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Local project gets growing

[Todd Major](#) / North Shore News

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Sutherland secondary students Julia, Jade and Alex McDonald and teacher Cynthia Bunbury harvest garlic from Loutet Farm. An upcoming evening, Farm to Feast at Loutet, Thursday, Aug. 7, presented by the Edible Garden Project, will raise funds to establish a schoolyard market garden and outdoor classroom at the North Vancouver school this fall. PHOTO PAUL MCGRATH

I like people who do something about problems versus those who just talk policy or sit on committees pontificating ad nauseam.

Among the many dedicated people at North Shore Neighbourhood House, the folks at the Edible Garden Project (EGP) are doing just that - providing solutions to help solve food security problems.

The EGP does plenty of worthy work on the North Shore. For example in 2013, 520 grade school kids were involved in the Fed Up program, learning about growing food. The Fed Up program teaches elementary school students about our food system from seed to plate.

Local residents also like the EGP's vision for healthy food as volunteer participation increased from 365 in 2012 to 462 people, providing more than 4,000 volunteer hours, in 2013. And 3,500 residents participated in EGP programs centered on growing food organically.

The EGP is also working on selling produce to become financially self-sufficient. Their Loutet Farm sales of fresh organic vegetables on Wednesdays and Saturdays generated \$32,000 in sales in 2013, up from \$18,000 in 2012. In total, the EGP harvested 7,300 pounds of fresh veggies in 2013 and sold or donated it to the food bank.

But it's a long row to hoe and no organization is an island these days with most community groups unable to survive without community partners. The Edible Garden Project's work is supported by more than 35 different local businesses, governments, foundations, individuals and anonymous donors who work and live on the North Shore and want to build a better community.

As with all causes there has to be a talented team behind the movement and the EGP's passionate leaders at the Neighbourhood House, the community volunteers and on the ground staff are as dedicated as they come. But all causes need a champion. Enter Emily Jubenvill, the new manager of the Edible Garden Project, one year into her new job.

I met Jubenvill once before when she was knee-deep at Loutet Farm working with volunteers. This time I met with her at the Sailville Sharing Garden where food grown on the strata property is donated to the food bank. Jubenvill struck me as part optimist, part idealist and part activist. She is also a fountain of knowledge on food security issues and people's right to food dignity. Using her bachelor degree in environmental science she started out as an intern with the EGP, moving up to community co-ordinator and now manager.

I sat with Jubenvill and asked her what motivates her to do her job.

"I like working with people and the environment. And food security is an important issue globally and locally and I wanted to work on the solution side of the problem. So this job is a good combination of those things," she said.

How has the EGP managed to grow so much over the past few years, I asked her.

"Building on the groundwork laid by Heather Johnstone, I believe people are what make everything grow in our organization. So I try to get as much community integration and participation as possible to help the project grow," she said. "Children are a good example of community participation. Our Fed Up program allows children to understand how food is grown so they can make healthy choices and learn respect for the environment."

The Edible Garden Project's latest endeavour will hopefully be built at Sutherland secondary. A new garden is planned on a third of an acre of unused lawn on school grounds. Much of the groundwork has been laid with 27 of the school's teachers meeting with the EGP to discuss curriculum integration and operation of the new garden. Math, science and even language programs may use the new garden for learning. I was surprised to find out the social justice program teacher at Sutherland is championing use of the garden during class time. As Jubenvill explained it to me, "Dignified access to healthy food is a matter of social justice."

The EGP always needs funding and goods to operate their programs. So I asked Jubenvill what she would do with a theoretical \$100,000 donation. She smiled like it was Christmas, paused and said, "So much. Grow. Leverage. Educate. Hire more people. Grow more gardens and feed more people."

But she needs our help. Hungry people need our help. Donations of new gardening tools, wood for fencing or structures, topsoil, mulch, printing services or money would be appreciated and used literally in our own backyards in sharing gardens.

The EGP is holding a fundraising dinner at Loutet Farm on Thursday, Aug. 7 to raise the money needed to build the Sutherland garden. Visit ediblegardenproject.com for more information, to donate or volunteer.

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