

## **UB Green Team | Greening the East Side of Buffalo**

Lea Kyle, Matthew Taboni, Andy Whitehead

**Overview:** Our team is transforming an empty lot into a flourishing community space to address the disproportionate effects of climate change facing the East Side of Buffalo. The empty lot will be transformed with flower beds, a quiet reflection and reading area, produce raised beds, a rain barrel, and a free community library for the students of East Community High School (ECHS), plus other pots painted and filled by students. The space does not only serve as a community refuge from the concrete and sun, but also will be used as outdoor classroom space for students at ECHS to learn about gardening and receive community service hours. In addition to this, our team: engaged 30 UB students through a seed starting program where we planted 200 seeds, built the garden beds, and a hydroponic farm system that will be donated to a second non-profit, and hosted three bake sales fundraising \$1,500 that went directly to the supplies needed for the space.

**CAP Journey:** Our CAP journey was full of ups and downs. Reflecting back on the five months, our team is very proud of what we accomplished. We have learned more about the intricacies of sustainability; we have gained more connections with community members that have aligned with our personal and professional goals; and we have developed a project that will leave ongoing and impactful change in our own community. This journey has allowed us to combine all of our passions of baking, sustainability, and impacting change into one amazing project!

**Goals:** At the beginning of the climate action plan our main goal was to build two green spaces for the community on the East Side of Buffalo. Throughout our five month journey these goals were refined, but our overarching goal stayed consistent throughout. On top of this overarching goal we also had goals to: connect with community members, engage UB students in our impact, fundraise \$1,000 to financially support the project, build lasting relationships with organizations to maintain the green spaces after the completion of our CAP, and deepen our knowledge of environmental challenges in the City of Buffalo.

**Challenges:** There were three main challenges we faced during this Climate Action Plan. The first challenge we faced early on was losing our main contact in Buffalo's City Hall. This set us back as we had hoped to leverage this contact in finding spaces to transform, but we were able to pivot and work with other community partners in our network which turned out to be a much better solution. Another challenge we faced was the lack of financial support. After learning we passed the deadlines for garden grant opportunities, we turned to our passion for baking and hosted three bake sales and raised over \$1,500 for the project. The final challenge we faced was Buffalo's snowy weather. It is challenging to build a garden when there is snow on the ground, but now that spring has sprung we are able to break ground and create our community space

### **Timeline:**

November: CAP Planning & PGC Finals

December: Community Engagement, 1st Bake Sale Fundraiser

January: Meetings with Community Stakeholders & Research, Research, Research

February: 2nd Fundraiser, Meetings with Community Stakeholders, Hydroponic Farm Research  
March: Acquired Green Space, Began Planning Green Space, Hosted Seed Starting Program  
April: Built Hydroponic Farm, Purchased Supplies, PGC Finals 2.0  
May: Install Hydroponic Farms, Build out Green Space at East HS

**Key Learnings:** Lots of research and learning was necessary for us to make this project a success. Beginning with learning about community needs, we started by talking with those in the neighborhoods we were hoping to support and gain insight on what challenges they faced the most. We then dove deep into learning everything we could about plant maintenance, including learning how to build hydroponic farming systems and raised garden beds. To accomplish all of this, we also spent some time learning how to creatively use our funds and some business research during our baking sales and learning what baked goods would sell the most.

**Impact and Actual Outcomes:** Our actual impacts are still in progress as we build our space, but we have been able to impact many people along the way. We were able to educate students at UB on the adverse effects of climate change on the East Side of Buffalo's community while we hosted a seed starting program. The green space and community library will serve as an education space for students allowing them to extend the classroom outdoors and engage with the other residents in the community. The hydroponic farm garden will support a community cooking class so students can add fresh produce to their meals. Finally, the space will add hope and happiness to a struggling community and be a spot for those who need refuge.

**Potential Ongoing Impact:** This space not only provides physical green space, but a community space. Our project has kickstarted a motivated group to continue to expand the space and more spaces around the school. Grassroots Garden, a local non-profit, connected us with an individual living next to the school who inquired about building a garden space next door, seniors at the school are planning to complete their mandatory community service hours by assisting with garden maintenance, ECHS's Say Yes coordinator has maintenance of a community garden in their job description, and three teachers have expressed their interest in using the space as a learning space to conduct hands-on learning opportunities. These many different touch points provide various opportunities for this space to be maintained and used beyond just the physicality we created.

**Proudest Moment:** While working with community partners is a way to be sustainable and collaborative by sharing resources, the process of finding the right connections and organizing with resources and the capacity to collaborate poses a challenge. Our proudest moment was finally seeing everything fall into place with our connection with East Community High School and seeing so many other community members and organizations offer their time and resources to help this project. Despite the challenges we faced throughout the journey, we have created a meaningful and beautiful space that will be maintained for years to come.