



Catholic Social Services | Summer 2024

Faces of Hope

A garden of peace and play

Your support provides families at Clare House with opportunities to connect and grow together.

Experiencing homelessness can be traumatic, and the journey back to stability can be long and challenging. That's why Clare House takes a multi-generational approach to homelessness, to make sure that both **moms and their kids are able to heal, rebuild, and look forward to the rest of their lives.**

All summer long, the Clare House Play Garden provides a **restorative environment for families to relax, play, and connect.** The Garden includes a children's library, picnic table, garden beds, and the beloved swing. Moms can rest easy knowing that their kids have a safe environment play in and a beautiful garden to promote healthy social and emotional

engagement for families.

In the summer, the Play Garden truly comes alive. Kids are on summer break, and the Alaska sun makes the foliage glow green.

For a recent new mom and her daughter, weeding together in the Garden provided solace as they

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settled in and adjusted to a new environment, which can otherwise feel overwhelming. And on any given day, older kids throw a football, siblings share the swing, and little ones push around the yard on scooters. These sweet moments in childhood are vital for supporting healthy recovery and bright futures.

At Clare House, you provide more than just

safe shelter and basic needs for moms and kids experiencing homelessness. You create a place where they can find social and emotional support, connect with each other, and build the foundation for a brighter future.



ABOVE: The swing is always a highlight, especially when several kids can swing together at the same time. The rubber mat below prevents hard landings.



Robin Dempsey
Chief Executive Officer

Hello everyone,
We're very excited to share about our added garden spaces at both Brother Francis Shelter and Clare House for guests to use, and the expansion of our FIG gardening plots. While gardening might seem like an odd supplement to client services, we believe tending a

garden supports our neighbors' personal growth.
Gardening, growing, and harvesting are excellent supports for social and emotional wellbeing, which is essential to building permanent stability. The peaceful practice and chance to work with living things is a natural stress-reliever, great for mental health, and centers the mind.

Working with plants provides a microcosm to practice success. Growing plants requires the discipline to work on a long-term project that will yield benefits in the future. This is good emotional reinforcement for all of us, including clients facing challenges like finding income or securing housing that can take

weeks or months of effort.
Gardening also creates an avenue to give back to our community. This can be a powerful feeling, connecting us to our neighbors and helping us see ourselves as a contributing member of society. Growing and sharing flowers, herbs, or vegetables with our neighbors helps us imagine a future where we have the capacity to give back in even bigger ways.

As always, thank you to you, our community of support for making these gardens possible and helping our community, our clients, and their lovingly tended plants to grow.

Warm regards,

Robin Dempsey

The Multiplied Impacts of Grow Local, Give Local

If you were to follow a Grow Local, Give Local vegetable from seed to harvest to dinner plate, countless stories of resilience and hope would unfold.

In 2023...



64 FIG gardeners

planted, watered, and grew produce right in downtown Anchorage, while also building community and practicing language skills.



\$30,325 donated

by Grow Local, Give Local supporters paid FIG gardeners for their harvested produce, providing important supplemental income.



6,000 pounds

of fresh, local produce were donated from the FIG gardens and distributed through St. Francis House Food Pantry to families in need in our community.

When you donate to Grow Local, Give Local, you join a cycle of support, empowerment, and growth for families in our community so that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.



Expanding community connections and strengthening families through gardening

At Fresh International Gardens, new arrivals find a space for community, language practice, food access, and more.

Every morning at Fresh International Gardens (FIG), participants gather in a circle to introduce themselves and practice English. Refugees and new arrivals from Afghanistan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and beyond come together, bringing their children who play with

childcare volunteers. This year, thanks to your support, the garden doubled its growing space, expanding by 6,000 square feet to accommodate even more participants at a time.

FIG participants are new arrivals to Alaska. For those learning English or mothers

with young children, FIG provides an employment opportunity that can meet them where they are, while also providing fresh produce for our community.

FIG participants are able to practice their English

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while they work, in informal conversations, during the morning circle, and afterward. And the program **provides a natural community as they work together** to plant, grow, and harvest everything from green onions and salad greens to beets and carrots. While growing together, our new neighbors share common experiences, learn about each other, and **set roots down in Alaska.**

Your support for Grow Local, Give Local make it possible

for FIG to expand and thrive. **Every gift transforms the lives of new arrivals**, providing them with tools to succeed and rebuild.



ABOVE: Last spring, the Rotary Club of Anchorage East spent two days siding, roofing, and finishing up the shed for FIG to store tools and material.



ABOVE: FIG has become a great source of community for many, including Athieng, a long-time farmer and FIG champion.

PICTURED: Volunteers Morgan and Joy tend and harvest fresh produce for families in need at the St. Francis Garden.

Fresh produce for families in need

From tomatoes to thyme, you help St. Francis House Food Pantry provide nutritious produce to our neighbors.

At St. Francis House, families in need request fresh produce more than any other item. Thanks to supporters like you, it's available all summer long.

FIG supplies a large part of the produce St. Francis distributes, grown just a few minutes down the road and purchased directly from refugee farmers through Grow Local, Give Local.

But some produce comes even closer to the source—directly behind the pantry! Tucked

away in a small side yard, the St. Francis Garden thrives with a variety of local Alaska plants such as raspberries, herbs, and tomatoes. Joy, one of our long-time volunteers, took the initiative to create the garden herself, and with her husband and other volunteers, tends and harvests its fruits to share with families at the food pantry.

Despite the garden's small size, it make a big impact: "When so much is canned or processed, **a cup of fresh raspberries can**

mean so much," says Joy. It provides a fresh little addition to food boxes filled with protein, shelf-stable items, and grains.

Your support and the innovations of volunteers like Joy **provide food-insecure families with a greater range of fresh, healthy options** so that everyone in our community has access to fresh food. Thank you for helping us feed our neighbors!