

2020 Annual Report



CommunityGrows 
Planting seeds, co-powering youth

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the gardens we steward and the schools at which we teach sit on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush (rah-my-toosh) Ohlone peoples, who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. We pay our respects to the human and non-human elders, past and present.



Mission & Vision

Our mission is to cultivate healthy youth through growing gardens in low-income, diverse communities.



Our vision is that all youth are able to benefit from the joy and healing of nature-based outdoor education, and develop the tools, confidence, and resources to navigate and challenge structural injustices.

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Learn how our team rose to the occasion to continue our programming while starting to offer distanced garden tours.

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This year, we ran a BEETs program like never before. Read about how we increased our capacity, incorporated youth feedback, and explored the possibilities of virtual programming.

14 Website and Branding redesign

“

I learned so much things from you like native and non-native plants, diversity, balance in nature and what fires do! A long time ago I didn't know a lot about these things, but now I know so much because of you!

—SF Student

17 Quotes from the Kids

Read what the kids have said about our programs. This section is particularly heartwarming!

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27 Thank you supporters!

Without our volunteers, community partners, donors, and friends we wouldn't be able to continue on our mission— we at CG thank you.



Letter from the Executive Director

Adapting and Growing

2020 has been quite the year for our country, communities, and organization. Issues of racial equity and justice propelled into the mainstream resulting in many taking a hard look in the mirror. The Covid-19 pandemic brought grief to many, including our friends, partners, and family. And yet, 2020 has also seen beautiful acts of resistance and love through people power and by moving at the speed of trust.

This year required us to turn inward for some intentional pauses, transitions, and care. We had to shift, stretch, and reimagine what's possible for safe outdoor environmental experience in service of our young students. I couldn't be more proud of our dedicated staff that continues to work towards a future that interrogates structural inequities and centers justice while stewarding safe, outdoor space for low-income and youth of color to thrive and grow in.

As CommunityGrows enters its 26th year, we remain committed to uplifting young people as they tap into their leadership, magic, and power in reimagining. Over this unusual year, we've had many successes. Though our program is, by nature, experiential, we've still managed to provide meaningful outdoor experiences even during shelter in place. K-5 students throughout our school sites engaged in rich online learning about ecosystems, habitats, animal and plant adaptations, bugs, seeds, and soil. CG and partner learning hubs collaborated to get hundreds of garden kits and activities into the hands of our youth and families. The BEETs Leadership Crew pioneered youth led environmental outdoor education during a pandemic: they safely stewarded garden spaces,

collaboratively implemented a curriculum that deepened their expertise and ties as a team, participated in CG Advisory Board meetings, and continued to steer and anchor our organization in justice, care, and the fundamental questions facing our society.

Additionally, with a heavy heart, this iteration of leadership will sunset. This was a difficult decision as my love for the Fillmore community, CG staff, partners and advisory board runs so deep. To everyone who celebrated my arrival in such a beautiful way. Thank you. I am so grateful for our time together and it has been an honor to share this brief stretch of journey with you.

I'm excited about what this next year will bring. Our CG staff has the capacity, love, and values to continue transforming the organization from within. In 2021, we are looking inward and restructuring our organization with the goal of becoming more collective, equitable, and just. We are working toward a new leadership model where our staff have more ownership and decision-making power, and where they can be more fairly compensated for their work. We look forward to continuing to deepen our relationships at each of our school and partner sites and to help our youth heal and re-acclimate as we come out of this difficult year. Most importantly, we have friends like you that continue to uplift, support and inspire us everyday.

With gratitude and love,
Nolizwe M. Nondabula

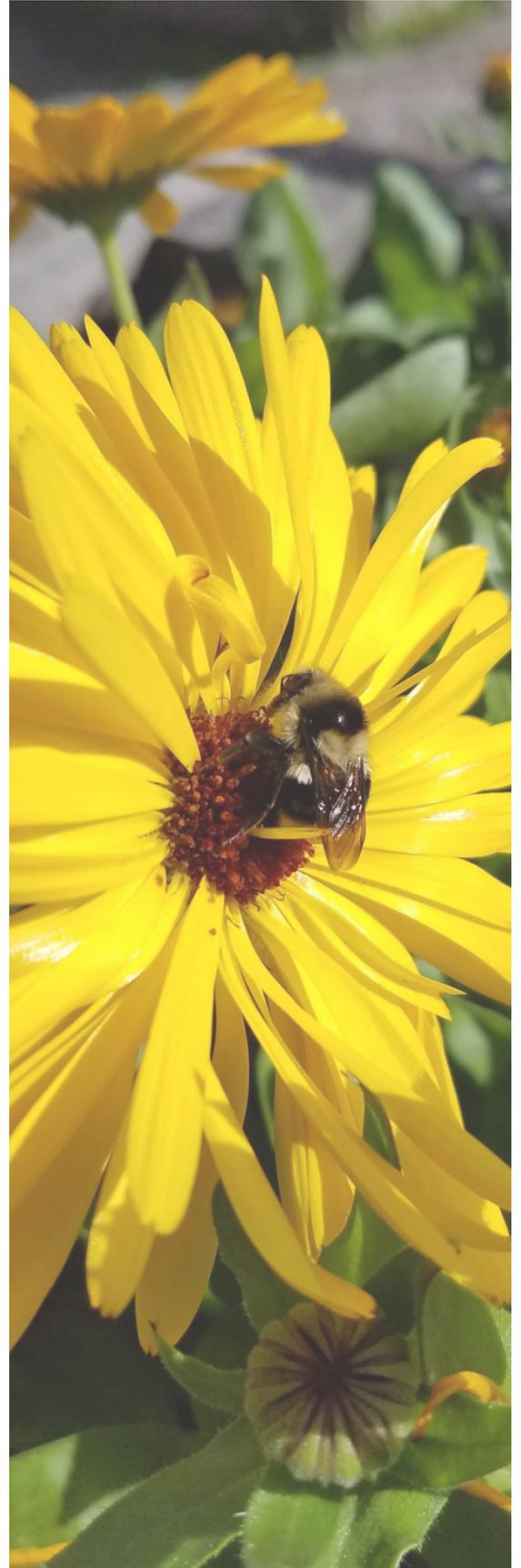


Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Like many organizations across the world, we at CommunityGrows have had to dramatically shift our programming to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has taken twists and turns as information from our national, state, and local governments has evolved. For the majority of 2020, we were unsure of what the next month would look like, but what we did know is that we would follow on our mission however possible. This was challenging, but we rose to the occasion and kept our programming alive and running thanks to our amazing staff, community partners, and the San Francisco youth that keep us motivated and inspired to do more.

A pre-pandemic day for CommunityGrows included gathering three people into a cozy office at the African American Arts and Culture Center (AAACC), while having the majority of our educators work in classrooms or gardens where hundreds of people buzzed around. We had to drastically transform our way of operating, and we transitioned to primarily remote work with safely distanced shifts in the gardens. That being said, we still continue to promote garden and environmental education through learning kits, virtual classrooms, and nature-filled assignments. The BEETs were even able to do a mixture of in-person/virtual meetings for part of 2020.

All that to say, 2020 has been a challenge, but our programs are running and our spark continues as we are inspired by staff, community partners, and youth,



Black Lives Matter

The grief and outrage caused by anti-Black violence across the US echoes in our hearts, our neighborhoods, and our youth.

We are committed to working towards a future that challenges and dismantles the systems that make Black communities most likely to be denied opportunities, impacted by police violence, and more likely to be excluded from access to safe green spaces. We will continue to steward outdoor spaces where BIPOC youth can thrive and grow as part of our vision.

Our Programs



Our Programs

A year of distanced learning



Environmental Education

Initial Response

At the beginning of the pandemic, our classes were getting canceled and we had a dramatic decrease in student participation. However, as we grew more knowledgeable about how to navigate life during a pandemic, we shifted our programming and transformed what we had to accommodate the virtual realm.

“

I learned that in nature, there also has to be a balance... It was cool how we were able to go outside while learning and, how you taught us to look around.

-SF 4th
Grader



BEETs

(Band of Environmentally Educated and Employable Teens)



Seed to Mouth

Keeping the students connected to nature Although our "face-to-face" teaching was done via Zoom or through YouTube videos, we still aim to connect kids with the outdoors. To do this we have created activities that get our students outside or spark curiosity about nonhuman life and environmental processes. Activities include going outside and making observations, recording detailed descriptions of animals (whether that is a picture of a lion or an ant on the sidewalk), and imagining how life would be different if we had experienced other adaptations throughout our evolutionary timeline.

Learning Kits

To keep the kids doing hands-on work, we began to implement "Garden Kits". These kits are distributed to community partners such as Buchanan YMCA and the Ella Hill Hutch Community Center, and feature a wide variety of activities that engage children beyond a screen. The kits in 2020 included tools to create a habitat for dinosaurs, to build seed creatures, and for students to grow their own food.

Cooking Classes

Using new tech to safely teach about nutritious eating

To continue bringing nutritious cooking to kids we are collaborating with Booker T. Washington in creating distanced cooking classes. During the classes, educator Yaya is filmed on-site in a separate studio as she prepares healthy recipes, and children in a nearby classroom follow along with their own set of ingredients and tools.

Grateful for our Educators

Resilience, creativity, and kindness proven over and over

We are grateful to have had a strong existing curriculum, and our educators worked collaboratively to adapt those materials to fit the needs of 2020. They regularly met and innovated together, which tightened our team and we grew stronger as a whole. The pandemic has helped us to collaborate in ways we were not able to before, and we are looking forward to continue working together on our curriculum once we return to in-person learning



Garden Workdays

A safe way to connect with the community

To engage with community members in a safe way, we started doing garden workdays. The workdays took place in September, October, and November before shelter in place orders took effect. Small groups of people were invited to Koshland garden, where they were split up into even smaller groups and could stop by different "stations" of the garden. Each station was led by either our Executive Director Nolizwe, who discussed visioning for the future, a CG staff member, who discussed current programming, or an advisory board member that talked about the history of CommunityGrows. People were then able to ask questions and get to know each other. These events were a huge success, and a special way to continue building relationships in San Francisco and we look forward to hosting more in 2021.



BEETs Update



Program Adaptation

Same mission, different format.

During a "normal" year our teen program, known as the BEETs, is entirely in-person and largely outdoors. To continue the programming under shelter-in-place restrictions, we shifted instruction to incorporate virtual programming. For a few months the program ran as a hybrid of online instruction and in-person outdoor activities, however as we saw an increase in COVID cases in the winter months the programs transitioned to being 100% virtual.

In response to this, BEETs Educator B changed the format and worked with the teens to come up with something that would still be engaging, build community, and encourage them to get outside. An added benefit of the formatting shift is that guest speakers from all over the country have been able to speak to the BEETs. The teens have also had more authority on what they want to learn about and have been able to create their own lessons each month in conjunction with a monthly project.



Increased Capacity

More BEETs than ever

This fall we had 50+ applications to our BEETs internship program, the highest amount in over four years. Due to the intense interest, we decided to expand the program and fund 2 additional stipends through grassroots fundraising spearheaded by

educators B and Vanessa. Between the second and third weeks of December, with contributions from 59 unique donors, we were able to surpass our goal of raising \$5,000 for the additional stipends and raise a grand total of \$6,009 for our BEETs program! We can not thank those who participated in the fundraiser enough, and we hope to continue to be able to grow the BEETs program.

“

We interviewed farmers and asked them about the difficult and lengthy process of getting their food established as organic as well as asked questions about how far they traveled and other things. . -Teresa, on a standout BEETs moment

”

Wellness Wednesdays

To help build the sense of community that is so essential to the BEETs program, educator B created an optional Wellness Wednesday online session. These weekly hours are planned and led by the Leadership Crew, and the teens can join a video call that includes meditation, sharing feelings, and time to laugh and connect through playing games together.



Increased Feedback

With a drastic and sudden formatting change comes the need for feedback. B found it essential to work with the teens to create programming that they care about and can take ownership in, and they have done so with success. One of the BEETs members, Teresa, even pointed out that she sees exactly where her feedback to B goes, which is refreshing and makes her feel heard.



Elevating the L Crew

2020 brought with it a unique opportunity to refine the BEETs Leadership Crew, AKA the L Crew, and give them more opportunities for growth. The L Crew consists of 3 returning BEETs members, who are eager for increased involvement in directing the program. The L Crew took on more than ever before which included leading their own lessons. Tiana taught about the Green New Deal, Jaden on wildfires, and Teresa compared the environmental platforms of the presidential candidates.



At the BEETs program, we are dedicated to counter-balancing the injustices and inequity of the world through programming that empowers & celebrates youth of color and low income youth.

A Chat with the L Crew

We heard from the Leadership Team in BEETs

What makes the BEETs program special to them?

Tiana— “I think something that makes the BEETs special and stand out is that you always learn something new. This is my third year, but every year we learn something new”. She mentioned enjoying the educational field trips because they don't feel like field trips that happen in school, but rather like going out with friends.

Jaden— “The BEETs is a place where you can speak your mind, and that's what I do every time. It's more community based rather than work. It's kinda like a family where we go on trips and go camping and build community. It's community-based and you can speak your mind.”

Teresa— She believes the emphasis on community building both internally and externally in the program is a really powerful element. The BEETs are provided with opportunities to work with their fellow BEETs, but also other local organizations. One experience she mentioned was the ability to work with Climate Action Now to plant trees. She also admires how broad the topics they learn are. She said, “we could just be working in local gardens, but it's so much more than that, and I think that makes the program very special”.



To get the full story read our [blogpost](#)

Website and Brand Redesign

A new look for CG

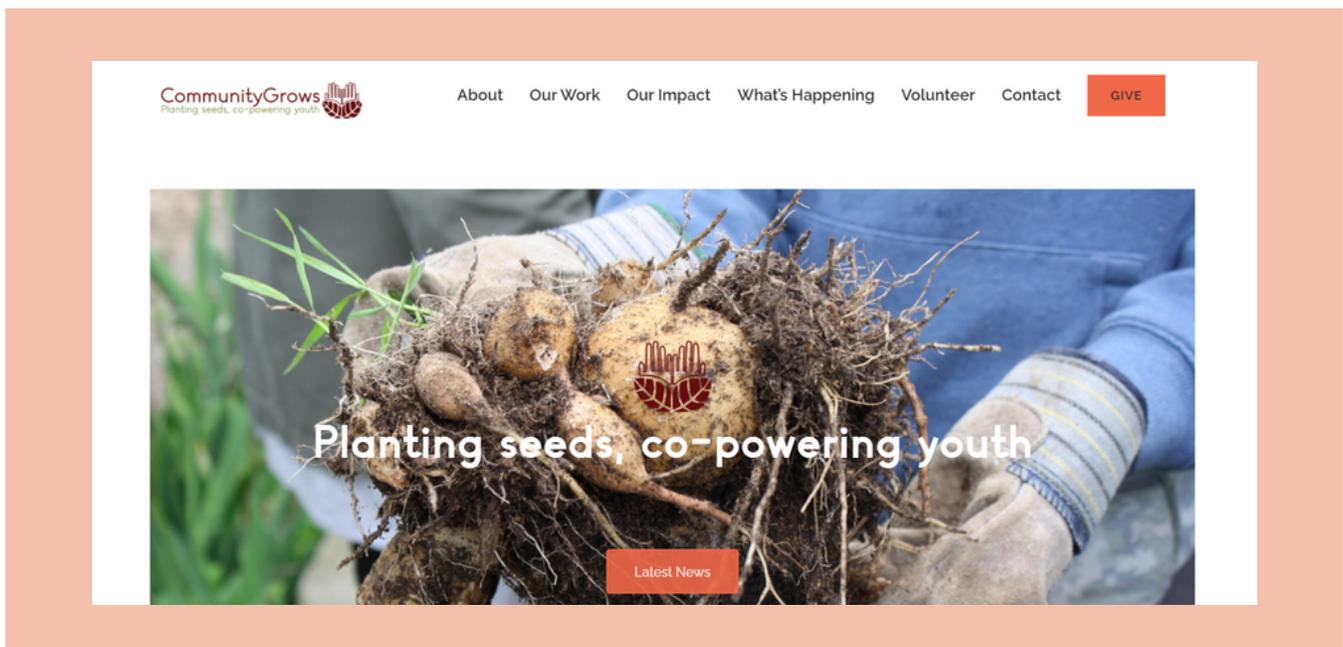
After many discussions and rounds of ranked-choice voting, we collectively decided on a new logo and colors, largely thanks to our talented VISTA Abigail. We had been using the previous designs since the inception of the organization. Our founder, Barb Wegner, did an amazing job creating the former logo, and with Barb's retirement, we saw this as an opportunity to honor her contribution to CG as well as a chance to visually represent a move into a new era of CommunityGrows.

Along with our new colors and updated logo came a website redesign. On the new site, you can see a history of CommunityGrows and the garden sites told from the eyes of our founder, Barb, current updates about our impact, programs, volunteers, and team, along with illustrations from our talented VISTA Abigail that were inspired by our programs.

We are incredibly proud of this accomplishment. A website branding and redesign is typically something done in easier times and could have been reprioritized and pushed aside. But we knew how important these elements are and decided to take on the challenge. We took everyone's input and the final products represent what the board, staff, and our supporters want. The whole process spoke to the climate of CommunityGrows and showed how everyone's input matters.



New logo, brand colors, and [website!](#)



Our Impact in Numbers

438 Learning Kits

have been made since the first shelter in place orders



Virtual Lessons 113



Virtual Lessons have been taught

20 Community Partners

that we are currently working with



Donations \$28,719



was raised through our fundraisers this year

10 BEETs

in our youth copowerment and job readiness program



So what do the kids think?

"You have told us a lot now I now like everything about nature."

"Even now when I go to the farmers market and grocery stores I think about the relevance of what we learned and how hard it is to be a farmer."

"I loved the assignments you gave us because I loved how I went into my yard and looked at all of the awesome plants and nature!"



"Thank you for everything you have done in garden class! You taught us the diversity of plants I was happy to know about it. I loved going on neighborhood walks!"

"I had so much fun doing the assignments and the scavenger hunt!! I know that you are working really hard for teaching especially online!"

So what do the kids think?

"Thank you for teaching us about flowers and trees it was fun to learn about them. Now I know that flowers are really cool. When i'm older i will plant my own flowers. It'll be really cool like the ones you showed us."

"I think something that makes the BEETs special and stand out is that you always learn something new. This is my third year, but every year we learn something new".

"I am very grateful that you [taught] us plants. Without you, I could have never learned how the plants are and different things about them. I can't wait to go back to school to do garden lessons with you . I'm very glad that i had an awesome garden teacher this year to teach me awesome stuff :!)"

"It was fun doing garden class with you this year. All of your assignments were FUN."

"It's very difficult to sort out who can get into the BEETs because there are so many great applicants. I would love to see the program expand"

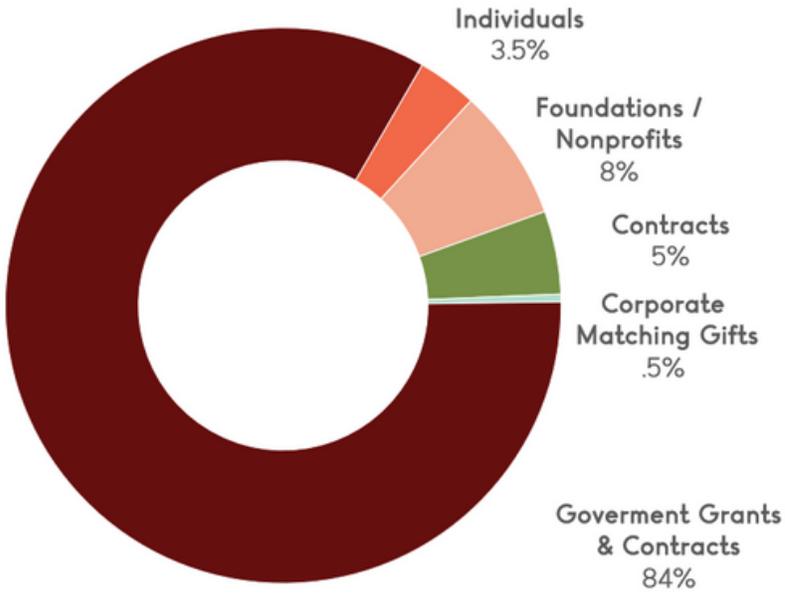


Financials



Revenue for 2020

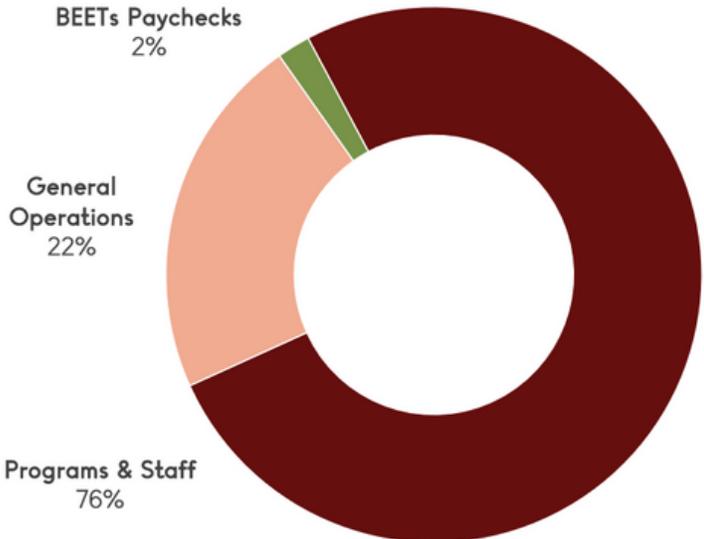
\$731,951.00



2020 has been a year of shifts, both in our programming and in our organizational structure. There have been some major financial successes – a grassroots funding campaign that allowed us to hire two additional teens to our BEETs program, and a successful #GivingTuesday campaign led by our AmeriCorps VISTAs. There have also been some unfortunate realities – like many small nonprofit organizations, we received funding cuts for the 20/21 fiscal year. Due to the unpredictable nature of COVID-19, we are facing a difficult fundraising landscape as we recover from the pandemic. It is important to us that we diversify our revenue streams and continue to build towards our goal of a six-month reserve. Our priority continues to be to fundraise for our staff in order to increase salaries, which will help to retain and uplift our talented team. This next year also brings an internal shift in the way that CommunityGrows approaches fundraising, as our organization moves towards a more collective approach and team members join our fundraising committee. We are so grateful to our supporters and advocates who have shown up for us in a huge way this year, and remind us that it takes a community to keep our organization healthy and thriving.

Expenses for 2020

\$624,159.00



Meet the Team



Meet the Team



Nolizwe Nondabula

Executive Director (they/them)

CommunityGrows matters to me because CG continuously invites/allows me to show up as I am. When I think about community, there's an immediate release of tension in my shoulders because I know there are people that care deeply about me, each other and this work. That's not to say, the community is all rainbows and butterflies. We have to be in the messiness of building, learning and creating WHILE also be reminded that at the end of day, it's that deep love that makes it ok to be in this process. That love is what I see in our programming, it's what I see in the ways we show up for each other.

Anna Luberoff

Gardens Program Manager (she/her)

2020 was a year of transitions--some expected, and some unexpected. Though there was a lot of instability as a result of COVID and our two executive director transitions, some amazing things came out of being in--as Nolizwe would call it--"a state of flux." Now, more than ever, I feel that our team is connected, collaborating, and producing amazing lessons and activities to keep our youth connected to nature. I am so proud of us for figuring out how to run a BEETS program both in-person and virtually, for creating hundreds of garden kits that the kids use and love, for transitioning all of our inherently hands-on lessons to Zoom while still getting students to notice and interact with nature in their neighborhoods, for collaborating on lesson planning and scope + sequence, learning from each other, and so much more. I could not be more proud of what we have accomplished this year and how much we have come together as a team to see ourselves through. I know that the systems, ideas, projects, and teams we've created during COVID will help CG survive and thrive for many years to come. And, I can't wait to get back outside with the kids!



B Freas

BEETS Educator (they/them)

2020 was a year of immense growth and creativity. I enter 2021 with a renewed sense of our community's resilience and ability to express care for each other, no matter the circumstances. In a year full of emotion and grief and waiting, it feels important to honor the fact that, as Naomi Klein puts it "In times of crisis, seemingly impossible ideas suddenly become possible". May the new possibilities continue to bloom and produce seeds, as the crises of 2020 wilt & wither away.



Meet the Team

Cristina Vila Ruiz

Garden & Nutrition Educator (she/her)

The year 2020 was challenging, different, confusing but totally a learning experience, it was a moment to unlearn and re-learn new skills. We had to transform outside garden class to an online experience and spark the interest of students to nature around them. We explore different media like video, zoom, and bags with material for garden activities and they were all well liked. In addition we learn to collaborate within each other and support our communities in the way they need.



Vanessa Williams

Garden & Nutrition Educator (she/her)

2020 was a year full of out of the box ideas and actions! I've been so inspired by our team's ability to transform our very outdoors based curriculum into one that not only works, but thrives in the virtual world. Seeing my students every week in the midst of navigating two pandemics (covid-19 and racial tensions in America) has been a ray of sunshine amongst the gray clouds. Wherever the next year takes us, I have faith that our community will not only stand together, but will find and celebrate our joys.

Karen Lally

Operations & Development Manager (she/her)

In 2020, there were a lot of hard moments, and challenges to both mental and emotional health (I think for us all). I'm not sure that there's a way to truly capture in words all that happened on a national, political, social, and local level. What I can say though, is how grateful I am and how much love I have for this team, this work, and this community. And I think this year has shown more than ever the importance of outdoor spaces and what it means to be able to gather in them together.



Meet the Team



Yaya Persing

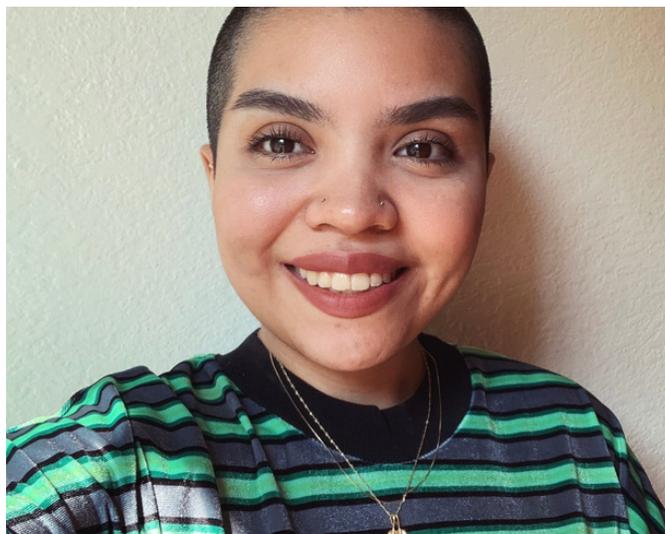
Garden & Nutrition Educator (she/her)

This year I found myself turning towards the plants and the people I work with for signs of resilience and strength. I saw our educators, community leaders and partners continually adapting to the shifting landscape: I saw student faces light up as they shared drawings of nature and plates of vegetable creations. I saw nettles, collards and calendula continue to grow along with student pride, creativity and curiosity. There were signs of community resilience and collective strength in every season!

Abigail Henriquez

Marketing and Communications Coordinator (she/her)

During my time as a VISTA with CommunityGrows, I've gained a lot of insight and first-hand experience on many different aspects of the nonprofit sector. COVID and social distancing measures have given way to a unique situation: trying to navigate building and sustaining current community partnerships, fundraising, getting new community members involved in what CG does, and keeping current supporters informed on how CG has adapted to COVID times. However, in spite of the circumstances surrounding the past year, I'm so grateful to be a part of this organization and to know that despite working remotely and not seeing everyone in person all the time, the CommunityGrows team has been such a supportive and collaborative environment that has helped in inspiring new and exciting projects within the organization.



Mayer Fischbach Barria

Community Engagement Coordinator (she/her)

Life has its ups and downs, twists and turns, and you never know what it will throw at you. We hear such sentiments all the time, but when something as globally halting and "normality" shattering as a pandemic arises, you're shocked and often slow to emotionally adjust. That considered, I felt comforted by how CommunityGrows adjusted together. We kept our programming alive, taught the beautiful kids of SF, supported each other however we could, and continued to steward the gardens. I'm proud of what we did in 2020 and am excited to keep pursuing our mission in 2021.



AmeriCorps VISTA

The AmeriCorps VISTA program is a government funded way for nonprofits working to combat poverty to receive additional staff support. At the beginning of the year we said goodbye to our former VISTA member, Angelique, and said hello to two new VISTA members, Abigail and Mayer. Written below is what Abigail and Mayer have to say about their experiences in CG.

“

Since starting my Americorps position in the fall, I have gotten the opportunity to learn about nonprofit work in the midst of really unique circumstances. The pandemic has presented some challenges that I, as the marketing and communications coordinator at CommunityGrows, have had to navigate in terms of how to engage with our partners and community in non-traditional ways. For example, although the fall fundraiser was not able to happen in an in-person format, we worked with the board to create Seasonal Seed Boxes, which were kits that had everything needed for people to grow vegetables from their own homes. This was an exciting project to work on because it allowed me to be a part of a fundraising campaign from the initial brainstorming stages to materializing our ideas into a fundraiser and working through the logistics as we moved along. I was also able to work on the marketing of the boxes themselves by creating content (videos and photos showcasing the designs and boxes) and sharing them throughout the website and social media.



Similarly, I also worked alongside Karen and Mayer to strategize what our GivingTuesday campaign and messaging would look like, and we were able to meet our fundraising goal! Seeing how the community was able to support us despite all the challenges this year has given us in some ways re-energized my desire to help the communities that I am a part of as well as be able to provide support and work alongside a team in order to see our ideas materialize from the initial brainstorming stages to successful projects. Overall it's been really great to be able to pick up and strengthen so many skills such as website design, arranging templates and layouts for print material, editing videos for social media and the GivingTuesday campaign, working with vector based drawing, and generally thinking about the decisions we make from a marketing and branding point of view. Through my time so far, I've been able to work on so many projects alongside an incredibly welcoming and supportive community here at CommunityGrows.

—Abigail Henriquez

AmeriCorps VISTA

When I took on my role at CommunityGrows, I knew I'd be embarking on a novel role from what I've done in the past. This was a bit intimidating, but I saw it as an opportunity to combine my past experiences and expand my skill set, all while supporting a mission I believe in. I was right about this role throwing me a curveball, but the ways in which I have benefited from joining CommunityGrows have been far more expansive than I ever imagined. I have learned about community outreach, compassion, the ins and outs of nonprofit infrastructure, and how to work with social responsibility at the forefront of my mind.



My position has involved a wide variety of work including writing grants, building gardens, creating blog posts, coordinating a newsletter, fundraising, reaching out to local organizations for support, coordinating projects that boost the internal infrastructure of the organization, assembling learning material, and even painting carrots. I believe working during the pandemic has pushed the limits of what my position entails, and given me the opportunity to be involved with every aspect of CommunityGrows. I've also been able to watch the evolution of a small organization to better meet the needs of its staff and the people it serves. I admire that CommunityGrows aims to constantly do better, and refuses to remain stagnant for the sake of simplicity. Instead, CG challenges systems in place to create a more equal and welcoming environment that treats everyone as an individual and aims to bring forth empowerment for all.

—Mayer Fischbach Barria

Thank You!



Project Partners

Through the support and collaboration with our partners, we work together towards our collective vision of a strong and healthy community.

African American Arts and Culture Complex
Booker T. Washington Community Service
Center Buchanan YMCA
John Muir Elementary School
Magic Zone
Mo' MAGIC
Rosa Parks Elementary School
San Francisco Recreation & Parks
Department Up On Top Village Project
Western Addition Beacon Center
Willie Mays Boys & Girls Club at Hunters Point
Youth Art Exchange
Ella Hill Hutch Community Center
Leonard Flynn Elementary
Malcolm X Academy Elementary School



Advisory Board

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Jaromy Schmidt, District Manager, Starbucks

Caitlin McLaughlin, Manager, Clearway

Energy Group

Thank You to Our Supporters

We would not be able to do what we do without our supporters and thank every person who has engaged with our organization.

Jaku Kinst
Sanjai Moses
Earl Frick
Rodney Chin
Manuel Gonzalez
David Burnett
Jack Weller
Heather Groninger
Francis Tompkins
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Sanjai Moses
Earl Frick
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Manuel Gonzalez
David Burnett
Jack Weller
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Francis Tompkins
Abby Miller



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Youth, and Families
San Francisco Public Health
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San Francisco Public Utilities
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Bella Vista Foundation
Clif Bar Family Foundation
Tides Stronger Together Fund
Luke's Local
Niantic Charitable Trust
Buffalo Exchange
Rosa Parks Elementary PTA
Sutro Stewards Plant Nursery
Sloat Garden Center
Leonard Flynn PTA
Malcolm X Academy

Abby Miller
Alex Vazquez
Irene Lei
Ashley Bastinelli
Kat Sawyer
Jeff Johnson
Renee Strong
Judy Heining
Kyle Virgien
Russell Lyman
Jim Illig
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Derek Remski
Sam Swartz
Megan Walker
Jason Wong
Roxie Mestas
Harold Ryder
Hal Roseberry
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Cole Munoz
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Thank you for all your support, from CommunityGrows to you! 



CommunityGrows

Planting seeds, co-powering youth



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