



# Common Threads Farm and School Garden Collective

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## Overview of Common Threads

### Mission and Vision

*Recall that whatever lofty things you might accomplish today,  
you will do them only because you first ate something that grew out of dirt.*

- Barbara Kingsolver

Wouldn't it be awesome if everything kids learned about food when they were young set them up for a life of healthy habits?

And wouldn't it be great if kids were always fed foods that helped them to achieve their superhero potential?

When kids get excited about healthy foods (especially ones that they've helped grow and cook), they make better choices.

### **Our mission...**

Common Threads connects kids to healthy food, in the garden, in the kitchen and at the table.

### **Our vision...**

- All children are given the resources, information, and experiences they need to make healthy food choices every day
- The foods that kids are served at school set them up for a life of healthy eating.
- Healthy food and healthy food education in schools become an expected norm, understood as an integral part of any basic, good education.

### **At Common Threads, we garden, cook, and eat healthy food with kids because:**

- It's important – In a time of obesity, diabetes, and the potentially negative impacts of farming practices on the environment, let's face it--raising kids who think carefully about their daily food choices really matters!
- It's fun – We haven't yet met the child who isn't delighted to pull a beet out of the ground, eat the delicious soup she helped cook, or gently hold a newborn turkey.
- It's a great way to learn – Gardening and cooking are a great context for teaching science, math, nutrition, social studies, language arts and more.
- Gardens grow good people – Patience, teamwork, care for living things, connection and community are among the most important things growing in our gardens!

### History and Program Areas

Founded in 2006 and based in Bellingham, Washington, Common Threads is a grassroots 501 (c) (3) non-profit agency with an active Board of Directors and many hard-working volunteers.

The majority of program participants are elementary school students ages 5 -12, though we also work with children as young as two and into their teens. In each of our programs, children plant, tend, harvest, cook, eat, and, in some instances, sell produce at EBT (food stamp) accessible farm stands.

The “Common Threads” throughout our programs are a commitment to:

- Food Competency - Knowing how to grow and prepare healthful, delicious food.
- Food Literacy - Understanding how daily food choices impact the health of our bodies, our community, and the environment.
- Food Equity – Working toward financial, geographic, and experiential access to healthful, nutritious, culturally appropriate food for all
- Youth Empowerment – Engaging youth with life skills that include patience, teamwork, delayed gratification, learning from failure, and stewardship for living things.
- Environmental Stewardship – Connecting children in joyful, caring ways with their daily neighborhood and school environments as a foundation for forming connections with the larger global environment.

2015 is Common Threads’ ninth year of gardening and cooking with children and seventh year of connecting kids with healthy food through cooking and gardening *in schools*. Our current success working with over 3400 children each year is a reflection of our long-term investment in relationships at a student, family, classroom, school building, and school district level.

Increasingly, Common Threads is recognized as the “go-to” community resource for seed-to-table education. In addition to our work in schools, we run summer camp programs at the Outback Farm and actively seek out partnerships with community organizations that target services to low-income and/or high need populations. We pride ourselves on always asking what the next innovation might be to engage children’s curiosities and passions for developing life-long healthy eating habits.

We have strong partnerships with Western Washington University, the Whatcom Volunteer Center, and AmeriCorps. These partnerships have been instrumental in our ability to provide high quality, cost-effective services to a great number of young people.

### **School-Based Gardens and Food Education**

- What: Coordinated leadership and support for school gardens in Whatcom County. Expanding to include classroom and after school cooking programs as resources are available.
- Where: We currently partner with Alderwood, Birchwood, Carl Cozier, Columbia, Geneva, Happy Valley, Parkview, Roosevelt, Silver Beach, and Sunnyland Elementary Schools and

Whatcom Middle School (Bellingham); Kendall Elementary (Mt. Baker), and Assumption Catholic School.

- Since When: The School Garden Collective launched in the Fall of 2009 with six member schools, and has been growing ever since!
- Number of Kids Served: In 2014 we served over 3200 children.
- Funding: Each school's PTA currently pays a membership fee, additional support comes from grant funds.
- Staffing: Seasonal garden educators, each of whom works with 1-3 schools, AmeriCorps service members, and *lots* of volunteers.
- Vision: Every school in Whatcom County that wants a garden has one that is sustained and supported over the long run, and well integrated into the culture and curriculum of the school. Schools understand and embrace food from seed to table as a context for exciting, authentic, meaningful learning across the curriculum.

### **Outback Farm Camps and Classes**

- What: After school and summer time camp style programs
- Where: The Outback Farm at WWU
- Since When: These programs began in 2007 (on Lummi Island.), moved to Bobbibrook Farm in Fairhaven in 2010, and then to the current location at WWU in 2015.
- Number of Kids Served: Up to 24 kids in any given program – total kids served for 2015 will be around 120.
- Funding: Fee for service, all on a need-based sliding scale and donations
- Staffing: Core staff plus *lots* of volunteers - over 3000 hrs./yr. of volunteer support.
- Vision: Summer programs are well integrated with school year programs so that 1) we maximize service to kids throughout our community (with particular attention to serving low-income populations), 2) Common Threads services and “brand” become more consistently recognizable and 3) We continue to generate revenue from open-enrollment programs while keeping our programs accessible to all.

### **Partnership Programs**

- What: Partnerships with other social service organizations allow us to better serve low-income and/or high need populations. Partnership programs have historically been negotiated on a case by case basis. For example:
- Rebound Ray of Hope: Low income kids with emotional and behavioral challenges
- Max Higbee: Teens and adults with developmental disabilities

### Core Values -

- **We recruit good people** to all key staff and volunteer positions
- **We assume that every person has unique gifts to offer.** It is our job, organizationally, to nurture these gifts.
- **We train our staff and volunteers well** and provide on-going opportunities for learning and sharing.
- **We celebrate, support, and thank** as often as possible - *we plan to have fun together!*
- **We “Celebrate the oops!”** “Mistakes” are learning experiences. We make intentional time for debriefing accidents and near-misses.
- **We all pitch in.** Some of our dirtiest jobs are also our most important and we count on organizational leaders to model the value in all aspects of our work.
- **We communicate clear vision** so that everyone can “row in the same direction”
- **We do not micromanage** - Once the vision is set, we foster an environment where there is more than one right way to get the job done. We hold team members “able”.

### Core Expectations -

- **Creativity/Entrepreneurship** - We encourage every member of our team to bring his or her special gifts to the table - noticing and exploring opportunities for organizational growth and improvement.
- **Reliability** - Our good name depends on each person’s ability to show up when expected and to follow through on tasks as committed to.
- **Excellence** in matters large and small.
- **Passion** for the work of growing good people, healthy food and strong communities.
- **Compassion** for each other and for the people, plants, and animals we work with.
- **Timeliness** in task completion.
- **Clear communication, robust and respectful dialogue and disagreement** - the problem named is the problem solved.
- **Loyalty** - We expect all members of the Common Threads team to speak well of Common Threads within our community and to address conflicts and disagreements respectfully within the organization.
- **Ambassadorship** - we count on each person associated with Common Threads to spread the word about our programs and service.
- **Confidentiality** - if you’re not sure it’s something you should share... please err on the side of confidentiality or ask.
- **Appropriate Dress** - Clean, rip-free, and of appropriate modesty for working with children - including children whose background may cause them to be easily over-stimulated..
- **Drug Free Workplace** - please refrain from use of any legal or illegal substances that may impair your ability to fulfill assigned duties.
- **Heathy Role Modeling** - Because of the values we work to teach, we expect that Common Threads is a smoke-free environment and that staff and volunteers model appropriate food

and drink choices during their time with us.

### **Accident/Near Miss Reporting (celebrating the “oops!”)**

When in doubt, err on the side of reporting any safety concerns. This is how we all learn together! Reports should be submitted via e-mail to Program Coordinator ([jessica@commonthreadsfarm.org](mailto:jessica@commonthreadsfarm.org)) and Executive Director ([laura@commonthreadsfarm.org](mailto:laura@commonthreadsfarm.org)) as soon as possible after the incident, and certainly by the end of the day.

In the event of a true emergency, crowd control is equally as important as care for the injured individual(s). The identified program lead (could be a teacher if working in a school) will assign roles as needed.

***The Common Threads Executive Director or designee is the only media contact.*** Under no circumstance is any staff or volunteer to speak with the media with explicit permission from the Executive Director.

In the event of a true emergency, call 911. A supervisor or substitute selected by the Executive Director will accompany the worker to the doctor's office or hospital. Injured workers must go to Squalicum Urgent Care, 3015 Squalicum Parkway, Suite 120 for evaluation. In the case of a true emergency, the injured person should go immediately to the St. Joseph Hospital Emergency Room at 2901 Squalicum Parkway.

### **Phone usage**

Please keep your phones in your pockets during the time that we are teaching kids. We can make exceptions for taking photos.

### **Social Media and Photographs**

Any social media contacts, including "followers" or "friends," that are acquired through accounts (including, but not limited to email addresses, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, or other social media networks) used or created on behalf of Common Threads Farm are the property of Common Threads Farm. Photographs taken during Common Threads programs are considered to be the property of Common Threads, and may be used personally with permission only.

### **Non-compete**

Common Threads staff and volunteers agree not to engage in work that could be construed as directly in competition with their efforts at Common Threads. Staff and volunteers agree not to seek to enter a consulting/client relationship with people they have served through their work at Common Threads.

### **Non-discrimination**

Common Threads Farm does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, ability level, or sexual orientation. We view diversity as an asset rather than a liability and actively seek to cultivate an environment of tolerance and inclusion.

### **Evaluation/Grievance/Discipline**

**Evaluation** - Any employee or volunteer may - at any time - request an evaluation check in with their direct supervisor. All paid staff may expect a formal evaluation no less frequently than once per year.

**Grievance** - Any employee or volunteer with a complaint against Common Threads is encouraged first to address his or her concerns with his or her immediate supervisor. Should that not be a comfortable thing to do, the employee or volunteer may seek the support of his or her supervisor's supervisor. Any grievance may be brought to the attention of the Common Threads Board of Directors.

**Disciplinary Action** - In most cases, disciplinary action is as follows:

1. Verbal discussion of behavior that needs to be improved
2. Scheduled follow-up to insure that changes agreed upon have been made
3. If not, written warning - followed by additional follow-up meeting
4. If still no mutually acceptable remedy has been found, termination from volunteer or employment

In the event of an egregious violation of organizational values, in particular one that puts any person or animal at risk, volunteers or staff may expect immediate termination.



# Common Threads Farm and School Garden Collective

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## **Working with Food Educators in Schools**

Each Food Educator has between 1-3 schools that they work with. They are responsible for teaching classes in the garden, getting to know teachers, scheduling teachers' classes for garden time, getting to know parents, enlisting classes and volunteers to ensure the garden is well maintained, supporting and mentoring volunteers in the garden, and logging and sharing information about what they have done with the Common Threads Team.

As an intern/volunteer, you are a HUGE help to Food Educators! It can be challenging to lead a lesson in the garden for a class of 20 kids without any extra help. Kids often learn better with hands-on learning in small groups. You may be asked to:

- Bring a class out to the garden;
- Help split students into small groups;
- Lead a small group of students in an activity;
- Assist the Food Educator in leading a large group activity;
- Assist the Food Educator with maintenance of the school garden;
- Develop your own learning activity in consultation with the Food Educator

*Please stay in close touch with the Program Coordinator if you don't feel as though you're being well utilized in your position, or if you feel as though there are unreasonably high expectations of you.*

*Also, please note that on occasion classes may cancel their garden visit at the last minute due to testing, illness, etc. It is a good idea to bring homework with you in case this happens.*

## **Supporting Common Threads with Other Activities**

Getting involved in other activities at Common Threads is a great way to learn more about the organization and how nonprofits work. This is also an excellent way to share any unique gifts or talents that you may have!

Please talk to us at the beginning of your internship to identify potential ways to contribute. The Program Coordinator will also include you on the volunteer mailing list when opportunities arise.

Here are some ideas or examples of things that may come up:

- Work parties;
- Data entry;
- IT support;
- Photography or videography;
- Assistance at special events;
- Postering;
- Creating garden art;
- Incorporating music into our classroom/garden activities;
- Building projects;
- Mailings;



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- Creating educational resources;
- Writing (i.e. blog posts, press releases, etc.)
- ...what else can you offer?

### **Communication with Food Educators**

We will have a mid-way check in to make sure that the internship is fulfilling and rewarding for both of us. This may be by online survey or in-person, depending on availability.

You can check in with your Food Educator(s) on an ongoing basis - speak up if you need something! Their contact info is included at the end of this manual. Food Educator(s) will typically email you the day's plan if they haven't already spoken to you in person.

You can also come in to chat with us and have access to various resources. Email to set up an appointment time to make sure someone is in the office (located at Portable F at Whatcom Middle School).

### **Volunteer Hours**

Please ensure that you fill out a record of your volunteer hours each day you volunteer - many of you require a record for your internship, and we require a record for AmeriCorps and some of our funders. Volunteer logs are kept by the Food Educator at each school. They submit them monthly and we will enter them into our database.

### **Documentation**

As much as your job is about supporting Food Educators and working with kids at each of the schools, it is equally about documenting your successes and failures, sharing any testimonials or particularly inspiring stories, and making sure that what you've done in the garden is recorded in a way that makes it easy for anyone who follows in your footsteps to pick up the torch and keep running.

- Fill out a reflection log via Survey Monkey when it is distributed
- Communicate with the Food Educator you are paired with at each site. Be prepared to share questions, success stories, and "oops" stories. Neither your successes nor your challenges are boring. Our goal is to accelerate learning for all through sharing!
- If you've got a great photo, share the photo with the Program Coordinator, so that it can be included in blog and facebook updates.
- All accidents or injuries must be reported immediately to the Program Coordinator & Executive Director. Ask your Food Educator for help in submitting this information.