

SIUE and Washington Park Residents Work to Build a Community Garden

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Young people and adults gathered on a vacant lot in Washington Park on Saturday, Sept. 28. Some brought black trash bags and shovels. Others carried coolers. All had a vision of the village's first community garden being created in partnership with sociology and construction departments at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

"We have been in ongoing conversations with village and community leaders in Washington Park about sustainability

opportunities we could collaborate on," said Connie Frey Spurlock, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Sociology. "I spoke to Derissa Davis, an educator in the city, who had some vacant property. Derissa is heavily involved in community and restoration work in the area."

Davis, a native of East St. Louis and a third-grade teacher at James Avant Elementary School in Washington Park, is using her one-third of an acre located on 4701 Forest Boulevard in Washington Park, for a community garden.



"We are using the community to help develop the garden," said Davis. "The garden will not only be for Washington Park residents, but also those in the surrounding communities."

"It's important to be able grow your own food for healthy reasons. We need more access to fresh, nutritious food. Community gardening also brings a sense of togetherness and allows the children to have a sense of belonging. I've told the children that there is no idea too big for this garden."

"Food from a community garden will be more organic and natural, and we can control what gets sprayed on it," said Elizabeth Scott, Washington Park resident and SIUE alumna (BS in Sociology, 2013). "The food also represents love that you've planted and grown."

“The garden will help the community grow and instill a value of working together for the betterment of the community,” added Alvin Smith, of Washington Park.

“The land is big enough for doing something productive, but it has been left abandoned for a long time as a dumpsite,” noted Antonio Rowling, of Washington Park. “I wanted to participate in the cleanup because the land can be used for a good cause.”

“It is important to bring the community together, and have a safe place for people to come and spend time,” said LaTaysha Jackson, junior and president of the SIUE Sociology Club. “It can provide a healthy alternative to junk food. Also, since SIUE is involved, the community garden will be a platform to unite people for the same positive impact in the community.”



Many SIUE students are working to make the garden a reality.

“My Research Methods and Study Design class (SOC 515) is the lead team on a collaboration with Ms. Davis to design, fund raise, and build a community garden,” explained Frey Spurlock. “The project is a collaboration between four SIUE classes across three disciplines, and the Washington Park community.”

Students in SOC 493, taught by Sandra Weissinger, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Sociology, will develop research proposals around the project and are supporting the project in numerous ways.

Students in SOC 390, taught by Ezra Temko, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Sociology, are preparing a fundraising guide for SOC 515 students to use.

Students in CNST 452, taught by Anne Werner, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Construction, are creating the work plan, which involves cost estimate, timeline, materials list, etc.

“SOC 515 students are practicing applied and public sociology by carrying out this project,” continued Frey Spurlock. “They are also developing 21st century digital skills through a [website](#) project, a social media campaign on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), a mapping project (to be

added to the website), and creation of videos. We've relied heavily on the [IRIS Center](#) to help us with the digital pieces."

"The community garden is going to make the area look beautiful," said Jayel McDaniel, a student at Mason Clark Middle School. "It will be an inspiration for other communities to build similar gardens. I am expecting that the garden will be colorful and pretty, and we will be able to grow lots of strawberries, and other fruits and vegetables."

Photos:

SIUE students and Washington Park residents spend the day cleaning a vacant lot in preparation of creating a community garden. The project is initiated by the SIUE Successful Communities Collaborative (SSCC).