

ANNUAL REPORT

Director's Letter

Friends of the Living Earth,

This year has been quite the humbling year. I am often struck by how nature gives us a nudge (and in some cases a shove) to allow us to better understand our place on this planet. With our fast cars, high speed internet, and Christmas music that starts the minute Halloween is over, it is often times easy to feel “above” or “outside” of the natural rhythms and seasons of life.



The global COVID-19 pandemic has been a leveling agent that has not only starkly reminded us that we are no match to the natural forces of life and death, but has also served as a sifting mechanism to bring all that must be honored and addressed to the surface. The last few months have exposed major deficiencies in our social structures and economic sustainability. It has exposed the grotesque inequity in access to food, resources, and health care that exists in this country. It has called us to answer some tough existential questions about who we are as a country and what we want our future communities and lives to look like. It has forced us to see that our resiliency is based on our ability to be creative and adaptable, collaborative and compassionate. It has displayed in full form what is important.

Like so many families and organizations, Living Earth Center (LEC) has adapted to the challenges and reexamined what is most important and how we can make a positive impact within our community. With economic and food insecurity surging and political and social divisiveness at an all-time high, LEC remains committed to bringing people together to share common ground. We believe that now it is not just a matter of responsibility but of collective survival - people need spaces to cultivate food as well as right relationships, people need education to bolster their ability to react with awareness and purpose as good stewards of the land, of their communities and or each other, and people need to feel a deeper sense of connection and grounding at a time that is wrought with uncertainty and transition.

We are more than “just” a Community Garden. LEC continues to serve as a Community Growing Space in both the physical, virtual, and metaphorical sense as a safe space for anyone from anywhere to come and grow and connect to the natural rhythms of nature, life, and most importantly, love.

With Gratitude,



Laura Peterson

Board of Directors

Becky Bates, Chair
Briana Baker, Vice Chair
Melissa Martensen, Treasurer
Sr. Jeanne Wingenter, Secretary
Ben Brzeski
Jeanne Grobener
Kelly Karstad
Jason Mattick
Joyce Prahm
Sr. Anna Marie Reha
Jim Vonderharr
Sr. Monica Wagner

2020 Staff

Laura Peterson - Executive Director
Amy Hunt - Program Coordinator
Martin Jacaruso - Garden Manager
Lynn Rozen - Garden Mentor
Bruno Gad - Garden Assistant

Contact

507.389.4272

livingearthcenter@ssndcp.org
www.livingearthcentermn.org

170 Good Counsel Dr
Mankato, MN 56001

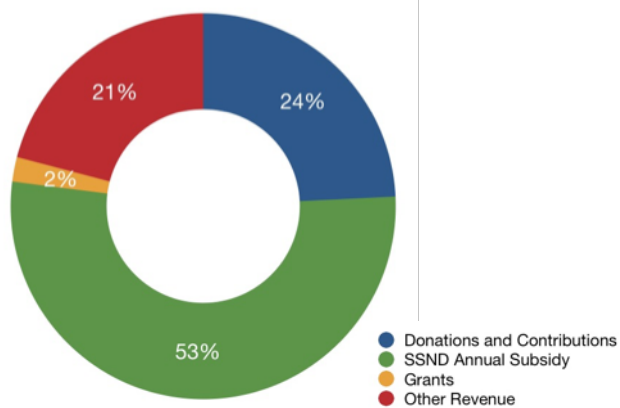


FINANCIAL STATEMENT - 2019 - 2020 FISCAL YEAR

When LEC became its own 501c3 in 2017, we knew becoming financially independent would be a long process. Along with an annual subsidy, SSND currently pays our Executive Director's salary and benefits and our office space and land for the Community Garden are in-kind donations. We are grateful for the continued support of SSND, in fact we could not operate without it. To that end, we are in the process of developing a future financial sustainability plan.

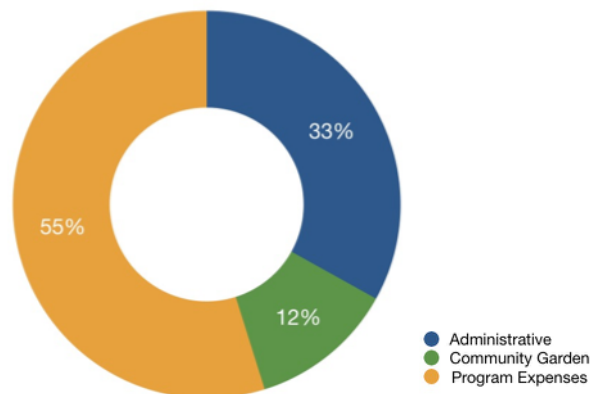
With the advent of Covid-19, our total expenditure for programming was much smaller than anticipated, with much of the expense being pushed forward to next fiscal year. Any income surplus has been invested in a "nest egg" of sorts towards our goal of future financial independence. The numbers below do not reflect our ED's salary/benefits or the in-kind donations from SSND but are our operating expenses for fiscal year August 2019 - July 2020.

INCOME



Donations and Contributions	\$16,059
SSND Annual Subsidy	\$35,000
Grants	\$1,360
Other Revenue (Program Fees and Interest)	<u>\$13,869</u>
Total Income	\$66,288

EXPENSES



Administrative	\$8,503
Community Garden	\$3,104
Program Expenses	<u>\$14,096</u>
Total Expenses	\$25,703

BECAUSE OF YOUR DONATIONS:

1669

pounds of **produce** were grown and harvested by LEC Staff and Volunteers and **donated** to local community partners including Feeding Our Community Partners Back Pack Food Program, ECHO Food Shelf, Mankato MYPlace, and Partners for Affordable Housing.



12

Garden Scholarships were awarded.

110

Community Gardeners and their families had a place to **grow** healthy **food** and quality **relationships**.



20

Programs and **Workshops** were presented surrounding topics ranging from Gardening and Soil, to Land Ethics, and Traditional Indigenous Beadwork.

0

cases of COVID amongst gardeners, staff, and visitors because we were able to **supply** the correct **PPE** and **safety measures**.



LIVING EARTH CENTER GROWTH



FILLING THE FOOD GAP

In anticipation of the growing stress put on the local food economy and families in need during the COVID Crisis, LEC added additional partner donation plots to its existing ones for a total of 13 to be able to help fill the gaps in local food needs. As a result, we were able to nearly double the amount of produce donated this season.

Staff and volunteers worked the entire season, to plant, harvest and deliver produce to various organizations that distribute to those who are in need. LEC is committed to collaborating with other organizations to help bring healthy and affordable food options to the local Southern MN Community.



STRENGTHENING RESOURCES

For the first time ever, LEC hired a Garden Manager and a Garden Mentor this season. Being able to create these two new positions provided consistent service to both our community gardeners and partner organizations.

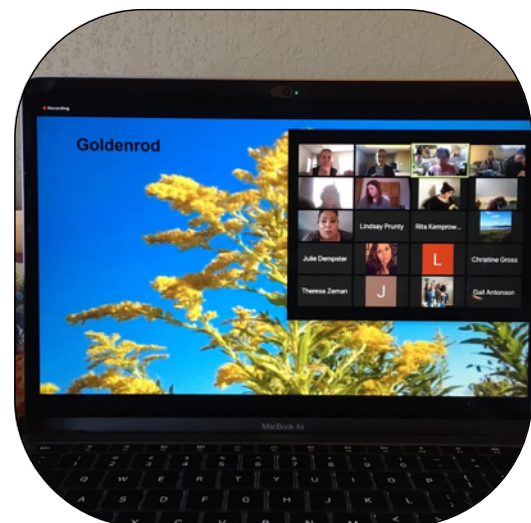
In addition to providing garden advice and mentorship, these positions were responsible for volunteer and partner donation plot management, COVID safety measures, and new gardener education.



ADAPTING TO THE TIMES

Beginning in March, LEC took everything online. All of its programming post-pandemic has been online and has succeeded in reaching a much wider audience through this virtual medium.

Events like monthly Open Mic Night served as a connecting agent to people in quarantine and online classes like Traditional Plant Medicine and Canning 101 drew audiences from across the country and even across borders.



LIVING EARTH CENTER FUTURE GOALS

COMMON GROUND SERIES

LEC hopes to resume regular in person programming next summer including our “Community Common Ground” Series built to bring people together to find the things that align our community rather than divide it. In this series two speakers will enlighten the audience about unrelated topics having to do with unique arts, education, and special interests within the local community... the goal? To figure out what the two topics share in common. We hope you can join us for this fun, entertaining, and educational pursuit, connecting from all different backgrounds in discussing how topics like “Pollinator Gardens and Punk Rock” and “Lakota Story Telling and Bike Polo” cross-pollinate.

THE ART OF GARDENING

LEC is dedicated to making the community garden more than just a place to grow vegetables, but a place that allows for connection to occur. In this way, we are committed to having a more integrated approach to bringing the arts to the garden with art displays, shows, and musical open mic nights and concerts.

BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE FUTURE

LEC continues to seek cross pollinating opportunities with other organizations within the local community. We are looking to expand our educational programs and food donation partnerships with Mankato MYPlace, ECHO Food Shelf, Partners for Affordable Housing, Feeding Our Community Partners and Minnesota Valley Action Council (MVAC).

EDUCATING THE FUTURE FOR THE FUTURE

LEC is hoping to expand its programming to incorporate more hands-on learning opportunities for regenerative solutions for kids and young adults.

