

Sprouts: Empowering Teens as Teachers in Garden Nutrition Education

Completed?

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Pioneer Valley High


Unit
Santa Barbara (County)

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SPROUTS teen leaders

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Story

Background

For the last two years, CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL), UCCE in Santa Barbara County has supported a USDA Farm to School grant by providing training and technical assistance to teen leaders, staff, and community partners on garden-enhanced nutrition education. Partners including the Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo (CAPSLO) and an agriculture teacher at Pioneer Valley High School, CFHL, UCCE staff trained “Sprouts” teens to deliver Teams With Intergenerational Support (TWIGS) curriculum to elementary school students and provided ongoing training and technical assistance to partners to support this work. The overall goal of the Sprouts program is to empower teens with opportunities to learn and serve their surrounding community while providing younger students at the elementary school sites with positive role models to enhance their overall learning experience.

Story Narrative

A promising method to promote positive youth development involves empowering teenagers to become mentors and teachers for younger students. [Research](#) has indicated that when teenagers take on the role of educators, they not only provide valuable knowledge and skills but also serve as positive role models, fostering an environment of encouragement and motivation for younger learners. CFHL, UCCE staff provided four 90-minute training sessions for Sprouts students in grades 9-12th. During these sessions, students were equipped with the

skills and knowledge to effectively deliver and implement the TWIGS curriculum and to educate younger students about healthy eating and gardening practices. The training covered a wide range of topics including classroom management, food safety, conducting food demonstrations, garden basics, and working with various youth populations. Students also had the opportunity to visit a local farm to make further connections to agriculture within the community. Upon completion of the training sessions, Sprouts students were recognized with certificates of completion acknowledging their hard work and dedication. After the training, students identified a need to give their group a name. After brainstorming potential names, the students decided to name their group “Sprouts”, reflecting their commitment to nurturing and fostering growth, not only within themselves but in the younger students they were trained to teach.

CFHL, UCCE staff then worked with partner elementary school sites to coordinate the delivery of Sprouts lessons with extender classrooms. Through this collaborative effort of Sprouts teen teachers, 21 TWIGS garden lessons were delivered to over 500 elementary school students in grades TK through 4th during the spring of 2024. These teens acquired valuable skills such as public speaking, classroom management, organization, communication, and knowledge about garden-based nutrition and food safety. They significantly impacted the elementary students they taught and served as positive role models. Many teens have expressed that they are now considering a career in teaching and have gained a newfound respect for educators in general.

Results from the retrospective Youth Leader Survey (n=8) indicated positive experiences and skills developed through participation in the Sprouts program. All eight survey respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” to the following statements:

- Gained skills through serving their community that will help them in future
- More confident in themselves and in helping others
- There were dedicated adults who supported them as a youth leader
- Received feedback for how they were doing as a teen teacher

CFHL, UCCE will continue to partner with CAPSLO, Pioneer Valley, and Santa Maria Bonita School District in the 2024-2025 school year to further expand the program to additional school sites. Experienced high school Sprouts leaders trained new Sprouts leaders and plan to facilitate the training of afterschool staff in TWIGS. This program is an example of working with multiple partners to empower youth to become leaders, educators and change agents for health in their communities.

Favorite Quote	When asked to reflect on their experience participating in the Sprouts program, two high school students stated “I was able to better improve myself in many different aspects. I was able to learn how to improve myself in order to improve my community. From becoming more confident in my knowledge and abilities to my ability to connect with people of all ages” and that they enjoyed “getting to teach elementary kids and seeing how happy they got”.
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SNAP-Ed Custom Data

Project Name	CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE
Related Framework Indicators	Healthy Eating (ST1) Healthy Eating Behaviors (MT1) Organizational Partnerships (ST7)
Socio-Ecological Frameworks	Individual/Family Environmental Setting
Approaches	Individual or group-based nutrition educators (e.g. direct education)
Partner Types	Community-based program(s) working with the SNAP-Ed target audience