex and very settler-colonial, depicting social inequities through hierarchies and those ‘in power’ often being white.²¹⁶ There are many challenges in engaging community in collective gardens which may include racism, classism, and differential access to land.²¹⁷ The multitude of power dynamics and a top-down approach can impede a community’s access to the decision-making process of these projects.²¹⁸ Depending on the community, but especially in a diverse environment such as Toronto, there will be an interest in participating in community gardens, ensuring that community gardens are able to be accessible, inclusive, and meet people’s needs is imperative.

Even though training on diversity and inclusion is increasingly common, those in charge of the PACT garden space are often white and not from the neighbourhood. Some

²¹⁵ Wang, Wakkary, Neustaedter, and Desjardins, “Information Sharing, Scheduling, and Awareness in Community Gardening Collaboration.” 79; South Zone Community Gardens, “Cultivating Friendships: The Social Benefits of Community Gardens”; Mejia, Bhattacharya, and Miraglia, “Community Gardening as a Way to Build Cross-Cultural Community Resilience in Intersectionally Diverse Gardeners: Community-Based Participatory Research and Campus-Community-Partnered Proposal.”

²¹⁶ McLarnon, “Community and School Gardens Don’t Magically Sprout Bountiful Benefits”;

Gray et al., “Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in Social Housing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection.” 573-574; Bowness et al., “Navigating Urban Agroecological Research With the Social Sciences,” 285, 286.

²¹⁷ Rebecca Ellis. “Priority 1: Engaging Diverse Communities Through Community Gardening”. Sustain Ontario. (June 2017): 4.

<https://sustainontario.com/custom/uploads/2017/06/Engaging-Diverse-Communities-Through-Community-Gardening-Research-2017.pdf>.

²¹⁸ Ellis, “Engaging Diverse Communities Through Community Gardening.” 4.

may argue that a mutual aid model from the people for the people would put the power back into the people's hands. Based on my observations, I argue that the relational aspect of working with one another, the interpersonal issues, interactions, and connections, would still be present. Phillips (2019) explains that community garden spaces can be a space of resistance and organization, but the introduction of greenspaces can encourage development and gentrification.²¹⁹ In agroecology, human well-being and food production are fundamentally connected., a food justice framework incorporates “environmental justice, race, history, and socioeconomics.”²²⁰ It assumes that community needs are met through equal access to and opportunity to participate in the garden.²²¹ This is beneficial to help further understand what may be happening in the area, as well as, with those accessing the space as it takes a more holistic view of the situation.²²² Thus, in theory, a more informed and just distribution of power could help meet the needs of the community. PACT is not alone in these complex tensions and power imbalances; other gardens have also experienced this.²²³ It is important to not only look at the positives the garden space can bring but to also explore the negative subplots and underlying issues, and to address

²¹⁹ Phillips, Kaylen, “What Do Community Gardens Have to Do with Gentrification?”

²²⁰ Dehaene, Tornaghi, and Sage, “Mending the Metabolic Rift: Placing the ‘urban’ in Urban Agriculture.”Mahbubur Meenar and Brandon Hoover, “Community Food Security via Urban Agriculture: Understanding People, Place, Economy, and Accessibility From a Food Justice Perspective,” *Journal of Agriculture Food Systems and Community Development*, (November 28, 2012), 144, <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2012.031.013>.

²²¹ Meenar and Hoover, “Community Food Security via Urban Agriculture: Understanding People, Place, Economy, and Accessibility From a Food Justice Perspective.” 145.

²²² Meenar and Hoover, “Community Food Security via Urban Agriculture: Understanding People, Place, Economy, and Accessibility From a Food Justice Perspective.” 145.

²²³ Troy D. Glover, “Healthy Garden Plots? Harvesting Stories of Social Connectedness from Community Gardens,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 11: 5747 (May 27, 2021): <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18115747>.

them so as not to whitewash or greenwash the garden experience potentially erasing experiences.²²⁴

Organizational Influences and Internal Discussions

Many internal discussions occurred during the summer of 2023 as PACT attempted to readjust their model to meet various community and funder needs. As previously mentioned, prior to COVID-19, community members were welcomed into the garden weekly for markets and meals. Then COVID-19 hit and the organization made a drastic shift to ensure that community food security needs were met and continue to provide services, they switched to a FFB model. The summer of 2023 was the first year during which events were being run as they continued to provide FFBs doubling the number of community members they served. This led to discussions regarding funding changes, public perception and input, and priorities, which added to tensions in team (PACT Staff), and volunteer and staff dynamics.

At the end of every season, PACT sends out a survey to members to gauge participants' experiences in the garden, types of events they would like to see and the type of produce and greens that they would like to be grown in the garden. Ultimately, it is up to the garden staff to decide what to focus on. Despite not being the aim, as they do not feed as many people, some herbs, greens, and fruit that community members are interested in grow in the garden as weeds and are sometimes harvested and distributed or people are invited to harvest these items at events. In Figure 37 below, you can see the participants

²²⁴ Glover, "Healthy Garden Plots? Harvesting Stories of Social Connectedness From Community Gardens," 6.

responses on their satisfaction of the programming for 2023 and the type of events they hope to see in 2024. Sixty-nine percent or 27 of 39 respondents were extremely satisfied with the programming in 2023. Over 50% of responses showed that community members wanted more food related events including Community Cooking Workshops and Community Meals.

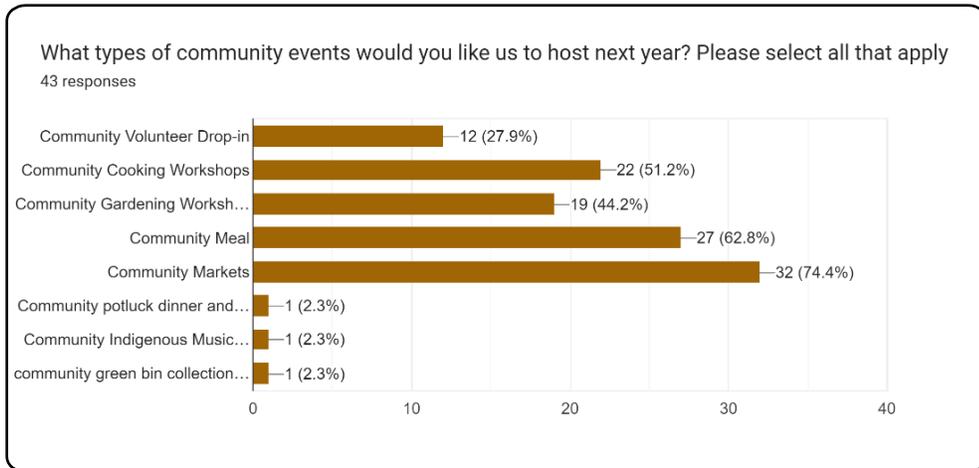
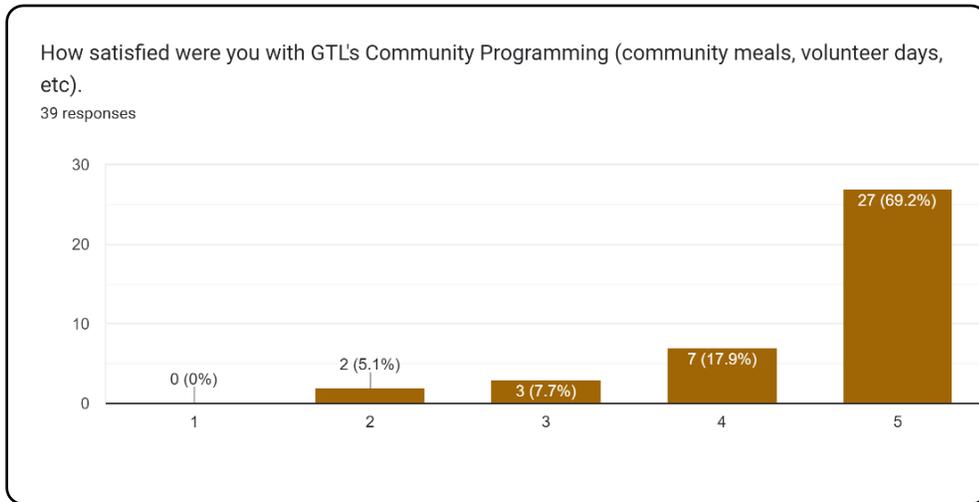


Figure 37. PACT 2023 Fresh Food Box Survey data.

During my interview with Brooke, a longstanding staff member, two main topics arose regarding her memories of the garden before the COVID-19 pandemic and the reality of the current moment. The community has been there before the garden and often before most staff members. They remember how things used to be with more events and more access to the garden. Thus, there can be disagreements and disconnects between new staff and community members/volunteers. Brooke shared that there is “a strong community presence and this community feels a strong connection and a sense of ownership and pride of this space.” With COVID-19, there have been many changes for the better and for the worse. There have been less events and access to the garden but more focus on equitable food security, partially due to funding. The following is an excerpt of what Brooke shared during her interview on September 18, 2023.

I know this is a sentiment that’s shared by other community organizations, the direction or the emphasis that funders want to go in. Also, it is kind of a dirty little secret of non-profits, [funding] dictates programming in a way because you can get money for certain things but not others. And I think COVID has changed the way funders behave in a number of different ways. [...] I think that the conversations around food security in COVID, really scratch the surface for a lot of people. COVID opened their eyes to a problem that existed before, and I think there’s a really big shift towards that now. At least from my perspective, and what I’ve experienced towards food security programming, quantifiable numbers, and it’s less focused on community engagement, which is also interesting because people suffered during COVID, and you’d think that that would be what came out of it.

Thus, although 74% or 32 of 43 respondents to the 2023 PACT Fresh Box Survey wanted to see Community Markets in 2024 and more events to access garden to socialize and connect, as they remember the past, more emphasis is put on low-barrier access to food security at JPCI, since this is a more readily funded program. Based on Figure 37, the low-barrier access to food and the FFB program were not input as options into the PACT survey. Instead, the Community Markets were there and were the community events that most respondents wanted to see followed by the Community Meals with 63% of or 27 respondents and Cooking Workshops 51% of or 22 respondents. There are many factors that go into prioritizing various programming including funding and restrictions. Although community members are grateful for the food, they miss being in the green space. There is a tension within the organization between setting boundaries to stay organized and helping to feed the most people whilst also trying to engage that social and nature connection that people miss.

In addition to this, it seemed as though the organization itself was in transition as it was trying to meet the community needs and its deliverables for funders, and some began to question whether they were aligning with the organization's original mission and vision. Based on their website and Annual Impact Reports, PACT's goal is to support and empower "youth, families, and seniors, systemically under-resourced communities, and youth in the criminal justice system."²²⁵ They develop and deliver various community programming with experiential learning opportunities including youth life coaching and mentoring, and food security initiatives.²²⁶ Their vision is to create "vibrant, thriving communities that are

²²⁵ "About GTL | Grow-to-Learn | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto."

²²⁶ "About GTL | Grow-to-Learn | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto."

inclusive and accessible so that every person has the opportunity to reach their full potential.”²²⁷ As the garden continued to expand the reach of the number of participants they try to provide for, it was often harder to balance their values and goals.

Like many organizations, there are tensions and contradictions in how to bring these values to life. For example, there were internal discussions as to whether we should buy food locally or import food to provide food for up to 800 people for food security initiatives. Buying locally may be more expensive and importing may be cheaper at those numbers and could feed more but would impact the ecological footprint. There were also discussions as to whether events should have food included as it was difficult sometimes to have so many elements. In addition, when there were so many discussions and they were already trying to help so many people in the community, some staff members were questioning why there was a push to try to partner with more community organizations, food security initiatives, and gardening networks instead of focusing on what needed to be done within the organization itself. Looking at the root values and the goals, it seems as though there were difficulties to determine and align what the garden should be, as some staff members had a more mutual aid mindset and others were struggling to deliver services as efficiently as possible.²²⁸ It is no wonder that there were tensions and difficulty working as a team. This is not something unique to PACT as most non-profit organizations go through these cycles of re-evaluating their internal structures, their values, and their impacts.²²⁹

²²⁷ “About GTL | Grow-to-Learn | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto.”

²²⁸ Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*. 39.

²²⁹ Suzanne Smith, “Where is Your Organization in the Nonprofit Lifecycle?,” *Social Impact Architects*, June 22, 2022, <https://socialimpactarchitects.com/nonprofit-lifecycle/>.

Part of this re-evaluation can occur in real-time as staff notice certain discrepancies and initiate discussions which may lead to changes as well. For example, there was a discussion between one of the Life Coaches (a person of colour) and Miriam (a Jewish person), the Community Engagement Coordinator, about the drumming program at PACTMusic offered the summer of 2023. One of the drums on the poster was a traditional drum and there were questions on if it was okay for a white presenting person to teach that kind of drum and whether that drum was even being taught. Discussions like this one are important as although most of the organizations' personnel were white presenting, often the community members were people of colour. They both reached out to the instructors of the program to find out more information. The instructor explained that a variation of the drum was being used but that the poster they were discussing (and that was printed) was not the one they were using online to promote the event as that had been changed prior to the discussion (see Figure 39). Thus, ensuring that the organization is not culturally appropriating or misrepresenting themselves AND communication within the organisation is clear is imperative so that the garden and the organisation can be a more welcoming and approachable space.



Figure 39. Poster for Summer Jam Sessions retrieved from Instagram. The original poster, *left*, and the poster that was updated prior to the discussion, *right*.²³⁰

²³⁰ PACT LifePlan Coaching (@pactlpc), “Every Thursday all summer! Free drumming for youth in #Toronto. Location: Grow-to-Learn garden at John Polanyi CI @pact_growtolearn,” Instagram, July 1, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CuKaGZXL39J/>; PACT Music Program (@pactmusicprogram), “Please join us weekly as we host an unplugged acoustic summer jam in our PACT Grow-to-Learn garden,” Instagram, June 14, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CteFSRcAHBW/>.

Boundaries and Discussions on Accessibility of the Garden Space

When looking at the accessibility of the garden, it was obvious it was only accessible during certain times throughout the season. The access was dictated by those in charge as they felt they needed more boundaries with community to be able to provide for the food security needs of the community. There were fences around the garden which often prevented passersby from seeing into the garden. If access to this space is dictated by others, is it really accessible? Though the community garden has proven to be beneficial for participants, limiting their access could impact the beneficial effects and people's reactions. I wondered whether more access would provide more benefit to the community. How would it impact loss of produce and damage to garden structures? How would more accessibility affect the service providers who are trying to balance providing for the community with their own work and well-being?

PACT is not alone when facing issues of access and exclusion.²³¹ For JPCI, part of the issue is that services are often run during working hours, so it may be difficult for some people in the neighbourhood to come out to events or to volunteer. I know some community members had previously requested access to the garden after working hours, but that means that staff have to stay later too or work in shifts which may require more work and could limit and hinder the team bonding that occurs during shared working hours. Staff found having the gate locked when in the garden and restricting community access to the garden to specific times was beneficial as it created a physical boundary which helped them feel safer in the space and ensure they could continue to provide for the community. The fence

²³¹ Glover, "Healthy Garden Plots? Harvesting Stories of Social Connectedness from Community Gardens"; Bowness et al., "Navigating Urban Agroecological Research with the Social Sciences," 285.

did not always help however as people could see through and scream at the gardeners. Almost on a weekly basis, there were community members who would yell the gardeners' names to try to get their attention and attempt to enter the garden whether by referencing their past access or by claiming they are friends with/knew the co-founder. These changes in dynamics and additional boundaries were experienced by community members as one community member noted, "Volunteering was at the top of my list, though this year the overall atmosphere towards community helpers was restrained. I do not know what to suggest to improve it. I assume there had to be reasons given recent attacks by people with mental health issues." Limiting access to the garden and the fences created needed boundaries for the garden staff but may have also increased some people's curiosity about the space. There were some break-ins and thefts in 2023, one of the student workers even confessed that during the pandemic he was curious about what was in the garden and climbed the fence.

Distribution times were the main times during which garden staff interacted with community members outside of the garden as people accessed the FFB. Distribution is a multistep process with check-ins, bag size identification, getting the correct bags, and adding the necessary additions such as greens and extra produce such as tomatoes to the bags. It can get very stressful and overwhelming with so much going on and people wanting to chat, thus it is important to stay organized and take it slow. As garden staff are no longer within the confines of the garden, sometimes they experienced some incidents with individuals such as someone having a knife and garden shears and walking around, someone else having a seizure (August 16th, 2023), and someone who was intoxicated seeking refuge (October 4th, 2023).

Two of these incidents occurred with the same community member. On July 12th, 2023, there was an incident as we were setting up for distribution a community member wandered in and started taking garlic. She had big garden shears and when gardeners went in to escort her out, she peed in the back of the garden. On August 9th, 2023, there was another incident with the same community member coming into the garden with a knife. The staff gave her food, and later she came back and tried to open the door again. The staff gave her more food and signed her up for the program.

It can be difficult to deal with these situations whilst also attempting to keep the situation calm and providing for the community. Staff, and sometimes community members, were hesitant to involve the police and wanted to deescalate the situations rather than involve them, but there are safety concerns at play as well. During a Programming meeting on October 16th, 2023, I discovered that the organization did not have any specific policies in place when dealing with safety concerns including shootings and stabbings. Thus the goal was to create policies, “protocol and procedures” in case of future events.

The Thistleton Collegiate Institute (TCI) location, on the other hand, is more open as it has no fences, and they only experienced one minor theft in the summer of 2023, but I was told more thefts would likely occur if the JPCI location did not have fences. As accessibility is limited in the space to once a week for volunteers, and a few times a season for non-volunteers (post-COVID), I am not sure if I would classify the PACT community garden as an accessible social green hub. However, when the community does have access to the garden, it has proven to be a social connection space within which intergenerational and intercultural exchanges occur.

A professor I spoke to about my research mentioned the phrase, “Building longer tables not higher fences.” It has an interesting application when it comes to the PACT JPCI community garden. In 2023, PACT has more than doubled the amount of people that they provide FFBes to and brought events back. They have definitely built longer tables (and included some shading with canopies and structures too!). But for the sustainability and mental health of the gardeners, they do need to set boundaries and limit accessibility to the garden to be able to continue to provide for the community. They do have fences, and still, there are multiple instances of theft, some of which really impact the ability to provide for the community, thus, the discussion of stronger and taller fences or cameras to deter intruders did occur. Finding the balance of including community members whilst also providing a safe and accessible space will be important for this organization. PACT and the gardeners do want to bring people together in the space and encourage the intercultural and intergenerational diverse community connections. As seen in my findings, despite the existing boundaries, these knowledge transfers occurred with participants who accessed the garden and attended events and weekly volunteering. Though ideas sometimes differ with times and cultures, people still tried to listen to one another and work together for a cohesive community garden atmosphere.

The Dynamic Relationships at the JPCI Garden

When looking at the relationships in the JPCI garden, there were three main categories of interactions: the dynamics between the garden staff, those between community volunteers, and then staff and community together. In my methods chapter and in the findings above, I explored a lot of the intergenerational and intercultural exchanges that occurred and the relationships that were formed through the interactions. Something that I did not take into consideration at the start of the study was that this community garden is a workplace. Thus, looking at how the workplace shaped human dynamics, power dynamics, and intragenerational figurations would be beneficial.

Visualizing the Human Ecosystem

To be able to provide for the needs of the community, all parts of the garden ‘ecosystem’ need to be functioning in cohesion. I envision it as ‘spinning’ Venn diagrams as social contexts, tasks and issues are constantly in motion, evolving, and interacting with individuals, connecting to the team, and then the community (see Figure 38). “Life histories reveal juxtapositions of social contexts through a succession of narrated individual experiences that may be obscured in the structural study of processes.”²³² Figure 38 depicts a type of visualization of the different human parts of the garden, specifically when it comes to the garden staff that need to work together to meet the needs of the community that access the garden space. It is a variation on the human ecosystem model (see Figure 4) with the paid staff member in the middle as the individual. The individual needs to know themselves and be able to function to fulfill the roles that are required of them. Then the

²³² Marcus, “Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography,” 111.

individuals need to communicate and be able to work together as a team to achieve deliverables for funders. Only when the individuals can function well as a team will providing for community and fulfilling the deliverables be sustainable and attainable. Everyone has their own lives, issues and ways of being which they bring into the space, an example of these issues and factors is represented by the light orange circles. There are varied and interconnected factors that can impact an individual differently, some of these factors may include but are not limited to family, peers, religion, workplace, neighbourhood, government, values and beliefs, and changes over time. These human and biophysical variables have a reciprocal relationship as they can cause system changes, and the system changes can have consequences on the human and biophysical aspects.²³³ Ensuring that there is a cohesive human ecosystem allows the interconnectedness to create a stable environment in which individual human development and capabilities can compound with others for growth.²³⁴ Looking at the individual experiences which intermingle with other individuals in the space allows us to visualise human dynamics as a way to sustain the ecosystem of this particular community garden for PACT to be able to meet their deliverables and help the community.

²³³ Machlis, Force, and Burch, “The Human Ecosystem Part I: The Human Ecosystem as an Organizing Concept in Ecosystem Management,” 348.

²³⁴ Moore, Rong, and Zhang, “The Human Ecosystem,” 70.

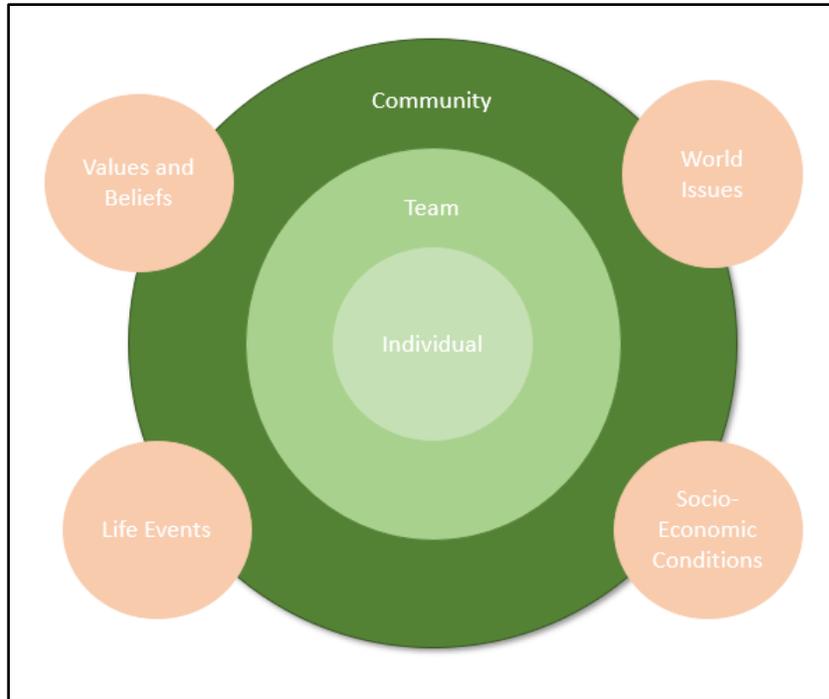


Figure 38. Diagram depicting author’s visual representation of some of the human ecosystem of the garden.



Figure 39. Photograph of quilt created by the Program Director from square art pieces made by garden staff. Held in front of the community garden cooler. October 25, 2023.

In Figure 39, you can see a quilt that was made together by a garden staff member composed of pieces of fabric painted and embroidered by garden staff during a team bonding exercise. A quilt can be used as a metaphor of bringing different pieces together without losing the individual characteristics.²³⁵ It can be a great way to visually depict part of the human ecosystem of the garden (creating a quilt with community members would provide a more wholistic viewpoint). It visually demonstrates some human dynamics and expresses how different individuals can come together as a team and create something beautiful – the quilt, the garden, and a community. Though different pieces, they come together and work together in unity without one piece being more important than the rest as they are all needed for the quilt and the team to work together.

I thought the summer of 2023 would be full of promise and lots of community engagement would occur as most staff members were returning staff. However, I did not realize that there were some changes to the program and management structure within the organization which caused some tensions. I also did not realize that garden staff had certain experiences with community which put them more on guard and pushed them to set more boundaries to be able to stay professional. Some staff had previously experienced community members being hostile towards them, yelling, getting into their personal space during COVID-19, and making racial and antisemitic slurs. Thus, there were tensions within the team and tensions between the team and some community members. The team tensions, mostly intragenerational interactions, involved a lot of power dynamics. It was obvious to the temporary staff – the CSJs, and some community members, that the team

²³⁵ Virginia Gunn, “Quilted America,” *The American Interest* 6, no. 4 (March 1, 2011), <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2011/03/01/quilted-america/>.

was not always working well together, and it reflected in the deliverables of having events and programming for the community.

Intragenerational Dynamics within the Garden Staff Team

Though PACT is a non-profit organization with limited hierarchical structures, part of the power dynamics that emerged were that there were not really defined job descriptions and roles. Yes, people had titles, and they knew somewhat what they were responsible for, but some roles had more blurred lines than others and some staff had different interpretations of their roles. Conflicts can be productive in a team dynamic. They can spark new ideas and perspectives, but conflicts need to be managed, and staff need to come to terms with their part in the conflict and actively work to get past it.²³⁶ Ensuring there is clarity in communication, and expectations would also be beneficial when working with a diverse group of individuals to minimize conflict of people but rather debate over ideas.²³⁷ With the 2023 JPCI team, conflicts did not always get resolved, staff members could not always complete their responsibilities, so they fell on others to step up so that the organizations' deliverables could be met. This is not a sustainable way of being and simply adds to others' burn out as the season progresses.

Promotions and Salary Negotiations. In 2023, a lot of tension occurred between the Program Manager and other staff. The Program Manager had previously worked as an Assistant Farmer at TCI, a position lower on the hierarchy, so there was a change in dynamics which added to the shift in power structures. Based on the Peter Principle, in

²³⁶ “Mastering Productive Team Conflict,” *Five Behaviors*, April 30, 2024, <https://www.fivebehaviors.com/blog/mastering-productive-team-conflict/>.

²³⁷ “Mastering Productive Team Conflict.”

which employees are promoted based on the success in previous jobs until they reach a level at which they are no longer competent, this could have been a great opportunity for the Program Manager to receive continued mentorship and engage in a collaborative approach with the team.²³⁸ She did try to do this, but the team was not receptive as they felt reporting to her was simply repeating themselves and they viewed it as micromanagement rather than collaboration.

This tension and feeling of being micromanaged was documented on July 4th, 2023, during a staff meeting. The dynamics that were observed during the meeting were a bit tense; it seems that both gardens knew what they wanted to do for programming and planning but it was not being communicated clearly all the way through the chain, which was creating confusion and some frustration as Mary, Program Manager, was trying to understand what was being done and when. Brooke, the Director of Operations, was on the call and heard the tensions between the staff. She said that she would have a conversation with Mary after the call. Members from both garden sites expressed that they wanted to communicate information and questions directly to Brooke rather than to Mary as the hierarchy indicated. Mary however tried to stay in her role which meant asking questions to obtain information which should have already been provided. This led to staff feeling “micromanaged.” As the Program Manager was technically a manager connecting role between the garden staff and the higher management, sometimes the role seemed unnecessary to others as they could function without having to report to a middle person. It also felt unclear to some as to who was supposed to do what. Was the Program Manager

²³⁸ Adam Hayes, “What Is the Peter Principle?,” Investopedia, June 6, 2024, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/peter-principle.asp>.

supposed to oversee programming or was that up to the Community Engagement Coordinator?

Another point of contention as the season progressed was salary negotiation and compensation for taking on more responsibilities, as the YMCA WorkWell Report showed, non-profit workers are paid 26% less than the average Canadian.²³⁹ PACT had raised workers salaries in the past years, but based on observed conversations, some employees had negotiated different contract stipulations whilst others did not know of the option. High turnover rates may also be due to GTL positions being seasonal work, this also means there is additional need to train new workers every season and possibly not having enough workers. At PACT, mostly staff members felt burnt out as they were being asked to take on more responsibilities without always more compensation. This is consistent with the YMCA WorkWell Report as non-profit workers who considered leaving felt underappreciated (37%), burnt out (41%), and undercompensated (61%).²⁴⁰ Though it was nice to be recognized for the efforts by community members and by senior managers saying thank you and paying for lunches, it did not often help enough after a long day. PACT staff are not alone in this as only 5% of non-profit workers feel a healthy level of recognition and low burnout, 10% lower than the Canadian average.²⁴¹

In the fall of 2023, as tensions came to a head and talk of contract extension into the winter of 2023 and renewal for 2024 began, more of these conversations occurred. Garden staff began to discuss what PACT covered for most staff and what others had

²³⁹ “Insights to Impact: 2024 Workplace Well-Being Report.”

²⁴⁰ “Insights to Impact: 2024 Workplace Well-Being Report.”

²⁴¹ “Insights to Impact: 2024 Workplace Well-Being Report.”

negotiated. One of these discussions occurred in September and was an eye-opener for those who did not know that you could negotiate for transportation (such as bus passes), necessary clothing and shoes, and necessary technology. This conversation could have in theory added to the tensions but instead was an open discussion and helped ease some of the tensions the garden staff team were feeling with each other and instead direct it toward the organization itself and future decision making. For example, one of the gardeners had been walking to the garden daily, which for her was five kilometers each way. In comparison, others got a monthly transit pass even though they did not come to the garden every day. For those who drove cars, they discussed the difference between providing receipts for returns for mileage versus top-ups of gas which would produce different sums and returns. As it was near the end of the season, this discussion could have impacted a gardener's decision to stay and could possibly include other demands or necessities in their future contract negotiations.

Unresolved Continued Conflict. Two of the individuals on the GTL staff team with whom people had the most continued conflict were the Community Engagement Coordinator, Miriam, and the Program Manager, Mary. Though these individuals were nice people outside of the work environment, they had conflicts in the workplace with other team members and with each other. Some conflicts occurred before my observations began in the early spring of 2023, but through the course of my research period I learned more about their tense relationship as conversations about power struggles and previous incidents occurred as early as July 2023 and into the end of September.

For Miriam, the Community Engagement Coordinator, a lot of the issues surrounded her not being able to complete her work responsibilities for a variety of reasons.

Prior to my research period, Miriam was responsible for specific partnership programming. Unfortunately, she had gotten sick and at the time, no one was able to step in for her as they had other responsibilities. This led to the partnership with that organization dissolving which not only negatively impacted PACT's reputation but also lost the GTL program access to a greenhouse which jeopardized the growing potential for the next season. During this time, Miriam was also responsible for teaching outdoor classes, which were a necessary deliverable as PACT leases the land from the school board. On occasion other staff members were able to provide a few classes, but the relationship with the school suffered. The relationship with the school was able to be mended in the fall as both gardens were able to host multiple outdoor classes daily.

As described to me by Cora, the JPCI Garden Manager, and Makena, the Farm Assistant, on August 28th, 2023, this initial issue impacted the relationship between Miriam and Mary. They had been friends and coworkers in the previous year, but then their relationship dynamic shifted as Mary came into a leadership role. They described to me that initially after the incidents described above, Mary had expressed not wanting to work with Miriam or even talk to her as she did not fulfill her responsibilities. This interaction was deemed to be unprofessional by both parties. Management, the CSJs, and the Co-op students all noticed the tensions within the main JPCI garden team. This tension within the team and the institution impacted the community commons as people did not want to work together, when teamwork and cohesion were needed to be able to organize within the garden space and provide for the community.

As I began to work with Miriam, I was able to witness some of these issues. As the Community Engagement department, we oversaw the social aspect of the garden. This

included event planning and all the logistics that came with it. As event planning progressed, I was better able to understand the frustrations that Mary had with Miriam. Mary wanted things organized and input into the calendar and not left to the last minute, and I wanted the same. Unfortunately, there were many occasions during which Miriam felt overwhelmed and unprepared. Not being prepared and blaming one another increases the tensions and disagreements disrupting the flow of the community commons of the garden and the ability to meet community needs as organization tasks may fall through the cracks. This led to tensions about workload distribution among staff members. On multiple occasions, Cora stepped up to help. She was able to simplify some of the event planning and delegate tasks to ensure that the final event of the season, the Garden Closing Meal, would be stress-free.

Collaboration within team dynamics is important and for this to occur, communication is necessary. Everyone has their own ways of being and they know how they work best. Ensuring that staff members are self-aware and able to use their strengths to work better together is imperative. Understanding each others' differences and how different individuals work would help people collaborate effectively and avoid misunderstanding. Becoming aware of interpersonal dynamics also helps with different aspects of teamwork including communication and mentoring.²⁴² Through my research, I found that other food organizations in Toronto also have issues with conflicts in the

²⁴² Sandra Seagal and David Horne, "Human Dynamics for the 21st Century," *The Systems Thinker*, n.d., <https://thesystemsthinker.com/human-dynamics-for-the-21st-century/>.

community garden space and have workshops for them.²⁴³ I wonder if implementing this type of model would be beneficial for PACT.

Staff Psychosocial Well-Being. Throughout the summer of 2023, I was able to have many candid conversations with team members about some of the stress of working in the garden space. This included being a front-line position dealing with a variety of community members, but also the realities of working as a team as staff members have a lot going on in their lives and there are tensions that arise. Though there are benefits to being in the garden space as described in the literature and in my findings above, there are also undeniable stressors as this specific garden is a non-profit organization and there are various human dynamics within this workplace.

As this was not specifically my focus, in the questionnaires, only two questions somewhat address staff members feelings and experiences in the garden space. In the additional comments of the questionnaires, some staff shared their experiences. A CSJ staff member shared, “The garden is a useful and amazing tool, when I first started working there, I had a large sense of hope. It was lovely to know there were organizations that understood the importance of community and were working hard to feed people good food.” The Indigenous staff member also shared, “I worked in a shelter for [three] years and also with effects of residential schools the garden has greatly helped my mental well-being and sense of community.” But as the quotes progress, the reader can see that there are cracks within the ‘oasis’ with mentions of thefts occurring, of confusions, and tension

²⁴³ “Conflict Resolution for Community Gardens,” by FoodShare TO et al., *Toronto Urban Growers*, Winter 2021, https://torontourbangrowers.org/img/upload/Conflict_Resolution_CG_Pt1.pdf.

with the management. The CSJ continued that, “I do however think that the management of the space has limited the benefits it can achieve. There seems to be a lot of confusion on the purpose of the garden that is preventing efficient help.” Another staff member from TCI also shared, “Sometimes it’s difficult for me to separate the garden as a place of work from a place of gathering and fun.” These quotes help to give a direct source explanation of how staff were feeling and gives further detail to their responses in Figure 34, which shows that there were some negative feelings shared by staff who participated in the questionnaire of “Stressed” and “Overwhelmed”.

My research showed that GTL garden staff did benefit from the garden space when working in the garden on their own. Through fieldnotes and observation, I did see that when staff took the time to work in the field on their own and in the early hours, it helped them recenter themselves and feel the well-being aspects that the garden and nature provided. Nevertheless, this community garden is a non-profit workplace and with that come non-profit challenges. Part of the challenges included the contradictory pulls of the mission statement and vision of the organization. PACT’s mission is to develop and deliver community programming and food security initiatives in an accessible environment,²⁴⁴ however that was not always the case in 2023 as within the institution there were some debates and disagreements of the direction of the GTL program. With community engagement, the need to be organized, to use the resources that were available, and to address the different components of the events were issues that were not always agreed or followed through on. Community access to the garden was also limited to community volunteering and events which helped the staff set needed boundaries to be able to

²⁴⁴ “About GTL | Grow-to-Learn | PACT Urban Peace Program | Toronto.”

sustainably meet community needs and run the garden, but this partially contradicted their vision and mission statements. Even when addressing the issue of food security, there were tensions and disagreements over prioritizing local Ontario-grown food or importing some fruit options (such as oranges) in addition to garden-grown food as they had different costs and ecological footprints. Post-COVID, the organization provided for the food security of the community, but parts of community wellness were not as addressed because the community garden was not as accessible an environment as before.

Intergenerational Dynamics – Staff and Volunteers

In regard to intergenerational dynamics, community members had a history with the garden as they were there before many of the current staff members, thus they had their own ways of being in the garden and felt like they held ownership of the space. Community Commons is a known phenomenon which describes community gardens as spaces of interaction in which members feel pride and autonomy through placemaking and community resilience.²⁴⁵ However, community commons, this sense of pride, often limited community members from seeing the big picture as to how much this space was providing for so many people. Though conflicts can also be generative to learning, this led to an overgeneralization in anxiety for gardeners, as they would get stressed or be on high alert,²⁴⁶ whenever a community member would enter the garden or yell their names over a fence. Yes, the space was to provide for community, so it was important for community to have access, but some exclusions were needed. There was a heightened fear/anxiety of

²⁴⁵ Cochran and Minaker, “The Value in Community Gardens: A Return on Investment Analysis.” 163-164.

²⁴⁶ Offir Laufer, David Israeli, and Rony Paz, “Behavioral and Neural Mechanisms of Overgeneralization in Anxiety,” *Current Biology* 26, no. 6 (March 1, 2016): 713–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2016.01.023>.

people coming into the space and wanting to make changes, take things, or ask more questions. Thus, the garden staff had to limit access to certain times and state and restate their boundaries to try to have a somewhat positive space amidst the multitude of tensions and dynamics.

Discrepancies in Collective Knowledge and Changes to Control. There were a few occasions during which garden staff and community volunteers' opinions and experiences came to a clash. They ranged from gardening tips to helping with events. Both stakeholders were attempting to adjust to the new boundaries that the staff attempted to put in place for the first time. These interactions occurred mainly during community volunteering and during events.

From my fieldnotes on four occasions throughout June and July 2023. Some examples include volunteers wanting to bring in tires or carpets to create microclimates to help with plant growth, but garden staff did not want that as it leached toxins into the soil. In July 2023, there were two occasions of volunteers complaining that berries were not being harvested when there were so many other vegetables that were being harvested and could feed more people. There was a clash between the old and new ways of being which dampened the positive effects of the garden space for gardeners. Intergenerational and intragenerational conflicts occurred about how to operate the garden and what its aims and purposes were.

Lack of process, procedures, and training are all impacting the effectiveness of the garden. Prior to COVID-19, volunteers were in charge of the weekly community meals during the community markets. They made the recipes, cooked everything, and served everything. The garden cooking information was available on the shared Google Drive,

however, the JPCI staff did not check the Google Drive for this information. I had the contact information for a volunteer that used to cook the meals weekly in 2019 and was able to contact her to ask some questions. I also took the time to ask Brooke if this information was available anywhere and thus was able to take the time to find the Food Safety Guide for the outdoor kitchen available on the shared Google Drive. I also took the time to speak with Beckie, and she shared that she had been on the team that developed the initial recipes and had some copies, which were available on the Google Drive.

The Community Social was the first event post-COVID, and with that came some tensions. During the first event, there were a lot of tensions between volunteers and staff as well as between staff members. Unfortunately, due to having focused on preparing all the vegetables first before starting to cook, we did not begin cooking until noon and thus did not take a lunch until 2 p.m., which may have added to the tensions. The culmination of the tensions rising and the chaos in the outdoor kitchen occurred when Beckie said, “We need a bigger wooden spoon, I can bring one next time.” Miriam responded, “We don’t have to be told what we are doing is wrong.” This interaction made everyone pause as Beckie was simply seeing a problem and providing a solution. Annie, one of the volunteers, went home and brought us some extra bowls so that we could start cooking as some ingredients were in the pots. We continued to collaborate to ensure that food was ready for the event. Elton, the summer co-op student, volunteered to wash dishes after the event even though he was just there as a participant.

The Storytelling and Dumpling Making event was also a hectic day as it was scheduled the day after the FFB, in the hopes of using leftover vegetables and greens. This day had different dynamics as the goal of the event was to cook, share, and eat together.

One boundary the staff were trying to hold was not to have anyone in the actual cooking section of the outdoor kitchen as there was boiling oil and water. However, as the event neared its end, Annie came by and took over the cooking, and the staff did not protest but rather were grateful as everyone was tired.

During this event however, there was another community member that stopped by to ask whether she was on the FFB list as she did receive an email but did not receive all of the food from what might have been listed. I explained in English and in Russian that it was what she *might* have received, every bag is different. In addition, although she was receiving emails, she was for some reason not yet on our list, we gave her an extra bag though she had received one yesterday. The same community member later came back during the event and asked if she was on the list yet. Makena and I discussed how it was interesting that some community members were not engaging with the event, but rather staying goal oriented to their cause. In the case of this particular individual, her cause was to ensure that she get on the list to have access to free produce and to emphasize that she spoke to the Co-Founder and President of PACT, despite him not being in control of the list. These conversations were sometimes difficult as the gardeners were also not in control of the list, this was the role of someone else in the organization. Thus, the gardeners and community members did not always receive information at the same time which caused some confusion when the FFB reached capacity and the list turned into a waiting list for the program.

The Garden Closing Meal in October was a lower-stress event. This time there was nothing to cook as the meal was cooked ahead of time, thus the staff again set the boundary of no one in the outdoor kitchen cooking area. The only visibly upset person was Annie.

She used to always help at community meals and take a lot of the extras, but this time we did not have anything for her to help with. She stood in the kitchen area with her arms crossed for a while and then decided to leave.

Research Results and Discussion Concluding Thoughts

By answering my research questions, I was able to explore a wide range of aspects of the PACT JPCI community garden and how they all interconnect. The pandemic brought changes to the garden programming structure which PACT had to adapt to. They chose to continue to meet the community's food security needs by providing locally grown produce in addition to purchased food so that community could access low-barrier no questions asked FFBs. Though providing for their food security needs, the pause in the weekly markets did affect the community engagement as community members had restricted access to the garden space. The summer of 2023 re-engaged the community and re-introduced them to the garden space. The JPCI garden was able to run three events in which new, returning, and community members that joined the FFB during COVID-19 were able to participate. Though with restricted access to specific times, community members were able to engage and socialize with one another during community events, community volunteering and distribution. Through my research, I was able to use participant observation, questionnaires, interviews, and photographs to demonstrate that the community engagement in the garden space continued post-COVID and the community garden was a space in which intergenerational and intercultural connections occurred. Specifically, during community volunteering, and during events, participants were able to interact with diverse community members, socialize, share their stories, and share their knowledge. Having access to the PACT JPCI team behind the scenes as a researcher and

employee also allowed me to see how much impact one individual can have. As the non-profit is a hierarchical organization and has funders to report to, those factors also impact the emphasis of the organization's efforts. Both the individual within the team and the fact that the garden is a non-profit worksite impact and influence PACT's ability to sustainably for the community. There were many instances in my fieldnotes which mentioned staff members feeling burnt out with all of the programming and front-line work and looking forward to time off or the long weekend. This is consistent with YMCA WorkWell findings as over half the non-profit sector workers are burnt out.²⁴⁷ In the case of PACT, the organization and the garden staff felt the need to set and reinforce boundaries with the community to be able to sustainably continue. Clear goals and roles must be put in place to ensure that the organization can continue to meet all stakeholder needs.

²⁴⁷ "Insights to Impact: 2024 Workplace Well-Being Report."

Chapter 6: Conclusion

From my experiences, community gardens provide, for some, an accessible outdoor social meeting space which is beneficial for community members. My research questions looked at the human dynamics of community engagement in a non-profit community garden. More specifically, I explored community engagement, intergenerational and intercultural connections, and how non-profit aspects impact community commons and well-being. Through my research, I was able to demonstrate that community gardens were a social meeting space and did provide an environment in which intergenerational and intercultural relationships could be nurtured which benefited the community in a multitude of ways. Even so, as a non-profit, PACT limits the access to the space to volunteer hours and events which brought into question how accessible the garden really is and the human dynamics within this garden space. Thus, I explored the sustainability of the human ecosystem of the garden as a non-profit urban agriculture worksite. In this chapter I summarize my findings, my recommendations to PACT, the non-profit that runs the garden, and future research potential.

Summary of Findings

Through my mixed-method short-term ethnographic study, I was able to answer my research questions:

Question 1: How has engagement changed in the community garden, post-pandemic?

Question 2: How do the intercultural and intergenerational interactions in the garden space affect participants' psychosocial well-being and knowledge sharing opportunities?

Question 3: How does the organizational structure, as a non-profit community garden, impact community commons and the participants' psychosocial well-being?

My questionnaires, interviews, and participant observations demonstrated that although there have been noticeable changes to PACT Grow-to-Learn (GTL) programming at John Polanyi Collegiate Institute (JPCI), namely the Markets transitioning to Fresh Food Boxes (FFBs) and less access to the garden, the community remains engaged with the community garden and wants more opportunity to socialize in the social connection space. Based on my questionnaires, in 2023 the garden had 25% new participants. Through self-identification in questionnaires and through observations in the field, I was able to demonstrate that there is a diverse population of participants in the garden space with 53% of participants identifying as seniors, 8% as older adults, and 36% as adults. Intercultural and intergenerational interactions occurred in the space during community volunteering and events which provided occasions for knowledge sharing and positively impact participants psychosocial well-being. During these times, community members were able to share stories with each other, share knowledge, and learn from one another such as by sharing recipes, over 60% of which were intercultural and/or intergenerational exchanges

with 30% of respondents sharing memories about food. Memories with people were also the most shared as 60% of participants described experiences during volunteering and with people. Psychosocial well-being was also improved as 90% or 46 of 51 of questionnaire respondents shared that being in the garden improved their social well-being. Mental well-being (80% or 41 out of 51 respondents) and emotional well-being (77% or 39 out of 51 respondents) were also highly noted followed by cultural well-being (69% or 35 out of 51 respondents).

Although my research did prove my initial research questions on intergenerational and intercultural community engagement, I found that there was more to community gardens than what was seen. On the surface, the results showed that participants benefited both from connecting with one another and from being in the community garden space. However, there were different factors that went into the final results, different parts of the human ecosystem of the garden. Interviews and participant observation were able to garner more information from participants and conversations.

There is a naiveté of only seeing the positives of community gardens, I did not realize that there would be so many human and power dynamics involved. I saw it as a green space for connection, forgetting that it was also a workplace with a hierarchy. As with many organizations built on a hierarchical model, non-profits struggle with wage issues due to unequal pay and wage gaps, along with burnout, overworking their staff, and harassment in the workplace.²⁴⁸ As I spent more time in the space and ‘in the know,’ I was able to see many of these aspects within the PACT gardens.

²⁴⁸ Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* (Verso Books, 2020): 26.

There was a hierarchy within the organization and between garden staff, even though there were some blurred lines, and blurred roles which played into the social configuration of the community garden space. I did not realize how much intragenerational cohesion and intergenerational engagement were needed for the human ecosystem of the garden to be able to function. Often, when attempting to work together, garden staff did not seem to benefit as much psychosocially. There was a lot of work that went on behind the scenes for the garden to look beautiful and to be able to meet community needs, which influenced garden staff stress levels; this was their job after all. Working on their own in the garden, in the early hours, or away from the group, did help them recenter and reconnect to the garden space and to themselves to be able to better function and benefit from the environmental connection.

Each individual has their own lives and issues, and they intermingle with tension and partnership between staff members. Garden staff teamed up against their manager and this exclusion affected others. From fieldnotes on August 18th, 2023, JPCI staff did not always understand the role of the Program Director and would not include her in decision making rather directing their questions and information to the Director of Operations with whom they had a closer relationship. This made the Project Manager try harder to get information, but then the staff felt micromanaged. At the same time, past histories with the community and current events affect how keen staff are to have community in the garden. I observed that what affects the gardeners affects how they can provide for the community. Most staff had been in the garden previously in 2022 or 2021 and interacted with the community, some positive but some negative interactions occurred which affects how they currently interact. On the other hand, much of the community has had a history with the

garden since the beginning fifteen years ago. So, they have their own beliefs and expectations of the garden and how things should be. This can be helpful as they have knowledge but can also be frustrating as they do not react to change or rule changes well, like what and who can be in the garden and when. The community adjusted to the gardens' COVID-19 changes from a Community Market to a FFB. I do still consider community gardens to be social connection spaces and provide a green space for the community. I have experienced this, and my questionnaires and interviews also demonstrate this. However, I argue that you need a strong and stable core to be able to provide for and meet the needs of the community with constant check-ins so that you do not burn out and can continue to be a green social hub. An example of this would be an individual, such as in the case of Miriam, not feeling well and so a program's deliverables might not be met. She became overwhelmed by event planning logistics, so others had to step in to help. Cora stepped in to ensure the deliveries were met and the events occurred, but it was in addition to her duties and not sustainable in the long run. If there were distinct roles and responsibilities with staff able to complete them or work together to ensure it is done, then there is a positive outcome.

Overall, through this mixed-method short-term ethnography, I was able to take a step into this non-profit community garden and explore the human ecosystem within this enclosed space. When there is opportunity to access the social connection space during events and community volunteering, community engagement is strong and intergenerational and intercultural relationships are nurtured through knowledge and food exchange. Hands-on tasks such as gardening and cooking are often universal languages through which individuals can connect across cultures and age groups as they work with

one another and share meals together. These connections, though tumultuous at times, and spending time in a green space in an urban environment have proven to aid various aforementioned aspects of psychosocial well-being. Nevertheless, this garden is also a workplace and one with a hierarchical structure as well as a community which sometimes holds more institutional knowledge than the new staff members. This tension between old and new ways of being and tension within the hierarchy affects the staff and their ability to provide for the community. Thus, boundaries have been put in place to attempt to sustainably meet community needs whilst also meeting the needs and deliverables of the non-profit workers.

Recommendations to PACT

Based on my observations during the 2023 season, my recommendations to PACT and funders would be to focus on employment sustainability. The organization lacks cross training, succession planning, and risk plans which are required for continued progress and program stability. Through my observations and work at PACT, I found that making certain that employees felt supported by ensuring there is enough personnel, shared workload, and compensation would have been helpful to secure a sustainable team structure. I know that PACT provided some professional development, but often, with the amount of work needed to be done, the additional workshops were not always well received. I argue that ensuring that workers are supported (financially, but also with enough staff members working and a clear vision) is imperative for this non-profit to meet community needs with hopefully a more stable and sustained workforce. Sharing the results of PACT's FFB survey could also boost morale as workers see their efforts appreciated. In addition, ensuring that staff know the duties that their role requires and potentially designating certain times for the task would be beneficial in getting the job done. In relation to this, ensuring that there are a structure and/or fail-safes in place if a person is unable to meet their role responsibilities would be beneficial to keep programs running, especially when a program is centred around one person, such as the Indigenous Gardens or Community Engagement. For example, connecting further with the TDSB's Urban Indigenous Education Centre could be beneficial to continue to sustainably promote intercultural community exchange and resources during community events. Some training and/or discussion from PACT on soft

skills, such as interpersonal skills, self-management, teamwork, and problem solving,²⁴⁹ may be required so that staff can work well together and complete necessary tasks to provide for community. I do believe that individuals applying for GTL jobs should hopefully already have at least some of these transferrable skills, but if they do not, some support from PACT senior-management may be necessary for the community garden to run smoothly.

In addition, I recommend that PACT senior management address the community directly as it pertains to institutional memory. Tenure in the space does not mean authority, as GTL staff change and have not been there as long as the community members have, sometimes the community oversteps boundaries and undermines the staff claiming, ‘this is how things used to be’ or ‘I am old friends with’ X person. PACT senior management need to address the situation and introduce or reiterate the new hours and boundaries, this may even have to be done every season to remind community members. This can be done as a ‘Welcome back to the garden!’ party for volunteers at the beginning of every season to introduce the new staff and ensure that everyone is on the same page (and not too upset). Involvement from upper management to reiterate the boundaries so that the community members cannot revert to the past or their connections will help to draw a clear line and set new more realistic expectations for staff and community members going forward. This would not be a new concept as in the fall, there is a welcome party for teaching staff with outdoor education class suggestions, there is also a thank you party at the end of the season for volunteers to recognize their hard work. At the end of the day, this is a non-profit

²⁴⁹ Varley-Winter, City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development, and Capital Growth, “Roots to Work: Developing Employability Through Community Food-Growing and Urban Agriculture,” 7.

organization, though they have an obligation to meet community needs, they still need to support the staff that work there, and this may be by limiting access to the garden so that community food security needs may be maintained. Further exploring how the dynamics and changes affect the functionality, sustainability, and engagement with the PACT community garden could prove to be beneficial.

A final suggestion for the JPCI GTL program is to look at recruiting more people from the Englemount-Lawrence community to work in the garden space.²⁵⁰ This task would most likely have to start with outreach and promoting the garden space as there are some people in the community that do not know it exists. An example of ways to outreach to the community could be going to the library or the community center that are nearby and hosting a workshop to see if there are interested individuals. PACT has attempted this in the past with their inclusion of FOYT student workers, but it has not always been successful. It may be beneficial to hire someone from the community for more community outreach and resources. There is a diverse population in the neighbourhood and people have garden and farming experience, knowledge, and passions that they may be willing to share and open to expand on by working with other garden staff. This person would not have to commute to the garden, as many staff do, and would have community connections. Maintaining connections outside of the garden space may cause some boundary issues, but it would also be someone the community could potentially more easily grow to trust, especially if they stay with the garden for multiple seasons. I found it nice and even surprising when I saw community members who visited the garden outside of it and in the

²⁵⁰ Baumann et al., “The Impacts of Green Gentrification on Homelessness; Urban Greening and Displacement in Parc-Extension Neighborhood of Montreal.”

community, we were able to greet and check-in on one another. I no longer live in the neighbourhood, but whenever I visit, it is lovely to see some familiar faces to know that the oasis and community social connections that were nurtured in the garden could potentially extend outside of it.

Future Research

Originally, this study was solely meant to explore the intergenerational and intercultural relationships fostered in the community garden as they pertain to community engagement and psychosocial well-being. The PACT JPCI community garden is a non-profit organization, so different factors come into play. Further looking into and exploring the community garden space as a non-profit and the hierarchy with quantitative data could be very informative. More research could be called to explore the tensions between the allocation of food resources, and mental health and community engagement.

Would the benefits that I observed at the JPCI location occur at the TCI location? What about in more urban environments, such as downtown Toronto, compared to a more rural location? Would a differently structured garden, such as grassroots or mutual aid, see different benefits and tensions? As each community garden has different sub-systems and factors creating their human ecosystem, the dynamics may differ but there may be similarities. Further exploring these variables could be beneficial to understanding the impact of these green social hubs and encourage their inclusion in future urban planning and development. Deeper exploration of organizational structures and the effects of funding could be beneficial to consider sustainable management of the community garden space.

Another area for research implementation would be to explore how community gardens could be used more strategically as a way to decrease loneliness on a national level. As per the Women's Age Lab, Canada ranked the loneliest of the participating nations with no comprehensive national plan to address the problem.²⁵¹ There are different types of community gardens in cities across Canada, could creating a national strategy including them help with funding for community engagement while also building social infrastructure through community and nature connection? The same study demonstrated that 41% of Canadians over 50 felt socially isolated.²⁵² The census data also showed that 50.3% of seniors in the neighborhood lived alone.²⁵³ With seniors representing 53% of participants in the JPCI garden, based on my questionnaire, building a national strategy that includes community gardens could promote social and environmental connection. Incorporating community gardens into the national loneliness policies would ensure that there is social infrastructure and funding for these programs to continue and remain integral to urban planning.

²⁵¹ Women's Age Lab, Women's College Hospital and Savage, "Recommendations for Action to Tackle the Loneliness Epidemic Among Older Adults in Canada." 7.

²⁵² Women's Age Lab, Women's College Hospital and Savage, "Recommendations for Action to Tackle the Loneliness Epidemic Among Older Adults in Canada." 2.

²⁵³ "Neighbourhood Profiles - City of Toronto - Englemount-Lawrence (32)," At a Glance.

Conclusion

The PACT JPCI community garden is a social green hub in an urban environment benefiting the psychosocial well-being of participants. It is a positive addition to the community and provides food security for 800 community members in a cost-of-living crisis during which nearby chain stores were not accessible. Encouraging the continued community engagement in the garden would be imperative to sustain the benefits that community members experience. As many participants have described, the JPCI community garden really is an “oasis in the city” and most parts of its ecosystem are needed for its continued success. As a non-profit organization, PACT has hierarchical structures which provide some constraints to community commons as there are specific deliverables that need to be attained every season alongside providing for the community. Some work needs to be done with a focus on organizational management and teamwork for the human ecosystem to thrive.

Nonetheless, PACT has demonstrated continued strides to reconnect people to each other and the land through continued community engagement in the social connection space of the garden. Not only does PACT provide for the social needs of the community, they also provide for the food security needs of the community which is imperative especially as in 2025, the mayor of Toronto declared a food insecurity state of emergency.²⁵⁴ PACT continues to provide for the needs of the community, accomplishing what more than 40% of urban farming projects fail to, as data from Montreal demonstrates

²⁵⁴ “Toronto Declares a Food Insecurity Emergency,” Daily Bread, January 27, 2025, <https://www.dailybread.ca/blog/toronto-declares-a-food-insecurity-emergency/>.

that these projects fail due to lack of community involvement and funding opportunities.²⁵⁵ Hopefully GTLs' dedication to community engagement persists into the future seasons as they navigate the human ecosystem of the garden encouraging continued intergenerational and intercultural collaboration in this social connection space.

²⁵⁵ Violet Cai, "The Risks of Urban Agriculture," McGill Policy Association, November 8, 2019, <https://mcgillpolicyassociation.com/latest-articles/2019/11/8/the-risks-of-urban-agriculture>.

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Researcher in the Garden

Research in progress...



Community Gardens as Social Connection Spaces



Hi! My name is **Pearl Finkelzon**, I am student at Trent University researching for my masters' in Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies.

The **purpose of this study** is to learn more about the relationships and connections made in the PACT community garden to better understand the impact and potential benefits of gardens as intergenerational and intercultural social connection spaces for community members. The goal of this research is to determine and demonstrate that community garden spaces can be essential for psychosocial well-being and to ensure that the garden can continue to meet the community's needs.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to participate or not. Your choice of whether to participate will not influence your future relations with Trent University, the investigators (Pearl Finkelzon, and Dr. Anne Pasek) involved in the research, or your ability to participate in future workshops.

You **may withdraw from this study at any time.** You may also contact Pearl Finkelzon to ask for your personal data (your questionnaire responses, interview notes, and any other observations specific to you) to be excluded from the study and they will be immediately destroyed without question.

This research study is being conducted by Pearl Finkelzon and supervised by Dr. Anne Pasek (Department of Cultural Studies, Trent University).

If you have any **questions or concerns** about the research, **please feel free to contact: Pearl Finkelzon** at pearlfinkelzon@trentu.ca or Anne Pasek at annepasek@trentu.ca .

This study has been reviewed by the Trent University Research Ethics Board; the study number is **[REB File Number 28427]**. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

Jamie Muckle

Coordinator, Research Conduct and Reporting.

Phone: 705-748-1011 ext. 7896.

Email: jmuckle@trentu.ca



APPENDIX B - Consent Forms



Research Participant Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions you need to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

COMMUNITY GARDENS AS SOCIAL CONNECTION SPACES

INVESTIGATORS:

This research study is being conducted by Pearl Finkelzon (Masters student Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies, Trent University) and supervised by Dr. Anne Pasek (Department of Cultural Studies, Trent University).

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Pearl Finkelzon at pearlfinkelzon@trentu.ca or Anne Pasek at annepasek@trentu.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

This project aims to examine the role community gardens play as social spaces for connection and relationship building. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the relationships and connections made in the garden to better understand the impact and potential benefits of gardens as intergenerational and intercultural social connection spaces for community members, and participants at PACT community gardens.

In this research project, I will conduct participant observation at the PACT Grow-To-Learn Gardens taking notes during community garden days, as well as a few semi-structured interviews with different community garden stakeholders, and some surveys. The goal of this research is to demonstrate that community garden spaces can be essential for psychosocial well-being and to ensure that the garden can continue to meet the community's needs.

WHAT PARTICIPATION INVOLVES:

Participation in this study involves continuing your role and involvement in the garden. The researcher, Pearl Finkelzon, will observe interactions on certain indicated days. Participation in the surveys and interviews involves answering some questions verbally and/or in writing about your experiences in the garden (your experiences with others and your feelings).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

We hope that this study will enrich the research community's understanding of the benefit of community gardens as social connection spaces. We hope that this research will provide PACT with useful information to apply to future community engagement planning. Such benefits, however, cannot be guaranteed.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT?:

There are minimal risks to participants. Through the survey and/or the interview questions you will be asked to share your knowledge and experiences within the PACT community garden. This can be in relation to your experiences with people, with the garden, or your personal feelings in the garden and during events. A small potential risk could be that if you are answering questions out loud, your answers may be overheard. To mitigate this risk or worry, the questions can be answered outside of the garden space, such as in the field.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

You will be completing surveys in the garden or at home, which presents a small risk that your responses may be seen by other participants. Please be mindful of other participants' privacy, as well as your own. If you are participating in an interview in the garden, there is the potential to be overheard, if you are uncomfortable with this, please let Pearl know and we can look into a location change outside of the garden, such as in the field, or at another location.

Your data will only be shared with the study's investigators. Your data (including your name, email, and other personally identifying information) and our research notes will be encrypted, password-protected, and stored locally on Pearl Finkelzon's school OneDrive. Your survey responses will be stored in a file in Pearl Finkelzon's locked office or online in the Trent University provided OneDrive. This data will be retained for no more than 5 years time, after which it will be destroyed.

We will only use your email to request follow up interviews, and to schedule these interviews. Your email and personal information will not be shared with any of the other participants. Information derived from the interviews, surveys, and participant observation will be compiled into a report presented to PACT to inform their future community engagement initiatives, and a thesis for Pearl Finkelzon's MA in Canadian Studies and Cultural Studies at Trent University.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:

There are no incentives for participation.

COSTS TO PARTICIPATION:

There are no costs to participate in this study.

COMPENSATION FOR INJURY:

By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not giving up or waiving any legal right in the event that you are harmed during the research.



VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to participate or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question without penalty. You may stop participating at any time. Your choice of whether to participate will not influence your future relations with Trent University, the investigators (Pearl Finkelzon, and Dr. Anne Pasek) involved in the research, or your ability to participate with PACT community garden and future workshops.

You may withdraw from this study at any time by informing Pearl and/or community garden staff. You can also withdraw from this study by either leaving during the garden sessions, declining an interview, or declining to do the survey. You may contact Pearl Finkelzon at pearlfinkelzon@trentu.ca to ask for your personal data (your questionnaire responses, interview notes, and any other observations specific to you) to be excluded from the study and they will be immediately destroyed without question.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

There are no potential conflicts of interest to report.

POTENTIAL COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS:

We do not anticipate any commercialization of the research findings.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact Pearl Finkelzon.

This study has been reviewed by the Trent University Research Ethics Board; the study number is [REB File Number 28427]. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

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Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies MA
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CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

- I have read, or have had read to me, the information in this agreement;
- I have asked any questions I have about the study;
- By signing, I agree to participate in the study;
- I am aware I can change my mind and withdraw consent to participate at any time;
- I have been given a copy of this agreement; and
- I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this consent agreement.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Office: Kerr House, 299 Dublin St., Trill College
Mailing: 1600 West Bank Drive, Peterborough, ON Canada K9L 0G2

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APPENDIX C - Questionnaire Questions



Community Gardens as Social Connection Spaces

The **purpose of this study** is to learn more about the relationships and connections made in the PACT community garden to better understand the impact and potential benefits of gardens as intergenerational and intercultural social connection spaces for community members. The goal of this research is to determine and demonstrate that community garden spaces can be essential for psychosocial well-being and to ensure that the garden can continue to meet the community's needs.

Please ensure that you have read the **Research Participant Consent Agreement** and sign below.

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- I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this consent agreement.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Section 1: *Introductory Questions*

What is your age group do you identify with?

- Youth
- Adult
- Older Adult
- Senior
- Other

What cultural/nationality group do you identify as?

Do you speak a language other than English? If yes, which one?

Have you spoken a language other than English in the garden?

How many years have you been attending the garden?

- I am new to the garden
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- 6 or more years

Section 2: *Garden Experiences*

How do you feel in the garden?

Please share your favourite memory with people in the garden:

**Have you ever shared or learned recipes or ways of cooking things from others?
If yes, please share an example.**

Was the person a different age/culture than you?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Unsure

How do you feel about community lunches and workshops?



Do you think there are more opportunities to learn from others and connect in the garden?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Unsure

Would you label the garden as a social meeting space which improves your wellbeing? Does it improve your: (Select all that apply)

- Material Wellbeing
- Social Wellbeing
- Spiritual Wellbeing
- Cultural Wellbeing
- Mental Wellbeing
- Emotional Wellbeing

Section 3: Additional Comments

Do you have any additional comments?

Thank you for Participating!

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

APPENDIX D - Interview Questions



Community Gardens as Social Connection Spaces

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- I am aware I can change my mind and withdraw consent to participate at any time;
- I have been given a copy of this agreement; and
- I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this consent agreement.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Interview:

Interviews are semi-structured. We will begin by going over answers to the survey questions and asking the participants if there was more, they wanted to share about the experiences they mentioned. Then asking follow-up questions, allowing participants to answer and lead the conversation where it goes.

This interview will be recorded. Please let the researcher know if you are uncomfortable with that and notes can be taken instead. After the transcript of the interview is completed, participants have the opportunity to review it and the option to remove sections and/or rewrite what they said.

Email address for review of transcript: _____

Relationships in the Garden

What impact have the relationships fostered in the community garden had on your life?

Have you benefited from the relationships with people in the garden and being in the garden? How? Including effects on: Material/Social/Spiritual/Cultural/Mental/Emotional Wellbeing.

How have the relationships nurtured in the garden affected your feelings of community?

Do you connect with people from the garden, outside of the garden?

Through the progression of the growing season, has your relationship with other community garden members changed? How?

Eating in the Garden

Is there a difference between community lunches and volunteer lunches?

What difference does it make to your experience that there are meals in the garden?

How does eating together change the community dynamic?

Learning in the Garden

Do you learn from others in the garden? About what? How does it feel when that person is younger or older than you? Are they a different nationality?

Do you share your knowledge and teach others in the garden? About what? How does it feel when that person is younger or older than you? Are they a different nationality?

Returning Volunteers / Garden Staff

How do relationships change with new volunteers and new garden staff?

How has the community garden experience changed with COVID?

Concluding Questions

How do you feel after this experience of reflecting on your experiences in the community garden?

Do you have any additional comments or questions?

Thank You for Participating!

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview process.

APPENDIX E – Promotional Material for Garden Events



Figure 40. Poster for the July 18, 2023, Community Social accessed on the PACT Instagram page.



Figure 41. Poster for the August 17, 2023, Garden Community Event accessed on the PACT Instagram page.



Figure 42. Poster for the August 24, 2023, Dumpling Making Social accessed on the PACT Instagram page.



Figure 43. Poster for the October 5, 2023, Community Meal posted on garden gate.