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FOSTERING A FARM COMMUNITY

IN URBAN PITTSBURG, CALIFORNIA, located outside San Francisco in the East Bay, youth who have been through foster care are learning work and life skills through a new farm program of the accredited John Muir Land Trust. Located on what was once a vacant lot in a densely populated neighborhood, the Family Harvest Farm provides employment opportunities, job skills and career development for youth as they transition out of the foster care system—typically around age 18—and into adulthood.

“The biggest issue is they lack a safety net,” says Mary Cherry, senior farm manager of Family Harvest Farm. At the farm, the youth work alongside staff and volunteer mentors to grow organic produce, some of which is given out free to the community to help alleviate food insecurity in the area, which is a USDA-designated food desert.

Cherry says her life was changed by working in a similar farming program after she left foster care herself. While she recognizes that not all Family Harvest Farm participants will want to go on to become farmers like she did—the program will help them find jobs in whatever field they are interested in—she believes there’s huge benefits to working on the land.

“I think the most healing part is being able to connect with the land in ways that are also giving back to it and not just taking from it,” says Cherry. “The hope is that they gain a sense of community and are able to have confidence going into the next steps of their life.” ☺





ADAM WEIDENBACH