

Cultivating children's love of learning, healthy food,



and nature through garden-based education.

Highlights of 2016

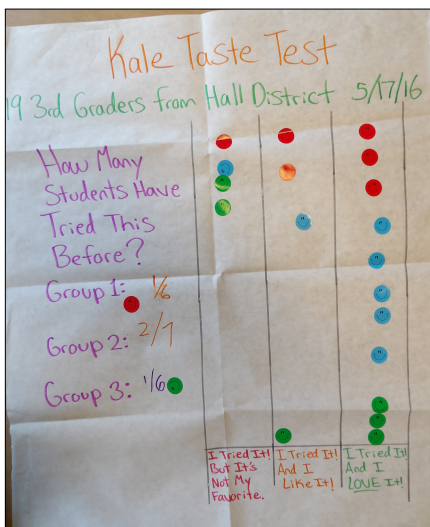
We had a fantastic 2016 season of growing program impacts for children here in Santa Cruz County and across the country. We asked every educator who attended one of our trainings this year how many children they work with, and they reported a total of more than 400,000! We are proud and grateful to share the experience and vision of Life Lab's founders and many staff and partners since 1979 with teachers everywhere to make healthy, inspiring garden-based learning available to so many kids.

Locally, the beautiful changes at Amesti Elementary School that teacher Margaret Rosa described at our Spring Benefit Brunch in June have continued for the more than 600 students there, as our current FoodCorps service member makes Amesti her base for this school year. We are also working closely with Starlight Elementary, and a new gift at the end of the year will help us expand to Radcliff Elementary in downtown Watsonville, where the students are 96% free and reduced lunch eligible and 86% English language learners. Our work with PVUSD on curriculum and professional development for teachers is advancing, too, and our education director, Whitney Cohen, is part of a team developing a district-wide



Environmental Literacy Plan to include garden-based learning. We are hoping to pilot enriched summer learning programs with PVUSD in 2017, too, and looking forward to expanding our Watsonville School Garden Crew from five to 12 college interns soon. Overall, our Pajaro Valley programs served more than 2,700 students from 10 elementary schools in 2016. In tasting assessments integrated into our Blooming

Classroom programs, 48% of nearly 500 students reported trying a new fruit or vegetable for the first time (beets, kale, tangerines, chard...), and 68% liked or loved them!



Soquel Union School District is also excited to dive into garden-based learning now with some new funding sources, and our director of partnerships and programs, John Fisher, hosted a meeting here at our Garden Classroom with their team in December, including the superintendent and assistant superintendent, to consult on planning and program development. This is a great opportunity to expand long-term garden-based learning in mid-county, and we have great partners for it now. We are also looking into the possibility of creating a countywide position in partnership with the County Office of Education to help all 10 local school districts coordinate garden-based education resources and training, following a great conversation with County Superintendent Michael Watkins.

Having shifted our Garden Classroom field trip program to focus more on higher need local schools, more than a third of the 116 classes and 2,900 students that visited last school year enjoyed free or half-price programs, following years of rising demand from further and further outside of our county. Now, Bay View, Gault, De Laveaga and other high need local schools have greater opportunities to bring their students here, despite limited budgets and competition from other schools. Overall, our local programs in Watsonville and Santa Cruz now provide free and half price access for 48% of classes participating from more than 50 local schools.



Life Lab summer camp has a deep impact on children's lives, and we have been working to make that experience more available in recent years, too. This year, we welcomed more than 290 children ages 4 to 14 to our day camps, including a new leadership program for 12-14 year-olds as assistant counselors for the younger Garden Sprouts (4-6 year olds). This is twice as many campers as we had just five years ago, creating fun, inspiring learning and growth opportunities in many more young lives. Camp income helps sustain our work, and 5% of the revenue collected goes to scholarships for lower resource camp families.

“The SGSO Leadership Institute provided fantastic resources and set us up to lead effective trainings. We are already communicating with other participants around the U.S. to share resources and questions.”

In addition to providing 40 days of educator workshops and presentations here and across the U.S. in 2016, we ended our training year with a first-ever national School Garden Support Organization Institute here in early December. Twenty-seven program leaders from 17 SGSO's in 14 states around the U.S. spent a week with Whitney and John, receiving training in core garden-based learning best practices and sharing their varied program and regional support models with us and each other. This peer learning community will continue in 2017 through expanded communications of our National School Garden Network, and we are excited to partner with Whole Kids Foundation again to host a second annual SGSO Institute in 2017.

It was a great year for sharing our unique Life Lab curricular resources with educators near and far, too, to help them connect children with standards-based science, math, and language arts, as well as nutrition, nature and each other in gardens. Amid record sales overall, one stood out: Providence Public Schools ordered *The Growing Classroom* for all 625 of their K-5 teachers to teach hands-on science this year.

We're also excited to see the “Food, What?!” youth empowerment program grow into its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2017 after 10 years of incubation and incredible growth within Life Lab. We look forward to continued partnership with FoodWhat and the UCSC Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems as we share this very special land and make its inspiring effects available to people of all ages.

Vital work is happening behind the scenes here, too, as financial management consultants help us upgrade our accounting systems and develop new tools to track current finances and plan for the future with greater clarity. Our board of directors is also welcoming great new members this winter and increasing their support for our strategic vision and the governance capacity we need to accomplish it. These and other efforts are strengthening Life Lab organizationally, which will help us sustain our current programs and expand strategically in the coming years.

Lots to be thankful for and excited about. We hope you are excited about what this work is creating in the world and the long-term returns for children nationwide. Thank you for being part of it with us!