A CELEBRATION OF SHARED ABUNDANCE

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in early June, about 75 members of the Northampton Survival Center, Abundance Farm, and Congregation B’nai Israel communities gathered for the first-ever “Celebration of Shared Abundance.” The event was conceived as an opportunity for the Center’s Bread & Butter Club members and special guests of the Farm to come experience and delight in the fruits of this unique partnership. With tours of the Center and the Farm, and a fascinating presentation by local historian Laurie Sanders on the history of the shared land (see inside), guests learned about the project’s modest early goals and the surprising and wonderful directions the collaboration has taken.

Mark your calendars now: Next year’s event, open to all, will be on June 2, 2019, from 3 to 5 p.m.

The Farm was started in 2014 with the threefold mission of justice, community, and education, keeping the needs and wishes of Survival Center clients at the forefront. Abundance Farm Director Rabbi Jacob Fine had an inclusive vision in designing every aspect of the Farm—from what would be planted to how it would be harvested. Over time, leaders from the Farm and the Center refined messaging, signage, and a strategy to enable clients to feel welcome and become involved in planting, weeding, harvesting, and other aspects of shared ownership.

Now the partnership has evolved and expanded to encompass teenage volunteers from the Farm and interns at the Center who introduce clients to the Pick-Your-Own program, and a public health graduate student who developed materials to help integrate families with children into the Abundance Farm community. Survival Center clients have brought over plants to contribute to the garden, led workshops on composting techniques, and rallied to support the rebuilding of the Farm’s shed after the original structure was destroyed by arson.

“Truly inspiring on so many levels. A beautiful job on a beautiful farm in service of a holy cause. And we all get to feel part of it—our little corner of the planet doing good.”

—Pamela Schwartz, guest at the event

PIGWEED: INSIGHTS INTO WHAT’S “VALUABLE”

A family of refugees from Rwanda were welcomed to Abundance Farm and invited to pick strawberries and peas, for which they were politely pleased, but not overly enthusiastic. Then a woman in the family noticed a patch of what we know as “pigweed” growing nearby. She became excited and explained that this was “dodo,” a type of amaranth that is a favorite leafy green in Rwanda. Her eyes lit up as she animatedly began pointing out other familiar plants—staples from her homeland that she hadn’t been able to find in our local grocery stores. Farm Manager Rose Cherneff now ensures that these greens are regularly in supply to provide nourishment and the comfort of home.
THE BENEFICIAL BLurring OF LINES

Every January, local sculptor extraordinaire James Kitchen and the Chesterfield Council on Aging organize a benefit concert—the Hilltown Spectacular—for the Center’s Goshen Pantry. Talented local musicians join James in entertaining a delighted audience from the surrounding communities.

This year the Northampton Survival Center was designated to receive proceeds from a three-day silent auction at the Paradise City Arts Festival over Memorial Day weekend. With the help of over 100 artists donating their work, including our friend James Kitchen who recommended us as beneficiaries, we raised over $8,000 at the event.

Northampton Survival Center volunteers, Elizabeth Armstrong, Wendy Parrish, and Margaret Miller, competing as team “Thought for Food,” joined in the fun and challenges at the annual Northampton Education Foundation Spelling Bee in March, a fundraiser supporting the students and teachers of the Northampton Public Schools.

We thank Rose for her words above. At the Center, we often experience this beneficial blurring of lines on an institutional level—a network of organizations and individuals who simultaneously have gifts to offer and needs that others can meet. Shown here are some examples.

“Here at Abundance Farm we are trying to blur the lines between who is giving and who is receiving. That’s the world we want to be creating—where every individual is seen as a whole human, not defined solely by what they need and what they can offer.”

—Rose Cherneff, Abundance Farm Manager

COMMUNITIES WE SERVE:

Chesterfield
Cummington
Florence
Hadley
Huntington
Northampton
Plainfield
South Hadley
Southampton
Westhampton
Williamsburg
Worthington

RECONNECTING WITH OUR ROOTS
A presentation at the Abundance Farm event

Laurie Sanders, Co-Executive Director of Historic Northampton, illuminated the history of the land that now houses both Abundance Farm and the Survival Center. Back in the 1820s, the site was home to the city’s “poor farm” and “poor house”—built to accommodate those “worthy poor” who were unable to work and considered deserving of assistance, versus those who were able-bodied “sturdy beggars.” Echoes of these archaic expressions can still be heard in modern-day discussions of need.

Tracing the history of the land and the quality of its soil to glacial activity, Sanders explained the challenges of farming on the sandy parcel, particularly after some of the richest farmland was taken to expand the railroad in the late 1800s. Still, with enrichment from decaying leaves and added compost scraps, the parcel has been rehabilitated into productive and life-giving land that now supports this extraordinary farm.

Local community leaders came together in May to support Cancer Connection through its “Thrifty Fashion Show” fundraiser. Survival Center Executive Director Heidi Nortonsmith was one of many who modeled wonderful outfits showcasing the clothing from the thrift store, while others helped with music, video, and photography.

Historic Northampton showcased an exhibit starting in May, “Single Room Occupancy: Portraits & Stories from Northampton Lodging, 1976–2016.” The work of the Northampton Survival Center was highlighted, and several clients were featured in the photographs. In conjunction with this exhibition, Claire Dacey, a local award-winning folk singer/songwriter, performed for Arts Night Out at Historic Northampton, collecting donations for several local organizations aiding those in need, including the Survival Center.

WHAT DID PICK-YOUR-OWN LOOK LIKE LAST SUMMER?
Abundance Farm held Pick-Your-Own twice a week from May through September, offering free vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers to all clients.

685 total visits from Survival Center clients

Average of 40 client visitors per week

Approximately 2,280 pounds picked during the summer

PICK-YOUR-OWN

Northampton Survival Center volunteer Cher Willems leads a tour of our produce area.
WEAR YOUR SUPPORT ON YOUR LAPEL

Have you noticed a friend or neighbor wearing one of our bright new carrot pins on their blouse or jacket? We’ve just distributed these to members of our “Bread & Butter Club”—those donors who, through regular monthly or weekly gifts, lay the critical foundation of our annual fundraising. With more than 300 households participating, “B&B” donations comprise over 15% of our yearly budget, providing stability that allows us to innovate and explore new approaches to meet our clients’ ever-changing needs. Would you like to join the Club?

We’d gladly welcome your participation, and in turn, you’ll receive a pin to wear proudly to assist us in reaching others in the community who may need help connecting with our services. Signing up is easy using the enclosed donation card.

THREE NEW BOARD MEMBERS BRING A BROAD ARRAY OF EXPERIENCES AND TALENTS

Mikala Hammonds owns THELÔ Home and Modern Wellness on Main Street in Northampton. With a background in graphic design and a certification as a health coach from the Institute of Integrative Nutrition, Mikala has opened successful retail stores in New York City and Concord, Massachusetts. She lives in Northampton with her husband, Jay.

Michael Skillicorn began working with local food and farm initiatives in Western Mass after spending years with a fair trade coffee co-op in Peru. His experience includes running a mobile farmer’s market in Springfield and serving on the Board of the Quabbin Harvest Cooperative in Orange. He now works as Director of Programs at Grow Food Northampton.

Ellen Frank is the Executive Director at Lander-Grinspoon Academy. She also serves on the Abundance Farm Advisory Board, and has over two decades of experience in finance and fundraising. Ellen, her husband, her three boys, and their dog Panko, live in Northampton.