

## God's Garden: Cultivating Hope in the Hopeless

*Identifying with the over 800 million people who go to sleep hungry every night can be a challenge in a city whose streets are lined with organic farms and multi-million dollar homes.*

*However, many of our own neighbors are forced to sleep on these same streets every night. Adding to that are another 2 billion neighbors living deficient of the basic vitamins and minerals essential to support general wellness, promote cognitive functioning, and protect against preventable disease.*

*Hunger nor homelessness in Santa Cruz, CA can be attributed to a lack of resources; instead, their roots lie in a misdistribution of abundant resources and the lack of resourcefulness. There is no need for any individual to go hungry in or beyond our city limits; however, the unsustainable and/or superficial*



*solutions of the past continue to exponentiate the literal and metaphorical cravings of our community... the intrinsic hunger for purpose, dignity, and engagement; indiscriminate of income, race, age or creed which is only satiated through relationship.*

*While reading this, God's Garden is growing fresh organic produce for the hungry, cultivating seeds of hope in the hopeless, and harvesting transformative relationships that are redefining the way we address homelessness.*

### **The Need is Real:**

- **11% of the over 3000 individuals experiencing Homelessness in Santa Cruz are Veterans.**
  - **25% of these individuals lost housing due to a lack of employment.**
- **Veteran homelessness is less tied to alcohol/drug dependency than the non-vet population**
- **Veterans are more likely to have emotional or Psychiatric trauma that is amplified by transiency and nutritional deficiency.**
- **73% of homeless Vets are unsheltered**
- **Depression and suicide rates are higher in Vets due to a strong service mindedness.**

*"Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump,bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming down stairs, but sometimes he feels there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it."*

*-Winnie the Pooh*

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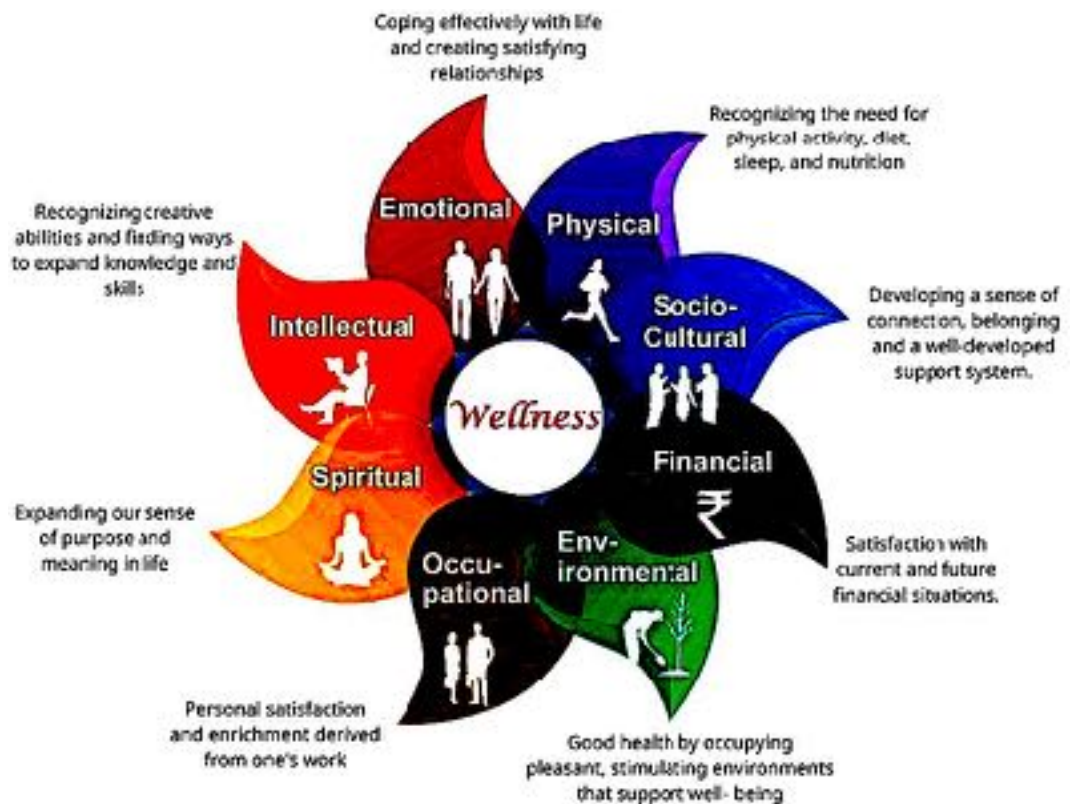
**Innovation, sustainability, scalability:** God's Garden utilizes scalable hydroponic growing systems, designed to create abundant agricultural environments in otherwise inhospitable areas (rooftops, parking lots, indoor facilities, etc.) creating pathways for community re-integration that promote economic and ecological sustainability. Our systems are customized to the unique needs and amplify existing resources of the communities they are placed (church, food pantry, business, nonprofit agency, school.) This exponentiates the production and accessibility of fresh organic produce while providing opportunities for formative transitional employment and empowerment.



Each garden is maintained by a vetted and trained homeless veteran as a means of transitional employment, personal and professional development, and empowerment. Alongside the God's Garden team, organizations provide mentorship and partner in the pursuit of sustained housing and employment for their gardener while harvesting mutually dignified relationships and fresh produce for a relevant outreach programing.

### **A focus on holistic wellness:**

"Wellness" can mean a lot of things, but its original etymology is rooted in "wholeness." God's Garden provides a unique metaphorical and literal demonstration of the holistic wellness circle. The process from sowing to harvest provides a metaphor for the holistic personal and social development of participants, teaching practical themes of self-care, nurture, nutrition, balance, and intentional community. After an initial training and vetting period conducted at our main site (which supplies fresh produce for the weekly meal and food pantry at the Veterans Memorial Center) participants are "planted" in an



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*intentional, supportive, and holistic community that offers mentorship, support, structure, refuge, respite, respect, and friendship. Our focus on collaboration and utilization of communal resources creates a supportive foundation addressing the unique spiritual, physical, emotional, and personal needs of each participant while providing them opportunities to share their gifts, wisdom, and story with their hosts.*

### **We Envision:**

***A multifaceted transitional employment and holistic wellness program that addresses the unique needs, while perpetuating the unique gifts of each participant and their host community.***

### **Our Mission:**

***To feed indiscriminate hungers for purpose, dignity, and engagement of a diverse community through the cultivation of relationships that overcome socio-economic and faith barriers, sow seeds of hope in the hopeless, and the unite in the harvest of accessible organic produce.***

### **We Value:**

***The deeper purpose and beauty of every individual in recognition that whether housed or homeless; vet, refugee, or business professional, black or white, baby boomer or millennial; and all who fall in between... we are all formed of the same soil.***

***We value sustainability, ecological and economical. Thus pave paths toward self-sufficiency that encourage environmental stewardship, teach conservation and resourcefulness, and encourage each participant to accept responsibility for their personal journey.***

**Objective:** *Engaging individuals in the transformative process from consumer to producer evokes a deep sense of purpose that reveals the true potential of despondent neighbors. The opportunity to provide for others is in direct response to the natural inclination of a Veteran to serve others, and the physical act of gardening complements this by providing a metaphor to help participants take an active role in their self-care and development.*

*God's Garden puts a new spin on an old adage: "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you feed them for a lifetime. However, if you show the man how to build a pond and grow fish, they feed their soul and the world.*

***\*\*Our scalable hydroponic units offer aquaponic (fish growing) systems.\*\****



### **Process:**

*After participants are trained and vetted by our God's Garden team they are intentionally matched (based on their unique needs and gifts) with a supportive and complementary church,*

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business, or agency. A core team from the mentoring organization joins their veteran "trainee" a day-long retreat at our ranch that focuses on building awareness of available community resources, cultivation of relationship, communal vision casting, and literal garden preparation. Host communities serve the needs of the participant by:



1. "Employing" them as caretakers: A paycheck is more than a slip of paper, but a statement of worth and potential to initiate their holistic re-integration journey.

2. Finding temporary housing within their network (open rooms in members houses, a tiny home or RV on site, etc.) Our team has a variety of levels of assistance ranging from tiny homes to network partnerships to aid in this process.

3. Activating the unique wisdom and gifts of their community to contribute to the holistic development of the trainee. (ie:

encouraging members with backgrounds or passions in counseling, resume writing, health/nutritional, etc to share their gifts.) This supplements community workshops hosted by the God's Garden program and partners.

4. Work alongside the participant towards sustained employment and housing (aiding in their search for, application and pursuit of, and move into long-term environments.)
5. Being a community. What differentiates this program from others is our focus on organic social re-integration that sees participants as equal members of mutually evolving communities, not outreach subjects.

Upon finding sustained housing and employment, each trainee graduates to a roll of mentorship for trainees to follow and is encouraged to stay active in their community..

### The new story is being scribed in Santa Cruz Ca.

You've come back from serving your homeland to find yourself without a home. Your mind is flooded with scenes of violence, injustice, and pain that are only amplified by the sounds of the street that you camp beside. There is a community meal at the local vet center, but as someone whose intrinsic hunger is to serve, every "free handout" leaves you emptier, magnifying an insatiable hunger for dignity.

One Wednesday something different brightens the lunch spread at the Memorial building. A salad. Not poured from of a bag of discarded wilted lettuce, but crisp; fresh; and refreshing. You soon find that the true nourishment of the meal resides in an opportunity you've been presented with to grow this salad for your comrades. So you enroll in the God's Garden re-integration program, a process that cultivates the potential of despondent individuals, while literally cultivating fresh produce for others in need.

Within days your learning a new trade and are soon placed into a supportive and caring

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*holistic community. Your head starts to clear with several nights good of sleep, your body responds to a diet rich in vital nutrients, and you suddenly start to understand the phrase "quality of life" as you remember how to laugh; share; listen; and smile. You're growing fresh food for those whom, just a month before, you shared the street and finding dignity and engagement in a new community excited to learn from your story and walk with you on the path to self-sustainability. You have a bed, a normal schedule, and a job, but most importantly, you have hope.*

*Members of your mentoring community have helped edit your resume and you soon find a job. Through their connections in the neighborhood coupled with your new savings account, you soon earn the keys to the first apartment you've had in years. You're taking critical steps on the path to a new life, but stay plugged into the community that took the first steps alongside of you. With a new job and fresh start underway, you're now given the gift of mentoring a new participant to the garden. A chance to share the wisdom and knowledge you've gained through the past months.*



### **...and its happening Here and Now**

With several units ready for placement and a new model of gardens in development (featuring optional aquaponic system integration that allows produce and fish to be farmed simultaneously in creating a mutually supportive, fully self-sustaining organic ecosystem) the story of homelessness is being re-written as we speak.

- Our training site, the "**Mitchell Horton Garden**" at Twin Lakes Church in Aptos, California, is currently up and running. This site is providing nutrient dense fresh organic produce for the Santa Cruz Veteran's Memorial Building lunch program, a charitable meal hosted every Wednesday that feeds around 100 Veterans and resources the memorial building's food pantry.
- We will be launching Veteran Hydroponic Business classes starting in April 2017 as we continue developing this holistic transitional employment/Job training program that concentrates on the holistic wellness, personal and professional development, and community re-integration of our local veterans.
- We are in the process of developing small business development opportunities for graduates through Solar LED lighting systems which can be further implemented into our scalable hydroponic/aquaponic units to create self-sustaining indoor/outdoor growing environments.

*Each hydroponic garden Unit is customized using four different growth systems to address the specific space, light, and water restraints of each unique community. These units grow vegetables 30% faster and with a less water than traditional systems turning parking spaces or other non-hospitable agricultural areas into robust holistic ecological habitats. These units can be placed locally at churches, businesses, and shelters and scaled to include housing and solar technology and/or provide the foundation for innovative small business developments.*

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**Donation packages each include a small group retreat/team building/training day at our *God's Garden Aquaponic Ranch* in Aptos, CA.**

### **Ranch Retreat options:**

- Basic hydroponic/aquaponic session
- Garden setup and planning session (crop planning, )
- Organic lunch (Grown on ranch and harvested by your team!)
- Reflection/worship (Special programming for Church mission teams)
- Q&A discussion with our homeless vet team
- Team-building by a SC Community Foundation Strategic Business Consultant
- Optional Horseback riding session
- Mission team Prep/training (for groups placing a unit in an outreach community)

## **Support Levels:**

### **Donation of \$1,000:**

- 3x3 (additional units to gift for \$450)
  - Fully stocked with organic starters & nutrients specific to your group's situation
- Sponsors a homeless Vet's enrollment and training

### **Donation of \$1250**

- 3X6 (Additional units \$550)
  - Fully stocked with organic starters & nutrients specific to your group's situation
- Sponsors a homeless Vet's enrollment and training

### **Donation of \$2,000**

- 3x3 Garden (additional units to gift for \$450)
  - Fully stocked with organic starters & nutrients specific to your group's situation
- Sponsors a homeless Vet's enrollment and training + personal 3x3 unit upon graduation

### **Donation of \$2,500:**

- 3x6 Garden (additional units to gift for \$550)
- Sponsors a Vet's enrollment and training + 3x6 small business unit upon graduation

### **Donation of \$7,500**

- 12x12 (additional units \$5000) Fully stocked with organic starters & nutrients
- Sponsors a Vet's enrollment and training + 3x6 small business unit upon graduation

### **Donation of \$10,000**

- 12x12 (additional \$5000)
  - Fully stocked with organic starters & nutrients specific to your group's situation
  - additional year of organic starters & nutrients
- 3x3 unit for your chosen of community recipient
- Sponsors a Vet's enrollment and training + 3x6 small business unit upon graduation
- Sponsors one year's Homeless Veteran lunches (Wednesday's at the Memorial building)

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