

# TROUBADOUR

The Newsletter of St. Francis House, New London, Connecticut



Center Section: **Tour of the FRESH Urban Farm**

Fall 2018

Vol. 20, No. 2

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## FRESH New London

*Growing from Strength to Strength*

by Frida Berrigan

FRESH (Food: Resources, Education, Security and Health) started at St. Francis House in 2003 when Arthur Lerner and Laura Burfoot met. Arthur wanted to grow food with community members to address inequities in the food system. Laura had a passion for working with youth and was emphatic about building youth leadership. They joined forces and initiated FRESH's first projects by employing youth in the summer months to grow food in backyards. Through the employment program, youth were offered more than a wage: they received mentorship, food system education and leadership development. As time passed, it became clear that those aspects of youth work were the most impactful. As a result of these organizational realizations, FRESH works with youth to institute community change. This has taken many different forms over the last 15 years, but building relationships with youth and cultivating leadership is a central aspect.

FRESH's mission is to build momentum for food system change through local agriculture and youth empowerment. We use food to connect the community, encourage stewardship, inspire leadership, and incite change. Currently FRESH work includes 3 focus areas that overlap— Growing Food, Empowering Youth and Connecting Communities. In our current iteration, we are growing food throughout New London in small urban spaces, organizing residents of all ages to claim land for urban agriculture and working intensively with a group of young people who grow food, talk about the local and global inequities in the food system, develop leadership and envision what change look likes.

Right now, it is as though our work is encircling St. Francis House, staying close to our roots! We are growing food at our hub: the FRESH Urban Farm and Education Center, located about five blocks from St. Francis House; and McDonald Park Community Garden, which is a little further away. These are both city lots. We just started growing on a small plot on Ledyard Street, a development facilitated by St. Francis House and the nascent community land trust effort. We'll be erecting a hoop house there in a few weeks and convening neighbors to begin envisioning what roles this .07-acre oasis can play in the lives and bellies of New Londoners. FRESH is also working with residents of St. Francis House's immediate neighbor, the Williams Park Apartments, a public housing complex where 100 elderly and disabled New Londoners reside. FRESH staff and young people worked to excavate garden beds that were built a decade ago and had been neglected and choked with weeds. They are bursting with produce now. And we're starting to talk with neighbors down Cottage Street behind St. Francis House about ways to return the terraced back lots that run between Broad and Franklin into an urban orchard or urban farm plots.

In all of these spaces, young people garden with adult staff and volunteers. The Youth Crew members determine how best to distribute the fruits of our collective labor and spend at least half of their time analyzing why this work is necessary, with an intentional focus on resisting systems and

dismantling oppressions. This work happens organically in conversations as we weed and more formally through workshops that share information about the food system while asking youth to share their own experiences with hunger and food. Tackling food justice work with young people reveals that most youths' food choices are circumscribed by family, school, economy, culture. Their choices are shaped by economic and political systems rooted in a history of violence against people of color that still exists today. But we all have to eat and food can bring us together. FRESH invites young people into joy and agency around food. We share that food can be power, medicine and community *and* food can cause illness, disease and discrimination. We use this framework to teach and envision collective solutions with the young people we work with. Even done with respect and sensitivity, this can be harrowing emotional work riddled with class, racial and ethnic hegemony. So, while we talk about these systemic problems, we also lift strengths by celebrating cultures and then complicating the picture with the ways our dinner plates are colonized.

Frida Berrigan works as FRESH's Development and Communications Manager. She is also secretary of the St. Francis House Board and a founding member of the New London Community Land Trust.

### **Voices of FRESH Youth: Testimonials**

*FRESH Youth Program participants* earn stipends, gain job training, build friendships, grow food, and are able to apply for FRESH Scholarships for college. Hear the voices of some of the future leaders of the food justice movement:

My name is *Marie-France Raymond*. I go to New London High School and I have lived in New London for about 9 years now. I participated in the summer program for the first time this year and it was amazing. I have learned so much about gardening and fresh food. Not only did we learn about how to grow our own fresh and healthy food, we also learned how to distribute it to the community. FRESH gives the youth an opportunity to have a job, stay off the streets during the summer time, make their own money and enjoy ourselves while at work.

My name is *Renasha Brown* and I'm part of the FRESH Program. Being involved in the community means a lot to me and after working in this program, I got a chance not only to help out, but I was educated on the importance of having a healthy life style.

While doing so, it opened up my eyes to many things which is why I feel like we should keep the community garden open.

*Ana Bella*: FRESH is so important for young people like me because we want to come every day to learn even more than yesterday because this program gives you all the motivation you need to want more and more.

My name is *Simone Lerner*. I will be attending Science and Technology High School as a freshman in the fall. I am a Crew Member for the first year this summer, but FRESH was a large part of my childhood. Since I was little, I've come to the garden with my dad (Arthur Lerner, the founder of FRESH) or with my mom (Emily Kellert Lerner, who worked there for many years). I have so many memories of playing with other kids in the kids' play space, gardening with my family and having pizza parties with the whole community. This summer, I did the program to reconnect with the garden and the organization. I learned so much about food justice, food systems and how to be more sustainable. FRESH isn't just some garden or some program; it is family and a safe space for us youth to share our opinions and make a change in our community.

My name is *Luis Baez*. I go to New London High School. I have been living in New London for 17 years and I grew up here and in the one year I have been working with FRESH, it was amazing. I learned how to be more healthy and caring towards people around me. FRESH is my family; my heart is with the community and with FRESH.



Youth Program Participants Sam Oudkerk and Luis Baez wash veggies at the FRESH Urban Farm.

Hello, my name is *Samantha Oudkerk*. My senior year of high school, I applied for the FRESH spring program. I got in. When three of us had to make compost, I felt happy. I have experienced so many new things. I ate turnips for the first time. They taste okay, but it's better cooked. I also learned about food justice; it is communities exercising their right to grow, sell, buy and eat healthy food that is culturally appropriate, and is safe towards the land, people and animals. We are family that is connected by this organization.



*Photo from the archives:* Barbara Barrett with Zuli Fareaux and Robert Maldon in the original FRESH community garden site. Zuli later married Emmett and Anne's son Nate Jarrett; they have grown a garden of 3 sons since their marriage in 2008!



*Note:* In 2005 Laura Burfoot wrote the lead article in the *Troubadour* (Volume 7, Number 4) entitled "A FRESH Summer: early reflections on youth, power and the garden." That was the first FRESH growing season with a crew of 4 girls and 4 boys and Arthur and Laura as the leadership team.

In honor of St. Francis House's 20th anniversary year, we are trying to get all our issues prior to 2010 online. We will start with that FRESH issue. Check out our website: [www.stfrancishouseNL.org](http://www.stfrancishouseNL.org).

Congratulations to FRESH on their growth and service to the community!

## Clarification of

## Thought Schedule

Fall - Winter

2018



# Facing Fear Telling Our Stories

Last spring we tried a different format for Clarification of Thought. Instead of asking our presenters to focus on a particular topic, we asked them to reflect on how their particular religious tradition - Buddhist, Hindu, Quaker, Reform Judaism, Muslim, Roman Catholic, Tlingit (Native American) had informed their lives with respect to whatever life experiences they were inspired to share. It was a very powerful and moving series.

We therefore gave some thought as to how to continue to have presenters draw from their experiences in ways which would help everyone present to clarify their own thought. Given the divided state of the country, we decided to ask our presenters to share stories of the fears each of them has had to deal with that have impacted their public life. Our hope is that everyone present will have their thought clarified, leading to better understanding of how each of us faces our own fears.

- September 21 - Reid Burdick
- October 5— Anne Wernau
- October 19 — Joanne Sheehan
- November 2— Kevin Booker
- November 16— Bill Foster
- November 30— Adam Spreccace
- December 14 — Wrap-up

## Evening Schedule

5:30PM Evening Prayer 6:00PM Supper  
7-8:30PM Conversation

*If you need child care, please let us know by  
7:00PM Wednesday.*



# Welcome to the FRESH Urban Farm and Education Center

Located at the corner of Mercer and Williams Streets



## *From the FRESH flyer:* Take a Tour With Us

- (1) The Greenhouse, a three season structure to start seedlings and extend our growing capacity as the weather gets colder.
- (2) Community garden beds, there are actually 60 of these that FRESH rents out for \$10 - \$20 to families and individuals for the season.
- (3) Kids are welcome. In addition to what you can see, we have a Kid's wild area on site too.
- (4) Our pavilion is an outdoor classroom, cafeteria and youth free expression zone.
- (5) Is that smoke I see? Piping hot farm fresh pizza coming right up from our wood fired pizza oven.
- (6) In 100 additional beds, FRESH youth, staff and volunteers grow thousands of pounds of produce and fruit to share with the community.
- (7) We have a rain catchment system to provide gardeners with water for plants and to conserve resources.
- (8) The gate is open; come on in! All are welcome!



Youth Program Participants  
show off their completion  
certificates

FRESH staff Julie Garay and Sean  
O'Brien show off Boer pumpkins



The Summer Youth Crew  
in downtown New London





## The FRESH Scholarship

*A Decade of Growth*

by Barbara Barrett

The FRESH Scholarship seed was planted in 2008 when a group of us who were associated with FRESH (Laura Burfoot, Anne Scheibner, Doug and Barbara Barrett) had a vision of providing encouragement, incentive, and financial aid to young people who had worked with FRESH for a significant amount of time and who were entering the next phase of their lives as high school graduates interested in furthering their education. We established the scholarship, tutored wonderful young people, drove them to various colleges, and attempted to wade through the dreaded FAFSA financial aid forms with them. Our first scholarship awards were in September 2008. We quickly became aware of our inadequacies in helping our recipients navigate financial aid, transportation needs, and support while in college.

Enter Higher Edge (then called College Access Program) in 2012. This successful program works with high school seniors for a full year helping them navigate the intricacies of applying to college and also maintains contact and provides support throughout the college years. Just what the doctor ordered and available to our FRESH students! Several FRESH seniors have participated in Higher Edge.

In the summer of 2016, we made the decision to establish the FRESH Scholarship at the Community Foundation of Eastern CT. This means that applicants now apply on-line through the Community Foundation. Among other things, the Foundation administers the funds to the various colleges. This has made life much easier for the scholarship committee. Our job is to spread the word about the scholarship among eligible FRESH young people and encourage them to apply (mostly done by committee member and FRESH Director Alicia McAvay), raise funds, and participate with Community Foundation staff on final recommendations regarding the awarding of the scholarships.

To date, eleven students have received FRESH scholarships totaling more than \$65,000. This fall (2018) we had four applicants for the scholarship which prompted us to look outside of our own resources for new funding partners. We were able to provide two named scholarships – one in honor of Anne Scheibner's grandfather the Rev. Mark G. Paulsen. Pastor Paulsen was rector of many churches in the Midwest finally ending up at Calvary Church in Stonington. There he continued his farming experience from growing up in Iowa; he tended prodigious organic gardens during the 1930's and 40's in his rectory backyard on into his retirement.

Our second named scholarship is in honor of Paul Jakoboski who died last year. Paul was instrumental in FRESH's early years, serving on their Advisory Board and enabling them to have office space in the

Gemma E. Moran United Way/Labor Food Center after their initial summer at St. Francis House. Paul was an avid gardener himself as you can see from these photos. He and his wife Wendy developed a butterfly garden at St. Francis House as well as tending our raised bed garden and window boxes on the porch. (See *Troubadour*, Fall 2017, Vol. 19, No. 2: "Celebrating the Life and Work of Paul Jakoboski, TSSF, 1951-2017")

Thanks to all these efforts, we were able to raise enough money to give full scholarships to all four applicants. 2018, one decade from the scholarship's inception, is a year to celebrate in part because two of our four-year scholarship recipients, Aziza Littlejohn and Julie Garay, are on track to graduate from the University of North Carolina and Eastern Connecticut State University respectively. We couldn't be prouder of their hard work and tenacity. Our vision of assisting promising young people with their on-going education has become a reality.

Barbara Barrett and her husband Doug have both served on the St. Francis House board. They have been active in support of FRESH from the early days at St. Francis House. They live in Mystic and are active members of St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

*Archive photo: Barbara and Doug with FRESH participants*





Paul's sister Jean responded with enthusiasm to the idea of creating a FRESH Scholarship in his memory. She sent us this photograph with the following note: "This sounds wonderful. I am attaching [this photo] of Paul creating a garden with Wendy on his parents property after they passed. He had the tallest fence poles, liked to do things big. He involved friends and family in creating it. It was a garden that supported a sense of community. The smell of the newly turned soil, time in the sun, connection to Mother Earth was grounding and nourishing for all of us. Gardens not only bring food and flowers but joy in the preparation, the tending, the harvesting and the storage."

## The Paul Jakoboski FRESH Scholarship

Paul was passionate about food "made with love," food security and justice. He was passionate in his support of FRESH and its outreach to young people to learn how to grow and distribute fresh food to seniors and families in underserved neighborhoods, to learn how the food system works and to develop community gardens.



Paul meditating in the Butterfly Garden next to St. Francis House that he and Wendy created.



### To support the Paul Jakoboski FRESH Scholarship

Send a check payable to "CFECT" with "Paul Jakoboski FRESH Scholarship" in the memo to: The Community Foundation of Eastern CT, 68 Federal Street, New London, CT 06320

— OR —

Visit the Community Foundation's website to give online: <https://www.cfect.org/Donors/Our-Funds/Give-Now> Search "FRESH Scholarship" in the Select Fund box, and include Paul's name in the memorial gifts space.

*Thank you*

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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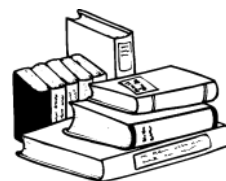
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## Book Sale



*Book donations welcomed*

**Saturday, October 13**  
**10 AM to 3 PM**

30 Broad Street  
New London

Fiction, Philosophy, Theology,  
Poetry, Surprises...