

# GROWING RESILIENCE



## The Inside Scoop

A quarterly newsletter by and for project stakeholders about “Growing Resilience in Wind River Indian Reservation: an RCT on gardens for health”

### Introduction to the Project

*By Christine Porter, principal investigator, UW*

Welcome to the first issue of the *Growing Resilience Inside Scoop*! This Growing Resilience (GR) project grew out of five years of a food sovereignty collaboration that included Blue Mountain Associates (BMA) and University of Wyoming (UW) on the “Food Dignity” project. Many families told BMA they wanted to start food gardens – more than BMA was able to support. That interest in gardening, and past research nationally that suggests gardens might improve health, led the team of UW, BMA, and Tribal Health organizations to design a pilot project together in 2013 to support gardens with tribal families and to measure health impacts.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded us to do a randomized controlled trial (RCT) over five years with 100 tribal families to prove what kinds of impacts gardens have on family health. Health measures include biometrics like weight and height, blood measures like hemoglobin A1c (for diabetes), and survey measures such as overall wellness.

If we find out that gardens do improve health, with the high-quality evidence than only an RCT can provide, then getting funding for helping families and organizations (like elder homes, recovery centers and schools) to start gardens will get a lot easier. This project is the first one ever to do an RCT about the health impacts of gardens, so our results will have a lot to teach the country – both

native and non-native. At the end of the project, in 2020, we will host national workshop in Wind River Indian Reservation to share what we have learned and to learn what other sovereign nations are doing to take control over and to improve their health. So the partners in this project – UW, BMA, Eastern Shoshone Tribal Health, the Wind River Development Fund, and the Community Advisory Board – are very grateful to the families who are participating in GR by having gardens now, and especially those “control” families who are waiting for their gardens, and are helping us to figure out how gardens impact health.



*Some members of the GR team from BMA, UW, and the Community Advisory Board. (PC: Gayle Woodsum)*

### GR Partner Organizations

The main project partners are the 100 families we hope will participate in GR. We have 18 families who are part of the project already. We are looking for about 40 more for 2017 and another 40 in 2018. GR also has four main partner organizations

and a Community Advisory Board (CAB). Their work and teams are summarized here.

### Blue Mountain Associates

BMA is leading the design and implementation of the home gardening support program. Dr. Virginia Sutter is BMA's Executive Director. Jim Sutter is directing the gardening program. Etheleen Potter is garden manager (half time) and she supervises two gardening assistants. This year Nelson "Pat" White is acting as a gardening assistant and helping her install the first 10 gardens.

BMA Contact: Jim Sutter, 307-335-8455, [jwwsutter@gmail.com](mailto:jwwsutter@gmail.com)

### University of Wyoming

UW is responsible for assessing the health impacts of the gardens that BMA provides. With help from Wyoming Health Fairs, the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center, and Assistant Professor Felix Naschold, the UW team is collecting and analyzing the data that the participating families provide when they come to four data gathering sessions over two years. The core UW team is Dr. Christine Porter (principal Investigator), Alyssa Wechsler (project manager) and Melvin Arthur (project coordinator).

UW Contact: Alyssa Wechsler, 307-399-3247, [info@growingresilience.org](mailto:info@growingresilience.org)



*Alyssa, Melvin and Jim, happy after the first and successful data collection session with family participants. PC: Christine Porter*

### Eastern Shoshone Tribal Health & Wind River Development Fund

ESTH and WRDF find families who want to participate in GR and help them enroll in the project and to participate in the four health data gathering sessions over their two years in the study. Dave Myers and Naomi Harris are the main ESTH contacts for families wishing to participate. Etheleen Potter is the main WRDF contact for families who would like to participate.

Contacts:

- Naomi Harris (ESTH): 307-332-6805, [naomi@esthealth.org](mailto:naomi@esthealth.org)
- David Meyers (ESTH): 307-332-6805, [david@esthealth.org](mailto:david@esthealth.org)
- Etheleen Potter (WRDF): 307-438-1826 [windrivelerprechaun90@yahoo.com](mailto:windrivelerprechaun90@yahoo.com)

### Community Advisory Board

An important oversight component of the Growing Resilience action research project is its community advisory board (CAB). Composed of community members with a keen interest in working for health equity among people living on the Wind River Reservation, this group of committed volunteers is invested in ensuring that GR research participants and local community members alike benefit from the project. Current board members are: Rhonda Bowers, Kathryn Lone Fight, Darrah Perez, Pat Harris and Nelson P. White. Gayle Woodsum of Action Resources International convenes and facilitates the CAB but is not a voting member.

Research participants and other community members are welcome to contact the CAB to ask questions, raise concerns and offer suggestions in regard to GR.

CAB Contact: Rhonda Bowers, 307-840-2256 (work number at UW Extension Office in Ft. Washakie), [rbowers@uwyo.edu](mailto:rbowers@uwyo.edu).

## Notes from the CAB

*By Gayle Woodsum, ARI*

The advisory board has been meeting monthly since March, where they have been learning about the project from researchers and staff of the project's gardening component, and have been seeking answers to their own questions about the how the overall project is progressing. The board also participated on the Growing Resilience panel at the recent health disparities conference held in Riverton.

The Growing Resilience Community Advisory Board (CAB) receives regular updates on the project's progress, provides input and participates in policy decision-making in regard to how the project is unfolding and is represented to the public, advocates for community interests in regard to research data collection, ownership and dissemination, and most importantly serves as a contact point for all research participants seeking information or assistance with their involvement in the project.

## Gardens!

*By Jim Sutter, BMA*



*Ethleen and Pat building the garden beds. PC: Jim Sutter.*

Basically, due to the crazy spring weather, we had a late start, but once we had the lumber, topsoil and compost we got production rolling very rapidly. In just nine days we had 20 of the 4'x10' raised beds built and delivered! Next came the contents for the boxes. The first two batches, 20 wheelbarrow loads each were loaded on a tarp and trailered to the site, then hand shoveled into the boxes. No easy task. Thanks to some much appreciated assistance

from one of the tribal programs the others were deliver to their sites after being loaded into a dump truck and dropped off to each location. However, in all but one location the garden material still had to be shoveled into the raised beds. All gardens attained 'growing plants' mode by mid-June. It has been interesting and we have learned a few hard lessons for use next year.

## Gardener Spotlight

*By Melvin L. Arthur, UW*

Ina Weed-Hurley's family garden is located at her beautiful home nestled at the base of the Wind River Mountains. Ina reported planting her garden at the beginning of June, and now Brussel sprouts, green beans, jalapeño's, verde pepper, sweet corn, cucumber, carrots, strawberries, pumpkin, zucchini, yellow squash, walls-walls, broccoli, Yukon potato's, thyme, oregano, basil, and parsley have sprouted (pictured below). The Weed-Hurley family uses a chart to monitor their gardening activities like watering and plant growth. Ina credits family members and the support of the GR project as major factors in the success of their garden so far. In total, the family has spent over 20 hours in preparation for the growing season with most of those hours going toward building and planting the garden.



The Weed-Hurley family is very excited to be growing their own food, and Ina is proud to be continuing the sustainable tradition of her mother and grandmother. Ina expressed that her intent is to use the food she grows to replace her use of the local grocery stores for these items. She feels very optimistic about the benefits for her and her family and they look forward to continuing the garden for future generations. The Weed-Hurley family are off

to a fabulous start, and they are seeing the fruits of their labor materialize and are getting healthier in the process.

## Project Updates

*By Alyssa Wechsler, UW*

- **January 27, 2016:** Project partners hosted a successful Growing Resilience open house at the Frank B. Wise Business Center. Attendees received door prizes and were invited to be screened for participation in Growing Resilience.
- **February 15-20, 2016:** First health data collection session! A total of 58 family members from 18 households attended the event, which included taking biometrics, a blood draw, a survey, and breakfast. Participants also voted on a logo for GR and selected Elizabeth Ridgeley's beautiful design, featured at the top of this newsletter.
- **March 2016:** BMA began planning gardens with participants, and gardeners attended workshops hosted by UW Extension (see "Gardens!" section on pg. 2).
- **Early June 2016:** Gardens installed!
- **June 9, 2016:** Project partners attended and presented at the Native American Health Equity Conference (see "GR at Health Equity Conference" section on pg. 3).

## Upcoming Events

- **August 10-11, 2016:** GR partners plan to present at the Education Summit at CWC.
- **August 19-20 and 25-27, 2016:** 7-11am each day. Add it to your calendar, these will be the dates for the next health data collection session! We ask everyone who attended the spring session to also attend the August data collection. Breakfast will be provided!
- **(Tentative) August 21, 2016:** Harvest festival to celebrate a successful first year of GR and to recruit families for 2017! Keep an eye out for more information on this event.

## GR at Health Equity Conference

*By Melvin L. Arthur, UW*

On June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016 the GR project partners presented their work to the audiences at the Native American Health Equity Conference held at the Wind River Casino. Project partners discussed their organizational and individual roles for the health intervention which gave the conference attendees an opportunity to view the internal forces behind the GR project. The GR staff members relayed how the support and collaborations have worked and gave attendees a sense of the activities over the last six years.

As a result of our presence at the Equity Conference, WRR residents are more informed on importance of the NIH grant as a resource that will lead to more gardens, and the benefits of doing the research for a Native American community. BMA discussed the growing season and gave an overview on the progress of the gardeners. Etheleen Potter, Naomi Harris, and Dave Myers talked on their recruitment activity and how the GR project has inspired them to get community members involved. In total the community became more aware of the great work we have been doing and we gave them a sense that it will continue as long as we have participants.

## About this Newsletter

The *GR Inside Scoop* is to share news about, with and by the project partners, especially the families who are participating in the project. Please send your ideas, feedback, photos and stories to the newsletter editor, Melvin Arthur.

([marthur1@uwyo.edu](mailto:marthur1@uwyo.edu) or 307 231 6414)

GR is funded by NHLBI with NIGMS at the National Institutes of Health (grant no. R01 HL126666-01).

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