

Vashon- Maury Island Garden Club- RFP
Helen Puz Student Benefit Program 2023-24
PO Box 2113, Vashon, WA 98070

February 14, 2024

Vashon Youth & Family Services
Jeni Johnson; Executive Director
20220 Vashon Hwy
Vashon, WA 98070

Vashon Youth and Family Services' mission is to foster a thriving community of emotionally healthy and resilient children, youth, adults, and families. We prioritize serving Vashon's most vulnerable populations and communities, particularly those who face systemic barriers to accessing services and/or belong to groups historically excluded from resources, recovery, and power.

Dear Vashon-Maury Island Garden Club,

Thank you for this opportunity to extend your dedication to educating the community on sustainable gardening through the Helen Puz Student Benefit Program. As you well know, gardening and getting your hands in the dirt have excellent mental health benefits. According to the Mayo Clinic, "social connections gained through community gardening help to lower stress, improve resiliency and promote support during difficult times" (Wimmer, et al., 2022). As part of our mission to foster an emotionally healthy and resilient community, we are implementing a project that combines sustainable and environmentally focused gardening with our Behavioral Health program therapies.

Through our Behavioral Health program, counselors help Islanders increase emotional stability and coping skills through child, adult, and family counseling; substance use disorder (SUD) treatment; case management assistance, and crisis stabilization. We counsel at-risk school aged youth and collaborate closely with school district staff and other social services to provide wrap-around care for individual client's mental health needs, including suicide prevention and protection from abuse. We also have an infant mental health specialist on staff who provides counseling to families with children from infancy through toddlerhood. Last year alone we provided 6,360 no- to low-cost therapy sessions.

Vashon Youth & Family Services Behavioral Health program proposes to implement our ***Natural Resiliency Project***. We will design, build, establish, and maintain two raised garden beds with fencing to be considered at our Behavioral Health Clinic located on the Vashon High School campus. The VYFS has a long-term lease with the Vashon Island School District until 2036. Slade McSheehy, School Superintendent, will be the contact person for lease questions. We estimate that the project will cost ***approximately \$900. We are requesting \$900 from the Vashon-Maury Island Garden Clubs' Helen Puz Student Benefit Program to cover the total cost of the project.*** To honor and acknowledge your generous gift and your dedication to sustainable gardening we will create a plaque naming the Vashon-Maury Island Garden Club and the Helen Puz Student Benefit Program fund.

The mental health benefits of community gardening are well known in the UK where primary care providers give "social prescriptions" for patients to volunteer in community gardening where it's believed "to be as beneficial as talk therapy or antidepressants". The New Yorker, 2022. Through ***The Natural Resiliency Garden Project***, VYFS counselors at the agency will work with clients who seek counselling services to participate in building, planting, harvesting and maintain the garden beds. The objective for the project is to strengthen mental health and resiliency through nature. Planning and

building the garden beds will instill in clients’ self-esteem, confidence, social skills and collaboration, connection, a sense of accomplishment and pride. Sue Stuart-Smith, British psychiatrist, and psychotherapist, writes in her book, *The Well Gardened Mind*, “when we sow a seed, we plant a narrative of future possibilities”.

The project will have a sustainability educational component where clients will learn sustainable gardening skills taught by our in-house sustainable farmer and counseling intern. The importance of native species and the significance of supporting island pollinators will be highlighted and practiced. The project will include an emphasis on soil health, composting, medicinal use of herbs and plants, how to observe and care for them and when to plant and harvest. A post project evaluation can be conducted to acknowledge how the project personally affected and benefited clients. A sustainable horticulture evaluation will tell us observations, successes, mistakes, lessons learned and going forward what to do differently for the next growing season and finally, how do these lessons apply to our lives. The project will be maintained by VY&FS Behavioral Health Counselors, client participants and staff.

2024	Natural Resiliency Gardening Project
Feb	Contact students/clients/ community youth to participate in planning (counselors, staff) Plan gardening bed space (counselors, staff, clients) Create Curriculum based on defined objectives (counselors) Design garden beds (Staff, clients, counselors) Select plants, seeds, and growing times.
March	Purchase materials. Build garden beds. Fill with soil, construct greenhouse seed cover. Plant seeds.
April	Seed care, soil amendment and composting, organic gardening, water conservation, plant life stages, BH component
May	Plant care, observations BH component
June	Plant care, herbs -uses BH component
July	Plant care in dry seasons, BH component,
August	Plant care in dry seasons, BH component,
Sept	Plant care in dry seasons, pre-harvesting, BH component
Oct	Plant care, harvesting, winterizing beds, Plant life stage observations, BH component
Nov	Plant and soil care, winterizing, dormancy stage, BH component
Dec	Ensure bed and soil maintenance for freeze, BH component
2025	
Jan	Observe plant life process in winter, begin new planting cycle/season plan, BH component
Feb	Continue new planting cycle planning for Spring

Thank you so much for considering funding our **Natural Resiliency Gardening Project** and partnering with Vashon Youth and Family Services in building resiliency through nature for community members seeking our behavioral health services. We welcome you to visit us at any stage of the project and we would love your feedback and advise. Please contact me at 206-463-5511 or jjohnson@vyfs.org.
Sincerely,

Jeni Johnson

