



Ripens Futures  
Boulder, Colorado

April 30, 2015

The Community Foundation  
1123 Spruce St.  
Boulder, CO 80302

To: The Community Trust Review Board

According to the Emergency Family Assistance Association's Annual Report homeless families with children comprise forty-two percent of Boulder County Colorado's entire homeless population. Social psychology researchers discovered homeless families are the fastest growing sect. The assistance of the Community Foundation's Community Trust will enable the Ripens Futures agriculture job skills program to launch. Academic researchers also discovered job skills programs are an essential tool for helping the homeless find job stability and a route towards stable housing. Together we will directly address the needs of the homeless family and at-risk homeless family community with a unique job skills program.

Ripens Futures shares the same vision as The Community Foundation in improving the quality of life in the Boulder County community. The Ripens Futures program seeks to address three of the same core goals of the Community Foundation: Basic Needs, Children & Youth, and Education and Health & Human Services.

Ripens Futures addresses these needs through the development of a job skills program that includes the entire family. Ripens Futures will open a special space in Hawthorn Gardens, a community garden located centrally in the city of Boulder along a public transit route. Families with children are invited to participate in building a sustainable vegetable garden. The program is designed to provide the service of job skills building without limiting families who cannot obtain childcare. The children and adults will all benefit from the therapeutic experience of working in a garden, learning about cultivation, food sourcing, and nutrition, while adults build their resumes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind Regards,

Jenna K Keenan-Alspector  
Ripens Futures, President



## **ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND**

Ripens Futures saw the need in the Boulder County community for additional job skills programs for the homeless and jobless/underemployed<sup>1</sup>. Ripens Futures sought to assist families facing homelessness. In the process of developing a program to assist this group a barrier to participation was identified: participants' inability to find and afford childcare. Since then children have become an important part of this program. Not only do parents suffer from severe stress, but children often become angry and emotional when faced with homelessness<sup>2</sup>. Gardening has been proven to be therapeutic as it stimulates all five senses and is a positive means of self-gratification and confidence<sup>1</sup>. We want to help ease the stresses families face while providing an opportunity for adults to build their resumes. This program is more than a job skills program, it is a way for homeless and at risk homeless adults and children to have a safe environment and be engaged in the community and share time with one and other.

Hawthorn Community Gardens has been selected as the location for Ripens Futures to begin. It is important for the program to be visible to the community and for participants to be integrated in their community. The community is less likely to discriminate against homeless families when they better understand who the homeless are<sup>3</sup>. Hawthorn gardens is centrally located with access to key resources including water and community tools. Hawthorn Gardens is also home to other community programs including ¡Cultiva! youth group, horticulture therapy, and the children's peace garden.

The Ripens Futures garden will operate as follows:

The Ripens Futures will be open from 10AM-7PM each day to accommodate all schedules. The Ripens Futures volunteers will plan the daily activities. We will be the custodians of our garden and be the primary instructors, teaching gardening basics, nutrition, and food sourcing. We will have a variety of crops that are quick growing and that are the ingredients in our participants' favorite foods so the garden is diverse and exciting to work in. Children within the involved families of the program will participate in projects such as painting garden and vegetable signs, rock art, and butterfly feeders. The children will also be engaged in achieving similar educational goals such as basic gardening knowledge and a better understanding of how food gets to the table.

## **GOALS**

Ripens Futures has many programmatic goals:

1. Provide positive job skills training for homeless families and at-risk homeless families without requiring the need for childcare.
2. Involve the entire family and provide therapeutic benefits for adults and children.
3. Provide a safe space for families to collaborate.
4. Expand participants' knowledge of food, health, and nutrition and ultimately distribute all food grown in the gardens to participants supporting generally healthier lives<sup>4</sup>.



## PROGRAM BUDGET

Item	Cost
Space at Hawthorn Gardens For One Year: 400 square feet	100.00
Access to Water	0.00
Access to Shared Community Tools	0.00
100 Customized T-Shirts	650.00
Budget for Miscellaneous Supplies & the Unexpected	250.00
<b>Total Program Budget</b>	<b>\$1,000.00</b>

Ripens Futures has developed a reasonable budget to launch the program. The table above details the costs necessary to launch Ripens Futures. Seeking to be sustainable and generate income we have added a budget for t-shirts that will be used to negotiate advertisement space with local vendors in exchange for materials. Local hardware stores such as McGuckin hardware and local farms such as Pachamama and Isabelle Farms will help supply us with supplies including soil, plants, seeds, compost, gardening gloves, and other miscellaneous necessities. This initial investment helps build partnership with local businesses and helps advertise the Ripens Futures program. By having a small product, like t-shirts, we can generate a small stream of revenue by selling them to community members the Boulder Farmers Market to cover unexpected costs.

## EVALUATION

Ripens Futures is a new program. As we launch our first season with the aid of the Community Foundation we will evaluate the successful implementation in two ways:

First, we will measure Ripens Futures' success based on participants' attendance. We understand the chaotic nature of everyone's lives, especially those who are homeless. However, the major purpose of the job skills program is to build relationships with the members so we can support them as references in their job applications. We are a flexible program but require schedule changes to be communicated. This reasonable approach makes attendance a great measure for programmatic success. We will measure and report this metric by keeping simple daily records of timely attendance. In the first year regular participation of three families will be considered successful. After three years regular participation of seven families will be considered a success.

Second, we will measure Ripens Futures' success on the participants' and volunteers' willingness to continue working in the program. The measure of this metric will be tallied through future participation surveys distributed mid-way through the summer and at the end of the fall season. By asking participants what their expected future participation will be, and if they would prefer to not continue we can make adjustments early on. Without the buy-in of our team the program will not persist. As described in the Inclusiveness section below we have a participatory design approach so all stakeholders have a valued opinion that can be incorporated into Ripens Futures.

## COLLABORATION

Ripens Futures success relies on the strength of community partnership. Bridge House & EFAA are the ideal partners for the Ripens Futures project. Both organizations support Ripens Futures. The Bridge House is a successful organization helping the homeless by providing meals in their



community kitchens, providing case services, mental health services, job skills training, and they have started a successful ready to work program. Bridge House is looking to continually expand their Ready to Work program and seek new avenues for transitional employment<sup>5</sup>. EFAA has been a staple for families struggling in and out of homelessness since 1918. EFAA has basic needs and housing programs and casework services to provide homeless families find and maintain stability<sup>6</sup>.

The Ripens Futures program has sought out partnership with Bridge House and EFAA to engage in a participatory design process. It is important for these major players in the Boulder County homeless culture to provide insight, best practices, and to accommodate the needs of our homeless families. Additionally, by having Ripens Futures embedded into these organizations we will have support to help the program succeed for the long term.

Ripens Futures will also seek to collaborate with ¡Cultiva! throughout the program's operation. ¡Cultiva! encourages their members to be involved with the Boulder County community by addressing food and hunger issues along with community education and community service projects<sup>7</sup>. ¡Cultiva!'s pre-existing garden know-how and mission to be a supportive part of community projects makes this an easy partnership to build.

## **INCLUSIVENESS**

Ripens Futures seeks to be inclusive of the entire community in Boulder County Colorado. Ripens Futures will do this by first, collaborating with the families by including participants in the program design and garden operation. Including the homeless families in the participatory design process is crucial for programmatic success. Participatory research inclusion helps change the ideology of the oppressed and makes the best and most just designs<sup>8</sup>. We want to empower our participants to take a stake in their future and own the garden space.

Ripens Futures specifically targets homeless families with children, however we recognize that this program can be valuable for other community members. It is critical to not be discriminatory by design. For example, EFAA is primarily an organization that assists families in emergencies it does not just assist homeless families but also families who are at risk of facing homelessness. Therefore, we will use this concept and work to incorporate all interested individuals including families struggling to find jobs, families struggling to maintain households, and other disadvantaged youth.

Finally, Ripens Futures will achieve a high standard of inclusiveness through the coordination of weekly Reflection meetings. These meetings are designed for all participants to contribute feedback and ideas including that of staff, volunteers, and homeless family participants. In order to include the voices of all members we will ask those who cannot attend for feedback and subsequently disseminate the topics discussed.

## **BOARD/GOVERNANCE**

Ripens Futures board will be made up of key collaborators and community members. Jenna Keenan-Alspector is the founder and President of Ripens Futures and will sit on the board. In addition members from Bridge House and EFAA will be sought out as well including: Bridge House's employment specialist Tim Arnold and EFAA's Director of Programs Elizabeth



Freedman. These two individuals have assisted in the initial planning of Ripens Futures and are great leaders in the community. We will also seek a leader of ¡Cultiva! to join our board as they have great experience in Hawthorn Community Gardens and integrating programs in the space.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteers for the Ripens Futures program will be sought out through the partnership with Bridge House, EFFA, and the Hawthorn Community Garden members. Ripens Futures has identified there are many individuals in the Boulder County community who participate in volunteer positions for a variety of durations. Ripens Futures most long lasting volunteers will be members in the Hawthorn Gardens as they have presence in the space and have a vested interest to make the community space rich and successful. We will attract volunteers with incentives such as healthy snacks on site, and ask for their involvement in planning to make sure they feel like integral members.

Within a typical year we will require the most volunteer activity during the growing season in the spring, summer, and fall seasons. The requirement for our volunteers is simply the willingness to participate for at least four hours once a week. All technical skills can be trained onsite.

Volunteers will be responsible for helping with the daily operation and maintenance of the garden. These activities include: confirming participant attendance, overseeing children activities, tracking and caring for tools, providing tutorials for how to care for the plants, discussing the vegetables in the garden in terms of their needs and nutritional value and how to use them in the kitchen. We also will rely on the volunteers to help maintain the garden for any of the participants missed time. Volunteers will help close the space for the winter months.

## **PLANNING**

Ensuring the longevity of this program is crucial. It is worse to start and then cease operations let down participants who have started to gain the benefits of a program like ours than it is to never have started in the first place. To plan for continued success in the next three years we will seek to deepen our relationship with the community collaborators Bridge House, EFAA, and ¡Cultiva!. By fostering great relationships we will have an easier time continuing the program in terms of attracting both volunteers and participants.

In addition to weekly meetings we will hold monthly meetings to discuss the successes and future needs. This will be a space to address issues and create a list of lessons learned. Again, we realize how beneficial it is to have participatory design. Ripens Futures leadership does not want to be the only voice in the program's development and seeks to rely heavily on collaborators, volunteers, and participants to have vision for future growth in addition to the short term projects.

We also seek to expand Ripens Futures so we can extend participation to more families. We will need more land and resources to realize this vision, to do this we will be planning how to implement a sustainable Community Supported Agriculture program that generates revenue. This model works and can be seen in the success of our neighbor ¡Cultiva! and as realized in the Homeless Garden Project in Santa Cruz, CA<sup>9</sup>.



## REFERENCES

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<sup>2</sup> Hinton, Stephanie, and Cassel, Darlinda. 2013. "Exploring the Lived Experiences of Homeless Families." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 41 (6): 457–463. Accessed April 10, 2015. doi:10.1007/s10643-012-0562-5.

<sup>3</sup> L. Lei, 2013. "Employment, Day Labor, and Shadow Work Among Homeless Assistance Clients in the United States," *Journal Of Poverty* 1 (3): 253-272. Accessed February 8, 2015. doi: 10.1080/10875549.2013.804479

<sup>4</sup> Yousey, Yvonne, Jacquelyn Leake, Melissa Wdowik, and Janice Janken. 2007. "Education in a Homeless Shelter to Improve the Nutrition of Young Children." *Public Health Nursing* 24 (3): 249-255. Accessed April 10, 2015. doi:10.1111/j.1525-1446.2007.00631.x.

<sup>5</sup> "Community Table Kitchen," Bridge House, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://boulderbridgehouse.org/what-we-do/community-table-kitchen/>

<sup>6</sup> "Local Needs," Emergency Family Assistance Association, accessed March 4, 2015, <http://www.efaa.org/local-needs/#education-advocacy>

<sup>7</sup> "The ¡Cultiva! Youth Project," Growing Gardens, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.growinggardens.org/the-cultiva-youth-project>

<sup>8</sup> Yeich, Susan. 1996. "Grassroots Organizing with Homeless People: A Participatory Research Approach." *Journal of Social Issues* 52 (1): 111-121

<sup>9</sup> "History of the Project," Homeless Garden Project, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.homelessgardenproject.org/whatwedo/history.php>