

**Watering Community Seeds  
Kalamazoo College  
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Hawthorne, California  
June 21st, 2021 to August 9th, 2021**

**Overview**

As Kathryn Wasserman Davis wishes for initiatives that “bring new thinking to the prospect of peace in the world,” Watering Community Seed’s idea of peace actively undermines systemic inequities. Our project aims to support garden spaces that tackle food apartheid in Hawthorne, Inglewood, and Wilmington, California. We will use the Davis Projects for Peace award to install irrigation systems at ten sites in the South Bay: eight schools in the Hawthorne School District, the Queen Park Learning Garden in Inglewood, and the I Heart Wilmington Community Garden in Wilmington. In addition to the irrigation systems, we will construct sheds for sites without existing storage space, assemble irrigation repair kits, and provide food scales to each location. We will also record an irrigation-installation tutorial catered to middle and high schoolers in the Hawthorne School District, which will be available via YouTube. The project’s goal is to establish irrigation systems to make caring for local garden spaces more manageable and approachable to community members. At the beginning and end of our project, we will compare survey data about hours spent by garden coordinators on watering plants, developing programming, and maintaining gardens in hopes that time spent on watering decreases and other projects are pursued. All things considered, peace within our communities must have food systems that promote the well being of all constituents.

**Community Context**

The South Bay of Los Angeles County is defined by its diverse population and rich histories. In this vibrant garden of diverse peoples, food is the arena where culture overlaps. Yet, there are real discrepancies in our community’s quality of life based on food access. The communities our sites impact are categorized as locations under food apartheid. Black farmer and activist Leah Penniman describes food apartheid as “geographical areas and communities where people live in poverty and do not have access to fresh, affordable, culturally appropriate food grown with sustainable methods,” (“Taking on Food”). Food apartheid recognizes that these are direct results of systems of inequity and segregation. As recorded in 2016, there is a 19% prevalence of food insecurity among Hawthorne households with incomes below 300% of the federal poverty level (“City” 9). Penniman also points out that food apartheid brings about life-threatening diet related illnesses. Director of the LA County Department of Public Health Barbara Ferrer remarks in Hawthorne’s Community Health profile that “These differences are particularly tragic because they are preventable. They arise to a large degree from the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities that people need in order to be healthy” (2). Hawthorne’s number of adults diagnosed with diabetes is 8% higher than Los Angeles County’s best-performing city (10). Knowing that tens of thousands of Hawthorne residents struggle with preventable health issues when 30% of Hawthorne adults are uninsured is terrifying (23). Food apartheid is deadly and community spaces like gardens mitigate that harm. Our project is a stride for green spaces; it is a stride for healthy families; it is a stride for being in right relation with our ecosystem; and it is a stride for stronger communities. Support for green space initiatives is imperative.

As residents of Hawthorne, California, we have lived with the consequences of food apartheid. Growing up, our access to food was our favorite hot chips, sugary drinks, and candy. It was either soggy microwaved lunches or a cup of noodles paired with chips bought from kids selling snacks at school. Heading to school, we would pick up donuts and milk tea from our favorite donut shop. Walking back from school was buying chicken fingers from Burger King, hot Cheetos and soda from Thrifty, or chicken tenders from Jack in the Box, all within 100 feet of each other. The nearest supermarkets were only accessible with a car unless you wanted to walk a minimum of two miles going up and down hills. We saw our city’s streets through a car window; Los Angeles County was never built for walking. In our

group, each of us has at least one parent diagnosed with diabetes, and some of us have experienced infrequent health insurance until enrolling in college. All this colored our reality despite living in one of the most privileged parts of Hawthorne.

### **Our Contribution**

The Los Angeles Basin is a desert; these gardens are in terrain that requires cultivation and support. Gardens address health and nutrition disparities and facilitate opportunities for collaboration, humility, hands-on learning, and communion with nature. Installing irrigation systems at various school and community sites will allow community members access to expanded environmental and nutritional enrichment. Our project builds on already existing community strengths and creates an additional infrastructure for the sustainability of community food justice and environmental remediation efforts. Watering Community Seeds seeks to empower community members to use the garden space to its potential. The drip irrigation systems we will install allows time for sustainable and constructive forms of community care that expose our youth to healthy nutritional food and increase their engagement in green spaces. As community members come together to cultivate and tend their gardens, they build a shared sense of agency and unity.

Danielle Marquez is our community partner, gardening mentor, and partner liaison. Thanks to her, our group is connected to two local community gardens and their respective garden coordinators. With her knowledge of farming and her position as Hawthorne's Parent Nutrition Educator Facilitator, she will allow us access to school sites, instruct the project team on where to acquire supplies, and how to install the irrigation systems. With the irrigation systems in place, there will be more time and energy to sustain the garden so coordinators can help maintain it without always starting at square one. Garden coordinators are prepared for their water bills since water use is already accounted for in their budgets. As stewards in training, we are eager to practice agriculture with a social justice framework, learn the technicalities of operating urban gardens, and support our communities.

### **Evaluation**

Hope and potential live in our gardens. Since the purpose of Watering Community Seeds is to alleviate gardening tasks, before the installation process, we will create pre- and post-surveys asking about coordinators' hours dedicated towards watering, programming, and other maintenance tasks for each site as well as notable differences in the site's culture. The pre-survey will be sent in late April and the post-survey will be sent at the end of August. We are looking for ways garden workloads and community engagement have shifted. The surveys will inform us how effective the irrigation systems are in making garden sites manageable while sustaining efforts to build community solidarity.

Watering Community Seeds acknowledges the people and potential behind food sovereignty work in the South Bay. Watering Community Seeds aims to support existing structures such as the Queen Park Learning Garden, the I Heart Wilmington Community Garden, and the tasting gardens at Hawthorne schools. Rather than start something new, we will contribute to existing efforts to help propel our local food justice movement forward. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in *Stride Toward Freedom*, "True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice" (27). With the resources the Davis Projects for Peace provides, Watering Community Seeds could smooth the bumps our community faces on the long road to food justice and community peace.

### **Bibliography**

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