

The Garden Project at Camp Sweeney



The Garden Project at Camp Wilmont Sweeney is a collaboration between the Alameda County Public Health and Probation Departments, with additional support from Planting Justice and Alameda County Office of Education's Butler Academy. The partnership started with the first planting in the Spring of 2016 and the accompanying classroom curriculum was launched in the Fall, allowing Camp Sweeney youth to earn credits through Butler Academy. Since that time, approximately 45 Camp Sweeney youth, with the support of Kimberly Blakiston - a Family Health Services public health nurse stationed in the Juvenile Justice Center's Transition Center - in partnership with the Camp Sweeney staff and Planting Justice, have planted, maintained, and harvested a bountiful garden. In

addition, they've participated in an educational component, which includes gardening skills, benefits of gardening, stress management, preparation of the garden produce, and the role fruits and vegetables play as part of good nutrition, and overall health. Activities have also included field trips to Planting Justice's local nursery for a guided tour and introduction to horticulture as a potential employment option, a grocery store tour to compare the store-bought produce to that from the Camp Sweeney garden, and City Slickers Farm. The produce grown in the garden is prepared with the youth as part of the classroom curriculum and provided to the youth's families during visiting.

The Garden Project has evolved over the last three and a half years and plans to expand by increasing the amount of produce being grown, which will help support more cooking activities and increase the amount given to the families. The curriculum will be enhanced to include more kinesthetic learning techniques and hands on activities, supporting and promoting stronger youth engagement and connection.



On June 26, 2019, the Camp Sweeney Garden Project entered, for the second year in a row, several different types of produce and one floral arrangement at the Alameda County Fair's Youth Gardening and Floral competition, which utilizes the Danish System of Judging, scoring each item based on how well it meets the standards of quality set by the Danish System Score Card.

The Camp Sweeney gardeners selected, cleaned, and prepped the produce to be entered and created the floral arrangement, which was made up of a blooming artichoke, lavender, rosemary, and





fennel fronds grown in the garden. The items were entered in the competition early in the morning and by mid-afternoon the results were on display. The gardeners, filled with excitement and anticipation, walked around the exhibit to see if their produce had won. The anticipation quickly turned to pride as they began to see The Garden Project won 8 first and 4 second place awards, totaling 12 awards for the floral arrangement, collard greens, purple collard greens, purple kale, arugula, swiss chard, mint, rosemary, blackberries, basil, lavender, sage, and spinach. The collard greens, mint, and lavender received additional honors from the Alameda County Farm Bureau taking first, second, and third place. The youth had the opportunity to attend the awards ceremony on July 3rd to receive the ribbons and be honored for their work.

Last year, the Garden Project won 4 first, 4 second, and 2 third place awards, totaling 10 awards for zucchini, yellow squash, rosemary, chocolate mint, cucumber, strawberry & blackberry mix, oregano, floral arrangement, basil, and purple collard greens.

The Garden Project at Camp Sweeney has been and continues to be a health promoting, produce exploring, stress relieving, skills building, uplifting, and rewarding learning experience for all involved, especially the youth.

