

To Whom It May Concern:

In early June of this year I was introduced to the Huntington Community Gardens (HCG) as a way to fulfill my community service hours needed to qualify me for welfare support. However, it wasn't long before I was truly inspired by and passionate about this project.

During my time with the HCG, I have been able to participate in picnics, children's education, events, and a substantial amount of gardening labor, creating vegetable and flower gardens for residents in our community. This dedication to outreach has empowered me to reconnect with my neighbors, build relationships, grow friendships, and feel like I'm part of the community. I have a reason to walk up to people and say "Hi", because I get to tell them about the gardens and invite them to get involved, too.

Working with the neighborhood children has been the best part. To share my joy in the project with them, to see their bright faces light up with excitement as we explore new ways to cook new vegetables and eat healthy, to watch teenagers discover where broccoli comes from for the first time: these are the reasons why, as a mother, I know this project to be more valuable than just some pretty flowers or a few free tomatoes.

On a personal level I feel my family has become stronger because we now have an activity we can share. As a mother of a teen it's difficult to find activities that are relevant to us all. Surprisingly, having a community space that has something to offer us all has been a great resource for creating family time together that produces an end result we can all share.

As a volunteer with the HCG, I now have a better appreciation for the significant work needed to start a garden, and the minimal but diligent effort needed to maintain it. In addition, I have been able to hone my professional skills in a number of areas, including research, surveys, and grant writing.

As a resident of the Fairfield community, a volunteer, a graduate student, and a mother, I wholeheartedly support the efforts of the Huntington Community Gardens and look forward to continuing to help them help Huntington.

Sincerely,

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