



URBAN TREE CONNECTION

Teen Apprenticeship Program Report for 2017

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Urban Tree Connection (UTC) is a non-profit community based organization whose mission is to work with residents in Philadelphia's historically marginalized urban communities to transform abandoned open spaces into safe and functional places that inspire and promote positive human interaction. Founded in 1989 and incorporated in 1997, UTC works primarily with residents of West Philadelphia's Haddington neighborhood to develop community-driven greening and gardening projects on vacant land.



Program Overview: UTC's Teen Apprenticeship Program hires and mentors 10-12 high school aged youth annually during the growing season. This unique five-month (June to October) paid Apprenticeship introduces young people of color that primarily live in Haddington, to urban agriculture. Each Apprentice receives one-to-one mentorship from UTC Staff and community leaders. Our Apprenticeship model focuses on the core aspects of our work which includes: *sustainable food production, community-based food distribution, community health and wellness and gardening education and community engagement.*

Goals & Framework: Our goal this year was to cultivate youth leaders engaged in the work of agroecology, urban agriculture and community cultivation through participation in farming and foraging, farm stand management and community education and outreach. Self-determination and food and land sovereignty were the foundation from which we challenged our youth to consider what an ideal community was and to use what they learned to manifest some of these things in their own communities. Recognizing that community development is about relationships, we explored how people communicate and build positive and enduring relationships.

- *Food is the First Medicine:* engaging community around eating for health and food preparation through food demonstrations and hands on workshops in the Haddington community. Gathering our youth together weekly to harvest for market, cook nourishing meals for lunch, and explore how food choices are influenced by our environment.
- *A People's Sovereignty:* developing an awareness of how land and food access is shaped in our community and country, visioning for a self-determined society.



Figure 1: Apprentices & UTC's Farmer Hannah at Girarden Community Garden

- *Youth Leaders in Action:* cultivating the voices of our youth leaders through community education, public presentation, and participation in youth driven experiences.



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The View: Our goal for 2017, was to take what our young people knew, add new information, and place them in positions to test, use, and cultivate this accumulated knowledge. This was done by integrating our young people into all aspects of UTC programming, encouraging our young people to find their leadership voice and confidently express it within the community.

The Growing Season: We began the recruitment process just before spring break of (April) 2017. The first interview and orientation session was attended by 12 youth, 5 who participated in previous years, and others who learned of us from community members or previous participants. A second session was conducted a month later and 15 youth applied for positions. After a panel interview process with UTC farm, market, and program staff, we opened the season with 12 youth, 6 returnees and 6 new Apprentices.

Our Apprentices were chosen based on their eligibility to participate, their expressed desire and intent for their experience, and their ability to commit to the full season. Most of our young people reside in the Haddington neighborhood of West Philadelphia in close proximity to our gardening and farming sites.

The Apprenticeship program opened June 10th of this year and our youth began their assignments the following week in one of three categories:

- *Neighborhood Foods Farm Apprentice:* Youth Apprentices assisted in all aspects of farm operations from planting to weeding to harvesting. All youth Apprentices assisted in weekly farm harvest, cleaning, preparation and packaging for farmer's market.
- *Farm-stand Apprentice:* Youth Apprentices participated in setup, sales, and breakdown of farm stands in North Philadelphia, West Philadelphia and Rittenhouse Square, developing skills in management, marketing, customer communication, and public speaking.
- *Community Education Apprentice:* Youth Apprentices led community education workshops, community outreach, event planning, and community garden cultivation and maintenance.



Figure 2: Apprentices harvesting beets at Neighborhood Foods Farm

Our youth worked an average of 6 to 8 hours before school end (spring) and an average of 20 hours for six weeks during the summer season. At the commencement of the school year (fall), our youth returned to a 6 to 8 hour work week.



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Every Thursday, over the summer the apprentices came together for community meals to discuss food and environmental justice issues. The apprentices planned and prepared meals for one another (farmers and interns) with vegetables they grew at the farm. The photo below features part one of a two part



conversation at Neighborhood Foods Farm on 'ideal community.' Apprentices envisioned and constructed a new society where all community members are valued and connected to meet their needs, and are able to pursue their passions!

Youth Council & Grower's Market: The season began with Sasha, youth Apprentice representing UTC at a youth council gathering in April hosted by Bartram's Garden, Sankofa Community Garden. As one of our youngest and newest to our program, Sasha took on the challenge/opportunity to help convene the youth council and facilitate a session. This burgeoning youth council, made up of youth from Bartram's Garden, Urban Creators, Vietlead, Norris Square Neighborhood Project, and others planned the 2017 Youth Grower's Market at Rittenhouse Square. Our youth cultivated, harvested, and sold their own produce to the public, managing all aspects of the stand independently. The youth council utilized their collective funds to send youth delegates from each organization to the Rooted in Communities Youth Summit in Greensboro, North Carolina.



Figure 4: Apprentices operating the farm stand at the Youth Growers Market (August) at Rittenhouse Square

Passport Summer Cooking Series and Community Classes: UTC partnered with Better Tomorrows of Haddington Townhomes for a six week summer cooking series for their internationally themed Passport Summer Camp. Our youth Apprentices assisted in teaching four hands on cooking classes to children from the age of 6 to 17. Each week we saw at least 15 and up to 28 children as well as four community members. Hawaii, Japan, Egypt, and Brazil were the focus of our menus and the campers prepared their meals with vegetables and herbs from the UTC's Memorial Children's garden. In addition to facilitating Passport classes, Apprentices helped plan and facilitate community health and wellness classes focusing on a variety of topics from fresh juice preparation, cooking from the African diaspora, to whole grain baking and salad making with produce and herbs from our farm and garden sites.



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Figure 5 (above): Apprentice RaShawn checking on and harvesting Red Okra at First African Presbyterian Church micro-farm site.

Seed-Keeping Project: Our Youth Apprentices participated in a seed-keeping project that they learned to care for and save seeds from five crops of the African diaspora and teach others the techniques. The *Paul Robeson Tomato*, *Asparagus*, *Sweet Potatoes*, *Okra*, and *Sorghum* were the focus crops, along with cultural stories that shared the life and histories of the seeds. Our youth had the opportunity to share these stories and techniques at a community cooking class, and UTC fundraising event. It was fantastic to see our youth teaching adults with confidence and pride!



Figure 6 (above): Apprentices prepping for a seed-keeping demo with Robeson tomatoes and Asparagus, at Neighborhood Foods Farm



On the Radio: Lisa Barkley, UTC's Community Liaison and one of the founders of Neighborhood Foods Farm, began a radio series on WPEB radio. Her show entitled "Did You Know," features talks on healthy eating, gardening, land and food. Our youth Apprentices commandeered the radio waves and presented some of their favorite vegetables, sharing health facts, cultivation information, folk facts, and recipes. What started out as a shy and nervous bunch turned into pros on the mic, and they found another way to demonstrate their ability to lead and motivate others.



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On the Road: Our youth Apprentices were able to hit the road this summer, representing UTC and their Apprentice peers at national and regional conferences. Two Apprentices attended the Rooted In Communities (RIC) Youth Summit hosted by Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Our young people connected with peer and adult leaders engaged in agriculture and food justice work, learned of food and land history in the local regions, and participated in a series of hands-on workshops around agroecology and leadership development.



Figure 7: Apprentices at the RIC Youth Summit, a national conference held annually to foster and cultivate youth leaders in food justice

Three Apprentices traveled to Black Dirt Farm (ancestral lands of Harriet Tubman) in Maryland for the Mid-Atlantic Youth Agroecology Encounter. Roughing it in tents in the woods, outdoor eating, and classes on everything from archery to medicinal herb foraging and medicine making were part of the experience as well as learning the history of the fight for food justice in this country. UTC's Apprentices facilitated a workshop on building community and a flag mural to capture the concepts of each new community. Our youth also developed deeper connections with youth from the Philadelphia area (also part of the youth council) who are also doing this work.

In addition, our Apprentices toured John and Kira's Chocolate Factory, where they witnessed what it looks like to be an active part of a food system. UTC's Neighborhood Foods Farm partners with John and Kira's to provide herbs and peppers for their specialty chocolate. As a result our young people were able to see what the path of a product looks like and to taste their work in the end result. Our youth also visited Norris Square Neighborhood Project's Las Parcelas Community Garden and received a youth-led tour.



Figure 8: Apprentices posing with John & Kira's Chocolate bars that feature UTC's rosemary, mint and peppers



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Advocacy: Urban Tree Connection along with other government agencies, non-profit organizations, and individual growers across the city participated in Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Committee's (FPAC) Strategic Planning sessions for Urban Agriculture this summer. UTC's Staff, community gardeners and youth Apprentices actively participated in the conversation, offering a community-based perspective; underscoring the need for land security, resources, and support for urban farms and gardens that are revitalizing their communities, and have been around for many years. These sessions will result in recommendations that will help shape the Urban Agriculture city-wide strategic plan.



Figure 9 (above): Second year Apprentice AJ, sharing his insights about youth involvement in urban agriculture

Figure 10 (left): Apprentices and UTC's Staff pose together before entering into the FPAC meeting

Season End: The Apprentices took our end of season Harvest Party into their hands planning everything from decoration to layout. What a beautiful thing to see young people who were a bit shy at the beginning of season knocking on doors and collecting shopping lists and contact information from community volunteers cooking for the party, creating connections with their elders and being examples for the little ones! They coordinated a community meal, children's activities, music, and a final gardening gleaning at Pearl Street Children's Garden – creating a safe and inviting community event.

This season was about relationship. UTC is making new moves and experiencing new views, and it is the foundation of strong relationship that becomes a platform for social change. Our Apprentices learned much about the land, food, markets, and seeds, and one of the greatest skills they demonstrated was the deep connection they built with each other through collectively working together and caring for one another in the process.



Figure 11: Haunted shed at Pearl Street Children's Garden – Harvest Party, October 31st