

## **Garden Songs**

**Project:** In the spring of 2017, I composed a songbook and singing manual, to inspire and prepare environmental educators to use group singing and lessons in garden classrooms. That summer, I led a training for Troy Kids' Garden interns, to encourage them to use the songbook and sing with groups of kids visiting the garden.

### **Collaborators:**

Rachel Brown, Song-writer, Organizer for Jewish Voice for Peace (Philadelphia, PA)

Alisha David, Troy Kid's Garden Manager

Kristin Eggen, Community Singing Enthusiast (Iowa and Wisconsin)

Ginny Hughs, Education Director at Community GroundWorks

Nathan Larson, Director of Cultivate Health Initiative with Community GroundWorks

Batya Levine, Organizer at Let My People Sing (Boston, MA)

Michael Olson, Videographer (Madison)

Karen Reece, President of Urban Community Arts Network (Madison)

Emily Sheehan, Music Therapist (Philadelphia, PA)

### **Goals of Songbook/Manual:**

- Explain how garden education lessons and leaders can develop comfort and familiarity with leading songs with groups of children
- Explain how music in garden education
- Create a document to use while planning lessons or while teaching in the garden
- Provide songs that are exciting, educational, beautiful, and easy to teach and share in outdoor classrooms

### **Goals of Educator Training:**

- Share the benefits of combining group singing with garden education with educators who may or may not be comfortable and familiar with this topic.
- Lead educators in song, to instill muscle memory
- Engage educators in considering the relationship between education, courage, personal voice, and collective voice.

### **Project Background:**

Ginny asked me to volunteer at the Kids' Garden, to familiarize myself with Community GroundWorks.

On the first day, we were leading a garden program for toddlers and the adults caring for them. The night before, I had sent Ginny my resume, to give her an idea of my skills and interests.

When I arrived at the garden, Ginny noted that I included singing on my resume. She asked if I would open the day with a song. I agreed to do so, and she was grateful. She explained that she was not confident singing in public, although she found singing with kids to be a great way to welcome them to the garden.

I asked her for a suggestion of a song, and she offered "If You're in the Garden and You Know It Clap Your Hands." Though the kids hardly sang along, their caregivers assured me that they were captivated. We made herb butter with the kids, and the adults asked for me to offer a song to sing while the kids took turns shaking a jar of heavy cream. I immediately sang, "Shake shake shake, shake

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shake shake, shake your butter!” The parents loved it. I said, “It’s pretty repetitive.” They responded, “That’s a good thing!”

This was at the beginning of my partnership with Community GroundWorks, though Ginny and I had already agreed to develop a business plan for a new camp. But I knew I wanted to conduct a series of projects with them. I asked Ginny if Community GroundWorks would benefit from a songbook, to aid educators with leading songs in the garden. The songbook would contain songs that are conducive for singing with children in the outdoor classroom.

Ginny was excited about the idea. I valued her excitement, because I wanted my work with Community GroundWorks to be as helpful and productive for them as possible. She did request that I provide tips about song-leading as well, and asked me to conduct a training for Troy Kid’s Garden interns during their orientation week.

### **Project Timeline:**

#### **September 2016:**

- I volunteered at Troy Kids’ Garden, and Ginny asked me to sing with the kids. I asked her if a songbook for garden educators would serve Community GroundWorks. She was excited for me to shape a songbook, and requested materials and a training to guide educators on how to use the songbook, and sing with their students.

#### **October 2016 – March 2017:**

- I compiled ideas of songs to include in the songbook. I considered songs that taught lessons about gardens, songs that praised the outdoors, the Earth, and community, and songs that were easy to quickly learn, and that sounded beautiful while sung together.
- I compiled ideas of garden education activities that incorporated music and singing.
- I compiled ideas of how music and vocal engagement can be used to manage classrooms and encourage students to act respectfully to themselves, each other, and teachers.

#### **April 2017:**

- I attended a training called “Singing for Organizers” while attending Jewish Voice for Peace’s National Members Meeting in Chicago. I was impressed by the training leader, Rachel Brown. I was excited that we both wanted to use music to empower people to share their voices, and support other people. Her training was very similar to what I hoped to lead and teach at the Community GroundWorks educator training. I asked if we could speak on the phone, and we had a conversation where she guided my training planning, and answered questions I asked.
- I was inspired by my conversation with Rachel, and realized I could benefit from discussing the project with others who wanted to share wisdom around singing with groups, or using music to build confidence and togetherness.
- I spoke over the phone with my friend Batya Levine, who organizes a retreat called “Let My People Sing.” This retreat uses group singing and Jewish music to promote the liberatory power of singing as a community.
- I met with Karen Reese, the president of Urban Community Arts Network. They support grassroots hip-hop culture in Madison. I wanted to use my project to promote anti-racist approaches to song-leading and music education, and asked Karen for feedback on integrating these goals. We discussed the violence of cultural appropriation, and opportunities for educators to engage respectfully with children from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

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- I met with the Garden Manager, Alisha David. I let her know my progress and ideas so far, and asked if she had any issues, questions, or suggestions.
- I met about my project with Renata Solan, Community GroundWorks's Communications Manager. We were working together on another project, the Wisconsin Farm to School Newsletter. She requested that I write an introductory story for another newsletter she worked on for the Wisconsin School Gardens Network. I agreed to help out, though I was very busy at the time. I sent her a story past the deadline we had set. She asked for some edits, which I integrated. Ultimately, she was very gracious in letting me know that my story was beautifully written, but would not work with that week's newsletter. She shared that she would be excited to use my words in a future communication.

#### **May 2017:**

- At this time, I was coordinating Community GroundWorks' bi-monthly Farm to School newsletter, which reached thousands of educators and administrators in the Upper Midwest. I was inspired by my collaborative conversations about the project. So I included a newsletter item asking for anyone interested to email me questions about songleading in garden education, or any ideas for songs and song-leading tips to include. I received a handful of a responses of people showing interest in the project, and one person, Kristin Eggen, who spoke with me about this stuff, visited, gave me ideas for songs to include.
- I attended my older sister's bachelorette party in New York City, where I connected with her friend Emily Sheehan. Emily is a music therapist, and shares my goals of using music to build self-esteem and courage. She reviewed my project and training materials and gave me feedback.

#### **June 2017:**

- I finalized the agenda of the training, and the composition of the songbook/manual
- I delivered the training at the interns' orientation week, and shared the songbook/manual.

#### **July 2017:**

- I made final edits to the songbook/manual.

#### **Success Stories:**

- This summer, interns that participated in the training used the songbook, singing with kids as part of their educational programming.
- After working together, Alisha, the Kids' Garden Manager, decided to be more courageous and open when singing, and joined a community choir.
- I sent out a call to the Wisconsin Farm to School newsletter, asking for questions or ideas to address in my songbook, manual, and training. Several folks requested a copy of the materials. One garden educator shared that my idea inspired her to build a music playground near her garden.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- **I found me by following them.** I began this collaboration by asking Ginny what Community GroundWorks needed. By following her lead, I discovered a need that she had not yet identified – supporting educators in singing. I brought something unique to the table, that I was excited to share.

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- **Goofiness gets things done.** My connections with collaborators and participants affirmed that food-production and fighting for food-justice is exhausting. Folks engaging in these efforts need courage and energy to keep up this difficult work. Coming together around playing with our voices reminds us of the joy, and caring, committed relationships, that inspire us and guide us forward.
- **Trust yourself - you already are what you want to be.** I had met Rachel Brown just a couple of times before she coached me on this project. On our phone call, she responded to my questions and provided feedback for my materials. In doing so, she pointed out that I answered some of my own questions, and could trust my skills and background. And, I was surprised when she reminded me that I once performed a song in her house at a Passover seder. I had not realized this was her house! I was anxious about presenting myself and justifying my project to her, She told me to take the participants into your heart.
- **Trust your audience.** Rachel shared a meditative practice that I could conduct before my training. She suggested that I sit comfortably, plant my feet on the ground, and close my eyes. “Now, imagine that you are at your training, and about to start. Now, think of the people there. Take them into your heart.” She reminded me to trust myself and my audience, and process nervousness or anxiety by remembering that I am there to take care of the people around me.
- **Plan for flexibility.** I love improvising. Though I spent weeks carefully crafting a training agenda and activities, I went off-book after about five minutes of leading the training. I was familiar enough with the activities and ideas I wanted to share to follow the groups energy. That way, when I saw that the participants were reticent to speak in front of the whole group, I quickly moved us into small-group discussions, meditations, and stretches.
- **Follow meaningful deadlines.** I was excited to expand the reach of this project by contributing to Renata’s newsletter. But I turned in my story to her later than we had agreed upon, so by the time of the newsletter’s publication, the editing was incomplete. Additionally, I had printed out and laminated the official Community GroundWorks’ copies of the manual before making final edits.