

Roosevelt Responsible Rockers' Wonderful Garden of Oz

School/City: Roosevelt School, Bridgeport

of Participants: 20 Students, 5 Adults

Total Service Hours Completed: 1,122

Academic and Social focus areas: Science, Health, Art, Math, Cooperation, Community Awareness, Respect

Twenty students in the Responsible Rockers' Kids Care Club at Roosevelt School began the second year of cultivating a community garden on school grounds. The project, which began in 2007 as a horticulture project for a local university student, entered its second year with the facilitation of 6th grade Special Education teacher Mrs. Pietrafesa. Together, the team planned a garden that would mix aesthetics with efficiency, learning about the needs, yields and timelines of various plants to create a garden that would not only brighten their urban school setting, but would also yield tangible results during the school year.

That plan helped the Responsible Rockers' garden win a 2008 Youth Garden Grant from the National Gardening Association of South Burlington, VT – one of only two Connecticut gardens among the 150 winners! The award included several gardening books and a \$250 gift card from Home Depot. Combined with support from the YES program, students prepared a budget and were able to purchase new tools, plants, protective fencing, and crafts kits to create garden mosaics from geometric patterns. The students also got involved in a NASA study that is researching the effects of space travel on plant seeds. They were given basil seeds and while they aren't told if the seeds were in the experimental group, and therefore exposed to outer space, or in the earth-bound control group, the students were excited to be a part of a real-world science project.



Students prepare soil to plant seedlings at Roosevelt School.

Students began preparing for the garden early in the school year by cultivating seeds indoors and spring bulbs outside before wintering the garden. They also decided to expand the garden to include fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, carrots, green beans, cucumbers, watermelon and cinnamon basil seeds. In June, the Responsible Rockers led tours of the garden for younger students, parents, and groups from the Bridgeport YMCA. The tours highlighted facts about the various plants and a presentation on the history and importance of Arbor Day. In addition, as the garden began to produce, flowers from the garden were used as table decorations and students were able to harvest and sample their green beans and carrots. While not everything was ready before school let out, many students were so engaged in the project that they volunteered to check on the garden over the summer months. Assistant Principal Michele Bonney-Gee gave the project a thumbs-up, noting: "The garden's interesting educational strategy links to the curriculum and encourages urban youth to be motivated to ask questions. They [are learning to] make more informed judgments about personal and social issues."