

Grants help community fight food insecurity

By Karen Postupac, Bulletin Contributor

On March 3, applications closed for United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania (SWPA)'s Community Food Solutions grant.

Established in August 2023, this grant has provided more than \$230,000 to 49 local organizations. These grantees utilize their expertise and United Way's funds to bring food security to the community.

Currently running a grant cycle of three times a year, United Way SWPA is preparing for its sixth cohort of grantees.

Kitty Julian, Chief Marketing Officer of United Way SWPA, describes the need that is being filled by the Community Food Solutions grant.

"It's much harder to succeed in school if you are hungry," she said. "It's much harder to build wealth when you are food insecure."

The goal behind this grant is not only to support organizations fighting food insecurity, but also to create a larger ecosystem of educated community members who can address this issue.

Jen Schuchart, the director of Meeting Basic Needs at United Way SWPA, gave an up-close look at this grant and why each of these organizations received funding.

"Food Insecurity is an evergreen issue in Allegheny County" and each awardee is empowering and encouraging "folks in their communities to address this issue themselves."

There are four grant-winning organizations in Garfield and Lawrenceville: Garfield Community Farm, Kincaid Street Garden, ValleyView Presbyterian Church and Lawrenceville United.

Garfield Community Farm has been awarded the grant twice, once in the first cohort in August 2023 and again in the fourth cohort in August 2024.

Established by Open Door Presbyterian Church in 2009, Garfield Community Farms strives to "[increase] access to fresh produce and educational opportunities with our neighbors and volunteers, and demonstrating ecological restoration through urban agriculture in the neighborhood of Garfield," says the organization's website.

The grant was awarded for their community allotment garden, a system that allows each Garfield resident the ability to grow their own food on the farm's land. Specifically, the farm came up with an innovative addition to their current system.

Many residents within the Garfield community had interest in the allotment garden, but couldn't get to the farm, due to a multitude of reasons. Garfield Community Farm then began building garden beds right at the homes of their residents.

Schuchart applauds Garfield Community Farm for their intentionality behind sharing knowledge. The farm creates in each resident "a foundation to continue the work."

The Kincaid Street Garden provides green space for the Garfield community. According to their website, their mission is to "build capacity in youth and residents in the Greater Pittsburgh Area while creating vibrant public spaces that cultivate connectivity and drive interactions."

With their grant, they are establishing a consistent workshop series, where residents come in and share their knowledge with their neighbors.

ValleyView Presbyterian Church had a unique experience within their grant journey. The church applied for the grant to expand their monthly pantry service. In addition to all they offer, they were hoping to expand to weekend meals. However, the church had to

pivot the way they use their funds to replace various appliances.

The grant is considered unrestricted funding, meaning that if the funds are aiding the fight against food insecurity, the project can redirect expenditures as necessary.

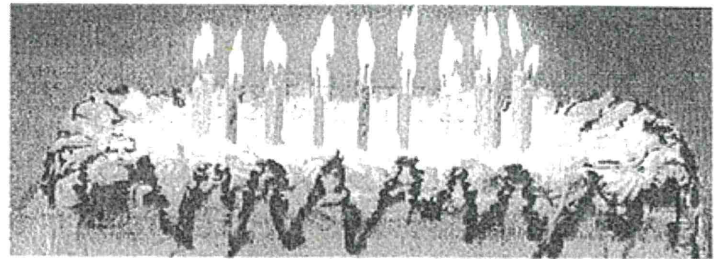
Lawrenceville United runs the Lawrenceville Farmers Market at Bay 41 on 41st Street. Thanks to the Community Food Solutions grant, the farmers market will be matching SNAP/EBT dollar for dollar at the Market. This means that food stamp users will double their benefits by shopping at the LFM this year. You can visit the Lawrenceville Farmers Market every Tuesday from 3-7 p.m., starting May 20 and running through Nov. 25.

Yet another important piece of this grant is the partnership with the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council. Each grantee is connected

with the council to receive mentorship and guidance. For example, the council may help a grantee learn about the regulations needed to serve public meals to the community.

This relationship exists well after the cohort, encouraging a long-lasting network of experts. "It's not just the funding for one grant cycle," says Schuchart, "but continued relationship when that project is done."

Schuchart reminds the community that this grant is for anyone interested in fighting food insecurity. "To folks interested in this work, please reach out with questions and submit an application. [The grant] is meant to be accessible. You may not be an official non-profit. This could be the first grant you've ever written. United Way wants to support the great ideas."



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Pictured is the Garfield Community Farm's allotment garden. In Spring 2023, the farm installed 14 raised beds for neighbors to use as their personal growing spaces. Garfield Community Farm