

A group of children are gathered outdoors in a garden setting, looking intently at a large, partially unwrapped vegetable, possibly a corn on the cob. The children are dressed in casual summer clothing. One child in the center wears a black t-shirt with a speech bubble that says "SUP DAWG?". Another child on the right wears glasses and a black face mask. The background shows more children and green foliage.

BACKYARD
Growers

**2021 ANNUAL
IMPACT REPORT**

DEAR FRIENDS,

In this annual impact report, we're sharing how Backyard Growers both deepened its roots and spread its wings in 2021 with incredible support from the community in Cape Ann, our extraordinary funding partners, foundations, local corporate sponsors, and committed volunteers. This year was full of transformation at Backyard Growers as the organization bloomed into its next phase and our reach broadened to touch more communities than ever before.

As the founder of Backyard Growers, I have led the organization for over a decade. Upon reflection, I have realized my own vision for Backyard Growers and our work in the community. We've launched award-winning school garden programs that have impacted thousands of children across the Commonwealth. We've developed community program models that have empowered hundreds of households in Gloucester—and now they're being adapted by communities all over the state. Our reach and impact are exploding.

THANK YOU for making this dream possible. In 2022, I am stepping down as executive director

of Backyard Growers to explore new experiences and opportunities for myself, and to watch the organization move into a new phase with fresh leadership under incoming Executive Director Alison Weitunski DiFiore. This will be the last impact report you receive from my desk—and I'm so proud of what we have achieved together. I'll be rooting for Backyard Growers and our community from the sidelines. Together, you'll continue to do incredible things.

Be well,



Lara Lepionka,
Founder & Executive
Director



DEAR COMMUNITY,

We are so grateful to Lara for her decade of committed leadership and inspiring vision. Through Backyard Growers, she has reshaped the landscape of Cape Ann to include plentiful school vegetable gardens, backyard raised beds, community garden spaces, and deep collective knowledge of how to grow and prepare fresh food. Lara founded Backyard Growers as a resource during a time of economic uncertainty and ended her tenure by ensuring that the organization was carried on with strength through the pandemic.

Lara's dedication has ensured that Backyard Growers is positioned to succeed for years to come. Through our continued organizational growth and financial stability our potential is limitless. Together, we will work to further the organization's mission in creative new ways.

With gratitude,

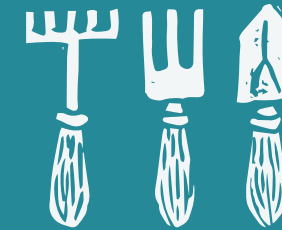


Alison Weitunski DiFiore
Incoming Executive Director



Dr. Brian Orr
President of the Board of Directors





BACKYARD GROWERS' MISSION

is to cultivate healthy, connected, environmentally sustainable communities and fight for food justice by teaching people to grow their own food. We provide resources, training, and support to connect kids, families, and seniors with access to and education about healthy food through vegetable gardens at homes, housing developments, organizations, and schools.

2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dr. Brian Orr, President

Pediatrician, Brian Orr Pediatrics

Larry Oaks, Vice President

CEO & President, Mainstay, Supportive Housing & Home Care

Elizabeth Redmond, Treasurer

CFO, Pathways for Children

Suzanne R. Gosselin, Clerk

Owner & Clinician, Harbor Health Group

Heidi McGrath

Retired teacher, O'Maley Innovation Middle School

Allison Mueller

Member of Wellspring Board of Directors and Trustee of Awesome Gloucester

Jennifer Perry

Director of Operations, The Open Door

Paul Romary

Former CEO, Lemuel Shattuck Hospital; Burnham's Field Community Gardener; Member of Burnham's Field Community Garden Board

Karen Taggart

Member of Associates of the Boston Public Library Board of Directors and Mountain Top Arboretum Board of Directors

Jen Zola

Volunteer Outreach Specialist

2021 STAFF

Lara Lepionka

Executive Director

Corinne Lippie

Program Director

Melanie Murray-Brown

Development Director

Courtney Allen

Communications & Outreach Manager

Jess Reid

Program Coordinator

Hailey Small

Garden Educator



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: RE-UNITING NEIGHBORS AND RE-ENERGIZING SPACES AFTER ISOLATION



The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in unprecedented isolation—from friends and family, from neighbors and community. In 2021, we prioritized creating safe ways for people to reconnect in-person and infuse growing spaces with teamwork and collaboration once more, while continuing to serve those who weren't yet comfortable being in-person.

"After so much isolation from the pandemic, it was so nice to have a safe space to be with other people and learn from each other...in-person!"

- Burnham's Field Community Gardener



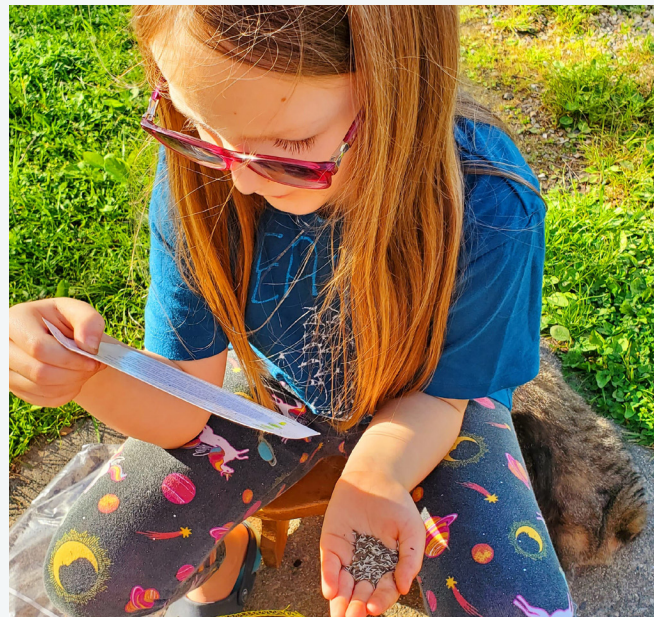
Thanks to your generosity, our community gardens were re-energized with the sound of voices, sharing, and learning, at events like in-person group workdays, an outdoor cooking workshop at Burnham's Field Community Garden, and a group garlic planting workshop at McPherson Park Community Garden. We also launched the collaborative neighborhood design process for agriCulture, a new growing and gathering space adjacent to Willowood Community Garden designed by residents of Gloucester Housing Authority's Willowood development. At the same time, we led six virtual workshops to continue to support gardeners with growing skills and learning opportunities irrespective of their in-person comfort levels.





PROGRAM POLLINATION: EXPANDING OUR GROWING POWER TO NEW RESIDENTS

This year, we fully launched the GrowBag Garden Program to households in financial need across Cape Ann following its beta period in spring 2020. We were able to connect 15 households, including nine families with kids and six seniors, with the resources to grow their own fresh food in modular grow bags with organic soil and compost, vegetable seeds and seedlings. This program expands the reach of our work to include more households with restricted access to outdoor space, whether they rent their home or don't have the room for a traditional raised garden bed. This has allowed us to fill a gap in who we were able to serve and deepen our impact.



"I didn't realize how much my kids didn't think about what they were putting in their bodies. Having something growing from a seed all the way to being able to consume it in our food, made me feel accomplished, my kids had a deeper appreciation for gardening and watching life grow."

- 2021 GrowBag Garden Program Participant





ROOTS OF REVIVAL: UPLIFTING STUDENTS USING SCHOOL GARDENS, CAFETERIAS, AND LOCAL FOOD SOURCES THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC



Thanks to support from community donors, corporate sponsors, and generous grant funding, we were able to shift away from our highly successful partnership with FoodCorps, which provided a crew of new service members each year, to hire a full-time School Garden Educator with a professional background in teaching. New-hire Hailey Small joined Backyard Growers in July following roles in Salem Public Schools, The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, and Framingham State's Inside-Out Program.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on schoolchildren that is still making itself known. In 2021, we were able to return in many ways to in-person Salad Days™ and Fall Harvest Days™ programming in five elementary schools, while hosting food and cooking education classes through Gloucester Public Schools' Remote Academy for kids at home. We also ran our wheat harvest and bread-making curriculum at O'Maley Innovation Middle school. Ultimately, our programs impacted 1,931 Gloucester Public School students with a minimum of three touch points per child.



CONTINUING TO GROW STRONGER WITH SOLID PLANNING

From Roots to Wings: Highlights from Year 3

2021 was the third year of Backyard Growers' 3-year strategic plan, "From Roots to Wings." We are proud of the many accomplishments achieved throughout the year. Here are a few highlights.



Expand and deepen Backyard Growers' involvement in Gloucester

Thanks to funding from Essex County Community Foundation's Creative County Initiative and a rich partnership with Gloucester Housing Authority (GHA) and the Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce, Backyard Growers was able to launch agriCulture, a new food-gathering and growing space adjacent to Willowood Community Garden, built by Backyard Growers in 2017. In June 2021, we welcomed over 50 Willowood residents to a community celebration launching a collaborative design process that empowered them to determine the features, experiences, and art pieces they would like to see in the new space. Backyard Growers artist-in-residence Claudia Paraschiv, of Studioful Design, then led six workshops throughout the summer season bringing the community together to develop a shared vision for agriCulture.



The GHA housing development at Willowood Gardens is diverse and vibrant, comprising **60** housing units with an average annual income of \$24,000.

33% of the units are leased by households of color, **81%** by female heads of household, and a growing percentage are occupied by immigrant and refugee families.

Residents speak at least **8** different languages.

123 children live at Willowood and have been Backyard Growers' partners in bringing the Willowood Community Garden to life.



GOAL #2

Develop a practice consulting to groups working to establish gardening programs in geographic areas beyond Gloucester

In spring 2021, Backyard Growers launched a new arm of its consulting practice, focused on supporting community programs and housing developments in other communities by training them to implement the organization’s successful program models. The Backyard Growers team served 11 other community sites, or 400 people, through organizations including the Salem Council on Aging, Ipswich Housing Authority, Elder Services of Merrimack Valley (now called AgeSpan), and SNAP-Ed Programs. This initiative is an extension of Backyard Growers’ successful school garden consulting practice, which has served 31 schools or 11,800 students outside of Gloucester to date. Together, our consulting practices represent an extraordinary expansion of our impact.



“The training [by Backyard Growers] has been instrumental in supporting our gardening efforts this year. Bay Cove started the Grow Bags with elders and another program in Plymouth has used your techniques with the community church gardening program.”

- SNAP-Ed Implementing Agencies



GOAL #3

Strengthen Backyard Growers’ organizational systems and infrastructure to support current operations and future growth

In 2021, Backyard Growers built on great organizational systems and infrastructure created in 2020 to support the hire of two new full-time program staff members, including a transition away from FoodCorps service members supporting school gardens. This allowed for reduced turnover and consistent relationship-building for our service population with staff who are deeply entrenched in the community. Full-time staff who are subject matter experts in small-scale and urban agriculture as well as food systems education create a deeper knowledge base for our community.



OUR GARDENS ARE POWERED BY COMMUNITY Volunteers Fuel Backyard Growers

Backyard Growers relies on a generous and hard-working crew of community volunteers who mentor new gardeners, do the heavy lifting of building garden beds and filling them with soil from Black Earth Compost, maintain community garden spaces, pitch in on events and office work, and more. In 2021, volunteers deeply re-engaged in our work, from a dedicated pair managing the kitchen garden at The Open Door food pantry to corporate volunteer groups from Blue Cross Blue Shield and Gorton's Seafood. We couldn't do this work without them.

In 2021, **188 volunteers** contributed **1,309 hours** of work empowering kids, seniors, and families to grow their own fresh food.



2020 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Action, Inc.
- Cape Ann YMCA
- City of Gloucester
- Endicott College
- FoodCorps Massachusetts
- The Food Project Inc.
- Gloucester Housing Authority
- Gloucester Public Schools
- Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce
- Massachusetts Farm to School
- Mass in Motion Cape Ann
- Northeast ARC
- Pathways for Children
- Sawyer Free Library
- The Caleb Group
- The Open Door
- Wellspring House



TOGETHER, WE'RE EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO GROW THEIR OWN FRESH FOOD

"We are delighted to know the impact of our donations will be multiplied greatly through the kindness and generosity of Backyard Growers as they help school kids gain gardening and cooking skills, make it possible for neighbors who lack garden space to have gardens, and continue to increase the availability of healthy, locally-grown, garden produce across Cape Ann and beyond."

- Mark Nelson, founder of Sweeping Heart Zen

Mark Nelson's Story

Mark Nelson grew up in Beverly and thoroughly enjoys connecting with neighbors and friends to build healthier, happier communities. He served in the Navy and spent time in Utah, where he worked as a union organizer and business agent and volunteered with organizations working to increase literacy, improve workers' wages, and expand access to healthcare. Mark made Gloucester his home in 2015 and founded Sweeping Heart Zen, where he teaches meditation and mindful living. In 2019, climate activism brought Mark and Backyard Growers founder Lara Lepionka together, and he was so impressed by the organization's mission and effectiveness that Sweeping Heart Zen started to give monthly financial support and Mark became a regular volunteer.



TAKE ACTION!

Want to help sustain and support Backyard Growers in the community? **Some of the ways to take action are...**

DONATE. Visit backyardgrowers.org to give online or mail in.

VOLUNTEER. We've streamlined the volunteer application. Visit backyardgrower.org/volunteer-with-us to learn more and apply.

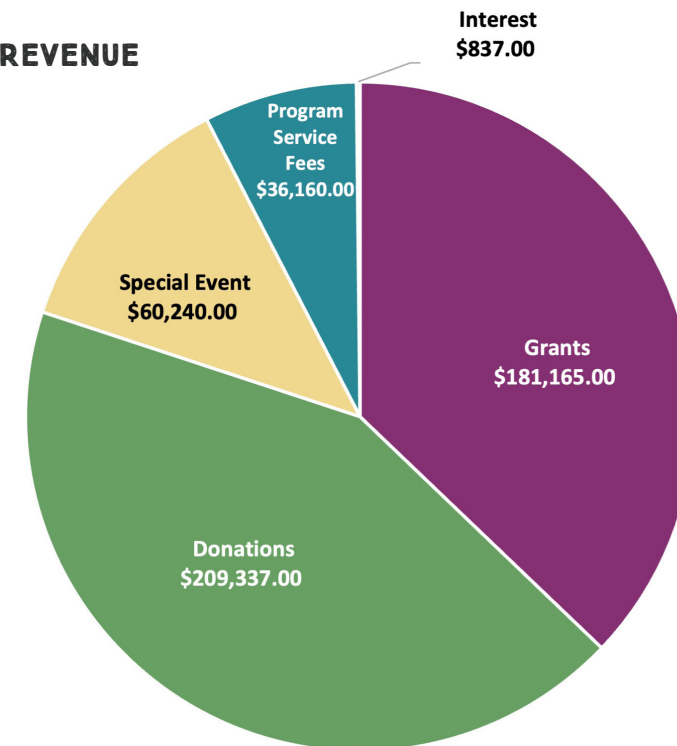
JOIN. Subscribe to our newsletter by online form at backyardgrowers.org or drop us a line community@backyardgrowers.org.

ENGAGE. Keep up on the latest by following us on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

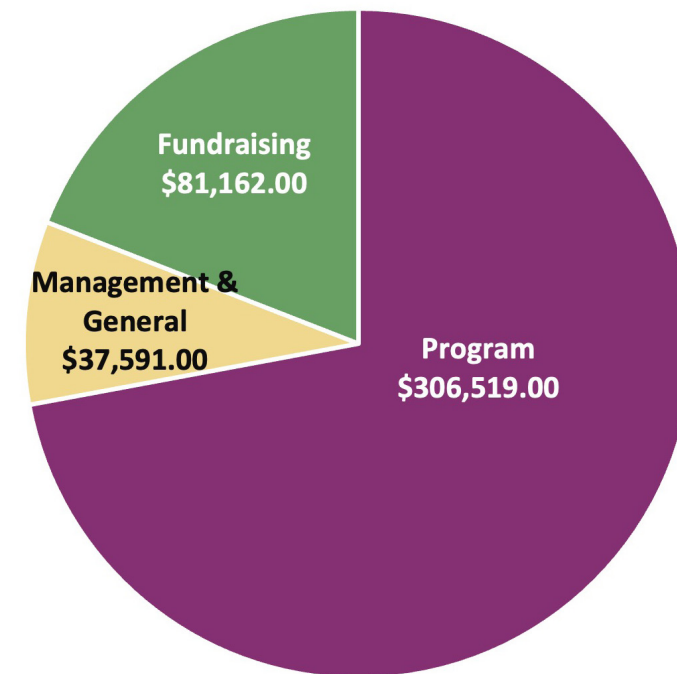
2021 REVENUE & EXPENSES

Fiscal Year: 1/1-12/31/2021

REVENUE



EXPENSES



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