

Victory Gardens International: Bringing Healthy Foods to Underserved Communities

Jonathan Nazeer was fortunate to grow up on a farm in North Carolina with fresh fruits and vegetables right in the back yard. Because of this, his family didn't need easy access to big box grocery stores on a regular basis. While farming has become less common in our community over the last several years, the need for fresh foods has not.

Here in North Rock Hill, we're blessed to have a number of grocery stores just a few minutes away from our homes, full of fresh produce and healthy foods. Unfortunately, other parts of our city don't have the same options. With the help of Jonathan and Crystal Nazeer of Victory Gardens International, however, things have begun to change.

The mission of their organization is wide reaching: to spearhead community redevelopment through urban farming, food production, food access, and job creation in low-wealth communities across the globe. While the outlook is global, it all starts right here in Rock Hill.

To begin filling immediate nutritional needs during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Victory Garden at Emmett Scott was created. This 12,000 square foot community garden has thirty raised beds for use in programs like 4H and the Silver Gardening Club. A recent addition to the space is an Innovation Garden featuring tower growing systems that can produce even more fresh vegetables in a smaller space. A similar victory garden will soon open at Pathways, as well.

Improving the health of a community isn't just about providing the right foods, it's also about educating the public on healthy habits and choices. Together with the Human Nutrition Department at Winthrop University, Victory Gardens International also offers the Foodfit program. This 6-week course is designed to help individuals learn to prepare healthy meals, increase physical activity, and make lasting changes to their overall health.

The team at Victory Gardens International understands the importance of cultivating new leaders, as well. That's why they created the Youth Workforce Development Program. For 6 weeks during the summer, students between the ages of 14 and 17 can work in the garden and learn about all aspects of farming and agriculture. In addition to a fair wage and work experience, the students also participate in workshops ranging from farming methods to finances. They go on college visits and explore a variety of career paths, including nursing, agriculture, and even logistics.

More dreams will also be realized for Victory Gardens International in the next year. After many years as a food desert, Rock Hill's Southside will soon offer easy access to fresh, healthy foods. The FARMacy Community Farm Stop will provide high quality produce and artisan items year-round. It will also serve as a gathering place for the community, where residents can have a safe space to work, learn, and even grab a cup of coffee.

Victory Gardens International is bringing much needed food assistance and education to Rock Hill, and they hope to serve as a model for other communities across the country. If you'd like to learn more about volunteer opportunities and other ways to support the organization and their mission, visit growwithvictory.org.

