

Southern Dutchess News - Bard Prison Initiative: 100 Pounds of Produce Donated to Beacon Soup Kitchen

9/14/2016

People who stop for a hot meal at the Beacon Community Kitchen—a soup kitchen operating at Tabernacle of Christ Church in Beacon—may be surprised to learn that some of their food is grown on an organic farm at Fishkill Correctional Facility. In just its second year, the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) vegetable garden at Fishkill Correctional Facility is booming. As part of their college course work in the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI), students at Fishkill Correctional Facility are growing a huge variety of produce—tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, cabbage, kale, broccoli, collards, bok choy, beans, beets, radishes, parsley, cilantro, basil, thyme, lettuce, spinach, chard, leeks, scallions, and peas. This month, the BPI students achieved part of the mission of this gardening program—providing nutritious produce to a local soup kitchen—when they harvested 100 pounds of produce to be delivered to the Beacon Community Kitchen.

“Thanks to our newest partner, the Bard Prison Initiative at Fishkill Correctional Facility, our soup kitchen is benefiting from the bountiful harvest by the students,” says Candi Rivera, founder and director of In Care Of Multi-Services, Inc., which operates Beacon Community Kitchen. “It was a pleasure and a learning experience for me to hear the BPI students’ share their knowledge and passion for what they’re learning and integrating with their hands-on experience at the garden at Fishkill.”

The fully organic garden offers BPI students more than an opportunity to connect with the soil. It anchors BPI’s reentry work focused on public health and food justice, and is fully integrated into the academic curriculum. BPI Director Max Kenner ’01 says that the gardens at both Fishkill and Woodbourne Correctional Facility, founded by BPI students, have become central parts of the college experience at each location. “Garden participation is fully integrated into the science curriculum, and donations to local food banks create unusually substantive ways for incarcerated people to make direct contributions to local communities,” says Kenner. “Leaving prison, BPI alumni who have worked in the garden bring their expertise home with them to communities where efforts are afoot to establish and sustain healthier ways of living and eating in the urban environment.”

BPI alumni, inspired by their experiences working in the garden at Woodbourne, have gone on to work for a number of nonprofit agencies focused on urban farming, food justice, and green issues, including GrowNYC and Green NY. Others are studying public health and urban planning, committed to working within low-income communities to foster change. BPI has also partnered with Hawthorne Valley Farms to offer workshops and internships for alumni to work at community gardens and sustainable food projects in New York City.

BPI student Miguel Rodriguez described his experience working in the garden at Fishkill as enriching. “Before working in the garden, I had no idea how much we could produce

in such a small plot,” he says. “I’m looking forward to going home and starting something similar to help feed those in need.”

Acting Commissioner of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) Anthony J. Annucci says, “It is always fulfilling to see the positive results of the partnership between DOCCS and the Bard Prison Initiative. I congratulate the students on their hard work and the beneficial impact they’ve made on the community.”

The Beacon Community Kitchen is open to all and serves a hot meal Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Tabernacle of Christ Church, 481 Main St. It is a service of In Care Of Multi-Services, Inc., a nonprofit, faith-based, community grassroots program that focuses on identifying community needs and working with others in the community and private and government sectors to address them. In the Beacon community, the In Care Of program has partnered and collaborated with residents, faith-based institutions, Beacon Police, Hudson Health in Beacon, Kids r Kids Feeding Program, Key Food, community clubs, Assemblyman Frank Skartados, and Common Ground Farms to increase community awareness and help serve the needs of individuals, children, and families in Beacon. For more information, call 845-728-8196 or e-mail incareof.beacon@gmail.com.