

Indian River garden grows skills, helps those in need

A gardening program at Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility helps to teach youth inmates skills as they work to turn their lives around, and local organizations benefit from the harvest.

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Charles Danzy (right), a youth specialist at Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility, works with juvenile inmates in the facility's garden as they grow produce that is donated to local charities.

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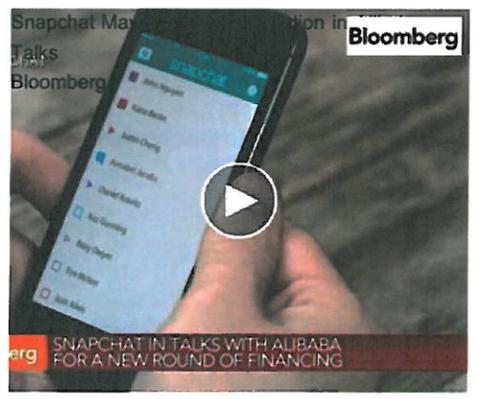
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Christina McCune
IndeOnline.com staff writer
Posted Aug. 1, 2014 @ 7:00 am

MASSILLON

When one of the 19-year-olds at Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility gets outside to work the soil, pick vegetables and tend to the garden that he can see growing just a few feet outside of a window of his mental health unit, he feels at peace.



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accredited high school, and many take vocational classes.

The gardening program, which is overseen by youth specialist Charles Danzy, is among numerous extracurricular activities that keep inmates busy, and teach them useful skills as they work to turn their lives around. This particular program benefits local residents in need because vegetables from the garden are donated to organizations including the Stark County Hunger Task Force, which received a bag of produce earlier this week.

An 18-year-old inmate who built a wooden entertainment center in woodworking class while he's been at the facility said he didn't have much experience gardening previously. He remembers visiting a garden as part of a fifth-grade school field trip, but he jumped right in to gardening when he was presented with the opportunity.

"I can do this at home and start this for my mom, that's what I want to do," he said.

HELPING THE HUNGRY

The garden on the grounds of the facility at 2775 Indian River Road SW measures roughly 20-by-30 feet and has been worked by inmates the past three years. It has neat rows of corn, collard greens, tomatoes, squash, different kinds of peppers, zucchini, onions and okra.

This year, about a dozen inmates have worked on the garden and at least three have been particularly keen on taking care of the crops the past couple of months. They are able to get out to work on the garden two days a week — usually on the weekends.

Danzy has a passion for gardening and he said it's rewarding and educational for the youths to plant a small seed and weeks later pluck a ripe tomato off the vine, or a cob of corn off a stalk and donate the harvest to a local agency.

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"It's something different, something to get my mind off of things," said the inmate, whom The Independent was asked by the youth prison not to identify. "We do it to help people in need."

He is quiet about his work, but seems to naturally have a green thumb since he learned about gardening as a child from his grandmother. The high school graduate plans to attend college and study computer science, and "I plan on having a garden when I get out," he said.

Indian River is one of three juvenile correctional facilities run by the Ohio Department of Youth Services. The Massillon facility houses 116 youth and the average stay is 10 months. The majority of the juveniles are students at the

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7:00 AM



World Golf Championships

Firestone Country Club

11:00 AM



Butterfly Walks

The Wilderness Center

11:30 AM



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Stark County District Library Main Librar

1:00 PM



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"You're weaving lessons in the activities they're interested in," said Superintendent James Darnell.

Some of the youths are impulsive and these activities teach patience and thinking ahead, he explained.

Unit Manager Gloria Robbins said she has seen a positive change in the behaviors of the youth who participate in the gardening program. To be allowed to participate in the garden and other programs is an incentive for maintaining good behavior, she said.

It's not only juvenile inmates who are encouraged to apply skills and give back to the

community. The Stark County Jail had a gardening program last year, and produce also was donated to the Stark County Hunger Task Force. Because of the wet spring the garden was on hiatus this year, said Sheriff George T. Maier. He said he hopes they can have a garden again next year.

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