

Growing a Healthier Community

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Statistics show that only one in 10 Americans eats enough fruits and vegetables. For low-income individuals the numbers are much worse.

When it comes to social determinants of health, food and housing insecurity are prominent along with a need for improved transportation and access to care. Low income neighborhoods can easily be food deserts, especially when it comes to healthy choices to eat, which often cost more. And while food pantries try to fill the void, a lack of fresh fruits and vegetables is common.

“When I first started working here and I kept looking out this window and I was like ‘OK, but there’s all this land over there,’” said Mary Ann Burk, Faith Community Nurse for OSF HealthCare. “And knowing that these people struggle down here - this is the poorest area. And so I said ‘can we use that land’ to help the church community bring everybody together just to let people know that we do still care and we haven’t forgot about them.”

Mary Ann Burk is a Faith Community Nurse at Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare, working out of St. Ann’s Catholic Church on the city’s south side. It became her goal – and passion – to turn a patch of grass on the edge of the parish’s property into a garden that can not only feed the spiritual needs of the congregation but their physical needs as well.

St. Ann’s Garden of Hope is in its third year growing a multitude of vegetables and herbs – including corn, zucchini, spinach, kale, quash, watermelon, sweet potatoes, and four varieties of tomatoes.

“As we’re working in the garden if someone comes over, we can give it to them, we also are giving to the food pantries and one of the really neat things is we go over to Southside Manor and those members come over here and share recipes and stuff,” explained Burk.

Burk says residents are excited to try the different vegetables, often bring samples to taste of what they have made. Burk is blessed with a number of volunteers who help with the upkeep and harvesting of the garden, they even do activities with neighborhood kids.

“They just they feel it’s a safe place for them to come and that’s what we want. We want not just to feed their stomachs, we want to feed their souls and to make them know there is hope out there. Our thing is to plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow that’s really what we believe. We believe in these people and we want to help them so that they do have tomorrow.”

OSF HealthCare recently hired a Coordinator of OSF Gardens to further develop community gardens in areas it serves. The goal is to educate, inspire, and connect volunteers from community agencies with residents to promote a healthy lifestyle which, ultimately, will have a positive impact on the overall health of the community.

Learn more about [Faith Community Nursing](#) or find a [healthy recipe](#) by visiting [OSF HealthCare](#).