The Belding Community Youth Food Collaborative is a student-led, 12-week youth empowerment and market-based program for high school aged students. Student leaders applied to the program and were hired into the Leadership Team in early summer. Our five leaders took charge of 6 garden plots at the local community garden, and used them to gain horticultural and leadership skills over the course of the summer. The Leadership Team also utilized the Teen Market Garden curriculum to create a business plan for the produce and herbs grown. They brainstormed personas, and strategized ways to market their products to a variety of customers. Additionally, student leaders took part in a variety of healthy living seminars, ranging from yoga practice to cooking classes. All curriculum and seminar speaker decisions were voted on by the Leadership Team, as were all gardening decisions.

Summary of key impacts/outcomes

Youth measurably increase knowledge of organic agricultural and culinary practices

- Increase in food knowledge
  - Diversity of foods available
  - Harvesting and growing techniques especially for:
    - Heirloom tomatoes
    - Habanero peppers
    - Green beans
    - Sweet peas
    - Strawberries
    - Marigolds
    - Herbs: basil, sage, rosemary, lavender
  - Food preparation knowledge
    - Garden vegetables
    - Red meat and chicken

Sustained or increased program activity

- Creation of market garden plan
• Creation of personas
• Garden club takeover

Youth from diverse backgrounds complete and benefit from the program
• Increase in healthy living
• Learned how to work with community stakeholders

Youth sustain learning and leadership outcomes long term

Key stakeholders/partners

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<th>Title/Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Ostrander</td>
<td>Belding High School Principal</td>
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<td>Christina Dombrowski</td>
<td>Belding High School AP Environmental Science teacher</td>
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<td>Tara VanWagoner</td>
<td>Owner of Con Apetit and guest speaker</td>
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<td>Val Dawdy</td>
<td>Owner of Val Dawdy Fitness and guest speaker</td>
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<td>Tim Flynn</td>
<td>Chef and guest speaker</td>
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Amount requested in additional funding

No additional funding is requested.

Brief project goals

• Youth empowerment
• Horticultural knowledge
• Leadership skills

Describe progress towards milestones as laid out in project timeline

The project proceeded on schedule with a slightly later than planned starting date. All proposed program activities were completed in the scheduled timeline.

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Achievements

One of the primary achievements of the BCYFC was the community connections built among the community and the University. Connections to the school, the community garden, the garden club, teachers, and the various workshop presenters were all forged and bolstered over the course of the program. Another important component of the program's success was the students' exposure to a wide variety of food stewards, including cooking enthusiasts, entrepreneurs, and farmers in their community. Students were exposed to new ideas and developed increased interest in those ideas. Finally, a component of the program we did not measure but which we feel was highly important was the reinforcement of body positivity, mindfulness, and strengthened social connections among the students, who were all young women in high school.

Outputs

In spite of a late start on planting, the garden was productive and the students were able to gain experience with a variety of fruits and vegetables. At the time the program wrapped up, the group had harvested about 2 pounds of tomatoes with many more green on the vine; several pounds of a variety of herbs; almost a pound of habanero peppers with more that will be harvested soon; strawberries, beans, and potatoes.

Outcomes & Impacts

In our grant proposal we committed to the four following outcomes:

1. Youth measurably increase agricultural and culinary knowledge.
2. Sustained or increased program activity.
3. Youth from diverse backgrounds complete and benefit from the program.
4. Youth sustain learning and leadership outcomes long-term.
The program was successful on each of these outcome metrics. As measured by a pre- and post-program test, students increased their agricultural and culinary knowledge. Specifically, the test showed a 19% increase in knowledge of pollinators, and students demonstrated a 20% increase in knowledge of recipes using whole vegetables. Knowledge of proper composting procedures stayed constant from a 100% knowledge rate at the beginning of the program. Students also had an increased capacity to recognize common garden plants from a picture.

With regard to sustaining program activity, the key community partners made plans to integrate the Belding Community Youth Food Collaborative into fall projects. The school’s garden club decided to take over responsibility for the garden, with the BCYFC student coordinators taking the lead on the project during the fall. This demonstrates the leadership outcomes students experienced. Additionally, all of the workshop presenters and community partners expressed willingness and enthusiasm for continuing the BCYFC program next year. Students were making plans for integrating entrepreneurship and strategic planning skills into the 2018 iteration of the garden.

In terms of satisfaction, all students stated that they would recommend the program to a friend. Furthermore, students stated that the program had significantly impacted their lives in positive ways. Some student comments included:

"I expanded my love and knowledge of gardening."

"I learned so much about gardening and I made new friends. I loved it!"

"I actually know how to garden and compost now."

All of these measures encourage optimism that the program will have a long-term impact on the students and the community. Impacts on the students’ leadership skills are implicated in
their commitment to lead fall activities in the garden, and impacts on the community are implicated in key stakeholders’ plans to support future iterations of the project. True long-term outcomes and project impact will be measured in a three-month follow-up survey of key stakeholders.

Remaining Project Plan

The final steps of the project are to perform a three-month post-program survey to measure long-term leadership and learning outcomes and to wrap up the financial component of the program. Reimbursements for program leads and the student stipends have not yet been paid due to fiduciary process challenges. Funds for the continuation of the project are not requested.