

ANNUAL REPORT

Director's Letter

As I sit down to write this letter, I have just said goodbye to my dear friend and co-founder of Living Earth Center, Sr. Mary Tacheny. She, along with the other School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) living in Mankato are leaving their home on Good Counsel Hill and moving to Shakopee as part of a larger SSND divestment plan.



Good Counsel Hill is the place where she and other School Sisters planted the seeds, both literally and figuratively, that have grown into the Living Earth Center we know today. Living Earth Center has the honor of carrying out their legacy of Care for Earth and for each other. That Care has taken many shapes over the years, from garden classes for kids, to potlucks, to large-scale produce donation projects.

While the departure of the School Sisters from the Hill is heavy with grief, as I dig deeper, I realize that in their absence, we do not find a void. Instead, we find a responsibility to ensure that those SSND values of Care continue. Legacy isn't just the idea that you carry on what once was; but a commitment to the growth necessary to see that Care continues. It is a common thread that continues to weave us together despite the changes in the times.

That Care has expanded beyond the original Community Garden on Good Counsel Hill to other areas within the community and beyond. It touches the youth from MY Place, YMCA Day Camps, and Head Start that come to the Hill to learn about gardening. It touches the clients of ECHO Food Shelf, Feeding Our Community Partners, and CADA House that eat the produce grown at the Community Farm. It touches every person who has attended a Solstice Celebration or an Earth Conference.

We are discovering that the SSND's legacy is not attached to a specific location, but to a specific idea – that of dedication to Care for Earth and each other. We are committed to this legacy, and are honored to be continuing it.

As we look to the future, to our work of creating healthier communities by growing food and fostering relationships, we know that the legacy of Care so graciously passed to us will endure as we continue to pass it along to others.



Laura Peterson
Executive Director
Living Earth Center

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2022 Staff

Laura Peterson - Executive Director
Amy Hunt - Program Manager
Madison Vandersee - Program Coordinator
and LEC Intern
Melissa Martensen - Finance &
Communications Manager
Abbey Dickhudt - Farm Manager
Sabrina Mercedes - Volunteer Coordinator
Mal Murphy - Garden Manager
Lynn Rozen - Garden Mentor

Contact

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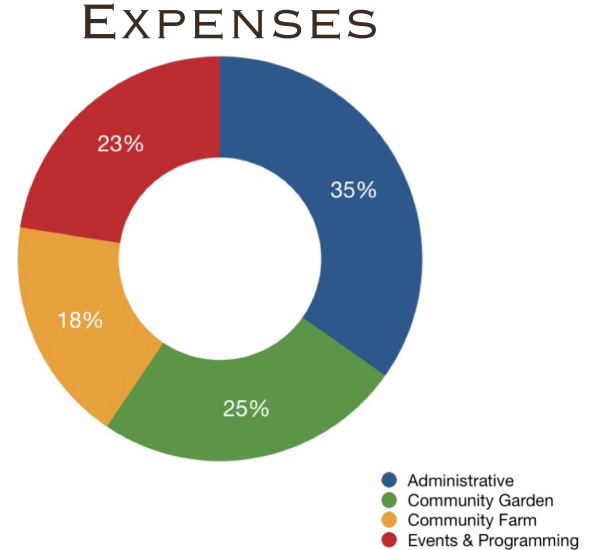
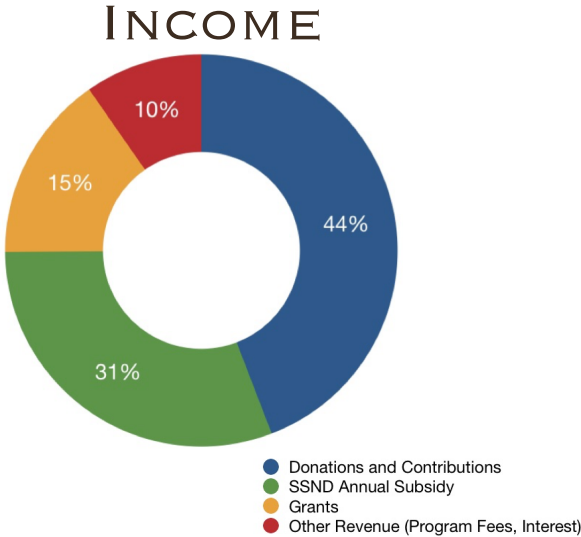
FINANCIAL STATEMENT - 2021 - 2022 FISCAL YEAR

Living Earth Center is a sponsored ministry of SSND, along with an annual subsidy, SSND currently pays:

- Executive Director's Salary and Benefits
- Office Space (in-kind)
- Land for the Community Garden (in-kind)

We are grateful for the continued support of SSND.

The percentages below reflect our operating expenses for fiscal year July 2020 - June 2021.



BECAUSE OF YOUR DONATIONS:

2413

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

14

Garden Scholarships were awarded.

114

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

27

Programs and **Workshops**, from kid's planting a pizza garden, a seed swap, to our winter reading series, with topics ranging from plant medicine to improv poetry.

73

Youth from MY Place (formerly Boys and Girls Club), ages pre-K to teens, attended weekly **gardening classes** from June through October.



LIVING EARTH CENTER GROWTH



COMMUNITY FARM

Our second season managing the Blue Earth County Farm has the land looking better than ever. We more than doubled our produce donations to our community partners! This is due in no small part to our Community Farm Manager, 30+ dedicated volunteers, and loads of compost through a partnership with Zero Waste Mankato.

We also partnered with the kids' camps at the YMCA. Three groups of campers came out to the Farm, where they did everything from watering plants to making their own pizzas! Our Family Farm Fun Day saw over 150 people come out to the Farm to tour the farm, paint gourds and signs, and help make fresh apple cider and caramel apples.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Creating Connections in our community is at the heart of LEC's mission. We are proud to continue our partnership with Mankato MY Place (formerly Boys and Girls Club), providing weekly youth gardening classes. We were excited this year when they asked us to expand programming to include classes for teens.

We also began a new partnership with MRCI, providing them space in the Community Garden and leading weekly classes for their clients to learn about gardening in a hands on environment.



CREATING COMMON GROUND

Beginning in the summer of 2021, we were excited to premier our newest programming event, the Creating Common Ground Series. We would take two seemingly unrelated topics (Beer Brewing and Glass Blowing for example), have experts present on both topics and then work with the audience to find the common ground between them.

In 2021, we had 4 events, all held virtually due to Covid. During the summer of 2022, we were able to meet outdoors by the Big Red Barn, hosting 2 in-person gatherings, which included live pottery and flower arranging demonstrations.



LIVING EARTH CENTER FUTURE PROJECTS

EMERGING FARMER PROGRAM

In its inaugural year, our Emerging Farmer Program, funded through a USDA Grant in partnership with Region 9, had 4 farmers and their families growing culturally relevant food at the Community Farm.

In the next two years, the program will continue to expand, increasing the number of participants and connecting interested participants with the local growers markets.

OTTO BREMER TRUST GRANT

In August of 2022, Living Earth Center was awarded a \$20,000 Otto Bremer Trust general operations grant for our mission to grow resilient communities by cultivating healthy food and fostering relationships.

These funds will be put to good use as we continue to grow and develop projects that expand access in the local food network and create common ground for cross pollination and strong relationships within the Mankato-area community.



HOMESTEAD APARTMENTS COMMUNITY GARDEN

We are proud to partner with Homestead Apartments and Southwest Housing Partnership to design, implement, and cultivate a new community garden space on the apartment complex site.

Building the garden will begin in summer 2023. In the meantime, we are meeting with residents to work together to plan how the space will be designed and implemented.

Growing spaces like this one are essential to addressing food insecurity while providing physical spaces for community engagement.

