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PROMISING PRACTICES



Connect, Grow, Share:

Can You Dig It! Grows Food and Cultivates Relationships



Gardeners at the Kitsilano Community Centre Collaborative Garden in Vancouver, British Columbia, enjoy a meal of fresh organic produce.

[Can You Dig It!](#) (CYDI) is an inclusive food growing initiative in the Vancouver area established by the community living association [posAbilities](#). It addresses the challenges of social isolation and food security through urban gardening. This initiative is a way to create and deepen the connections of persons served with their neighbours, and to provide an opportunity for community contribution.

CYDI was created in 2009 by a team at *posAbilities* who asked the question: "How do we use what resources we have to create welcoming spaces where communities can grow with a foundation of diversity and inclusion?" The team had seen a newspaper article about the emerging food security, food supply, and environmental sustainability movements and their

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About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

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benefits in modern society. Community food production can be a wonderful way to develop a sense of belonging and connection among neighbours—a benefit that is often lost in large cities like Vancouver where many people report feeling isolated. The team realized that many of *posAbilities*' residences have large backyards, which could be used to host and promote the type of community interaction discussed in the article, and launched the CYDI initiative.

As of 2015, CYDI has grown to a network of more than 40 community gardens on public and private lands—rooftops and backyards—throughout the Vancouver area. Each garden is independently self-managed, with persons served, neighbours, and community members working together. The gardeners at each location choose how best to connect with their own community, how to engage with local partner organizations, and how and to whom they will donate portions of their garden's yield. Some gardens choose local food banks, on-site donation boxes, or mini-market stands, while others choose low-cost grocery stores like [Quest Food Exchange](#). CYDI gardens are designed to be diverse, with leaders actively reaching out to the community to include everyone possible—newcomers, persons with disabilities, seniors, youth, and close neighbours. *posAbilities*' staff members typically assist each garden for the first three years, slowly disengaging as communities take up the mission of inclusion on their own. The initiative now has more than 1,700 individuals participating.



The Goodlad garden, located in the backyard of a *posAbilities* residence in Burnaby, British Columbia, is a wonderful example of how perseverance, intention, and community collaboration resulted in the creation of a welcoming garden. Built in 2011 with just six plots, the garden was expanded in its second year when a social enterprise, run by the Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion, helped construct six more garden beds, which were then installed (along with a

greenhouse) by Don't Sweat it Services, a work crew run by *posAbilities*. By its third year, the Goodlad garden had developed into a community hub, hosting workshops and



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work parties for Burnaby Food First and other events such as the Fall Harvest Festival where all in the community are invited to enjoy the harvest and the local entertainment of storytellers, musicians, magicians, and more. (Pictured at left: Tonka Ivsic, a *posAbilities* team member and neighbour who gardens at Goodlad)

The Goodlad garden grew under the leadership and coordination of Jim and Lindy McQueen, members of a neighbourhood association called [Edmonds People In Community](#) (EPIC). Along with adding another new garden bed and organizing a major site clean-up, the duo emphasized the importance of community integration and moving beyond having the plots being “only places to garden.” The McQueens began contacting each gardener and built connections with local food coalitions such as the [Surrey/White Rock Food Action Coalition](#) and [Vancouver Urban Farming Society](#). Through the connections made by involving these coalitions and energizing the gardeners, more networking was done and new projects unfolded that allowed the Goodlad garden to become the model it is today.

These types of developments and community partnerships can be found at CYDI gardens throughout the region and have added to the financial sustainability of the initiative, which was originally seeded from legacy funds and grants. CYDI has collaborated with more than 40 partner organizations, including the city of Surrey, which supports all new community gardens established on city land; [Phoenix Society Drug & Alcohol Recovery and Education](#), which uses civic participation in the gardens as a method of rehabilitation and recovery; and [Urban Matters](#), a [C3 social enterprise](#) in British Columbia, which is a new partnership that aims to utilize the gardens to bridge the gap between social needs and community aspirations. Resources on how to approach similar community partnerships can be found at: <http://www.cydi.ca/#!resources/c1xpg>.

The CYDI initiative is one of many approaches that *posAbilities* uses to provide choice, meet individual goals of persons served, and increase participation by persons served in their communities. *posAbilities* was commended by [CARE](#) in a recent survey report for exemplary conformance in this pursuit. To learn more about the CYDI initiative, please contact info@cydi.ca.