

**NORRIS
SQUARE
NEIGHBORHOOD
PROJECT**

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Photo by Solmaira Valerio

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LETTER FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

Reflecting on 2025, I am filled with pride for the resilience and growth of Norris Square Neighborhood Project (NSNP). This year has been one of profound transformation, as we deepened our roots in the community while modernizing our operations to ensure NSNP's long-term sustainability.

A Renewed Board

Perhaps the most significant milestone of 2025 was the successful completion of a robust board recruitment process. We set out to build a leadership team that reflects the diversity, expertise, and passion of our community. I am thrilled to share that we officially welcomed nine new board members this year. This infusion of new leadership will ensure our governance is strong, representative, and ready to guide our future strategic planning.

Celebrating One Year of Leadership

In September, we celebrated the one-year anniversary of our Executive Director, Andria Bibiloni. Andria has led with a blend of cultural competency and operational rigor that has already strengthened our foundation. From overseeing her first successful performance evaluation to strengthening ties with longstanding residents and to her hands-on engagement with our youth and garden pillars, we are proud to celebrate this milestone, and are committed to supporting her vision for the organization.

Impact Across our Pillars

Our greatest joy remains our youth. The Semillas del Futuro program shattered its enrollment goals this year, reaching more high-schoolers than we have seen in years and earning a formal citation from City Council for their public art displays. We also made historic strides in land stewardship, securing multi-year investments for public space improvements and advancing critical efforts to protect our historic gardens. We continued to prioritize the preservation of Puerto Rican culture through our annual El Bembé festival, the launch of a Community Archive project, and the inauguration of a new mural by celebrated artist Celso González honoring our garden founding partners, Grupo Motivos.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

In community,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Steve Vásquez Dolph". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Steve Vásquez Dolph
Board Chair, Norris Square Neighborhood Project

NSNP AT A GLANCE

Norris Square Neighborhood Project is a cultural hub committed to uniting and inspiring the surrounding community through programs aimed at the cultivation of young leaders, the preservation of Puerto Rican cultural heritage, and the stewardship of community land and environmental practices. We have six special gardens that, together, make up the NSNP active green space to amplify our sense of belonging and our shared learning experiences.

MISSION

Our mission is to unite and inspire youth and families using the strengths of our community: shared cultural wisdom, creative energies, and environmental spaces and experiences.

PILLARS

NSNP fulfills its mission by integrating the three pillars of youth development, land stewardship, and cultural preservation.

VISION

We envision a community in which youth and adults can positively engage one another, promote cultural awareness and preservation, and advocate for a healthier future for West Kensington.

PURPOSE

Our purpose is to prepare youth for a future in which art, agriculture, and cultural awareness can be leveraged for individual agency and community prosperity.

STAFF

- Andria Bibiloni, **Executive Director**
- Toni-Anne McDonald, **Youth Programs Director**
- Evelyn Matos, **Youth & Family Services Manager**
- Xena Stearos, **Communications & Events Manager**
- Sarah Trad, **Development Manager**
- Anna Toffani, **Operations Manager** (January 2025 - February 2025)
- Victoria Gonzalez, **Gardener Groundskeeper**
- Tatiana Lammie, **Grants & Impact Specialist**
- Stefanie Hamill, **Semillas del Futuro Instructor**
- Guillermo Caro, **Semillas del Futuro Instructor**
- Ria Alfonso, **Garden Educator** (January 2025 - August 2025)
- Sky Deswert, **Garden Educator**
- Neida Quiñones, **Janitorial Services**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Andrés Celin, **Chair** (resigned November 2025)
- Steve Vásquez Dolph, **Chair** (November 2025 - present)
- Kim Jordan, **Treasurer**
- Roman Pérez, **Secretary**
- Rebecca Miller, **Member at Large** (resigned November 2025)
- Raquel Ramos, **Member at Large** (resigned September 2025)
- Ash Richards, **Member at Large**
- Devin Jackson, **Member at Large**
- Diamante "Dimo" Ortiz, **Member at Large**
- Eburne "Eddie" Irizarry, **Member at Large**
- Frederick Durham Jr., **Member at Large**
- Jacquelyn Saez, **Member at Large**
- Martha Hanna, Esq., **Member at Large**
- Wilfredo Hernandez, **Member at Large**
- Dr. Yonaira Rodriguez, **Member at Large**

Two NSNP students in Puerto Rico during a Bomba workshop.



NSNP PROGRAMMING

YOUTH PROGRAMS

NSNP's youth after-school programs, Semillas del Futuro and Raíces de Cambio, provide opportunities for young people in our community to develop leadership skills, learn about sustainable agriculture, and engage in cultural activities.

SEMILLAS DEL FUTURO

A year-round leadership-building program for high school students. This program immerses youth in arts, entrepreneurship, gardening, and Puerto Rican culture while offering homework support, mentorship, and college prep. With a focus on work readiness and outdoor experiences during the summer, youth participate in photography lessons, gardening, camping, and canoeing.

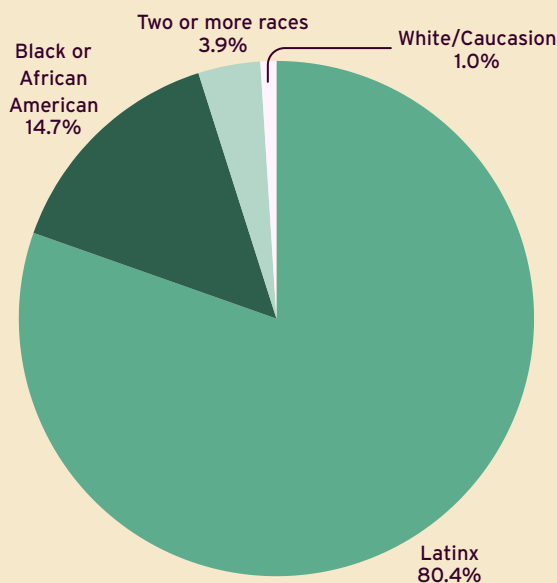
RAÍCES DE CAMBIO

A year-round apprenticeship program teaching youth about gardening, farming, food justice, and the cultural impacts of urban green spaces. This program prepares students for entry-level positions in horticulture or agriculture while imparting knowledge about Puerto Rican history and indigenous Taíno gardening practices.

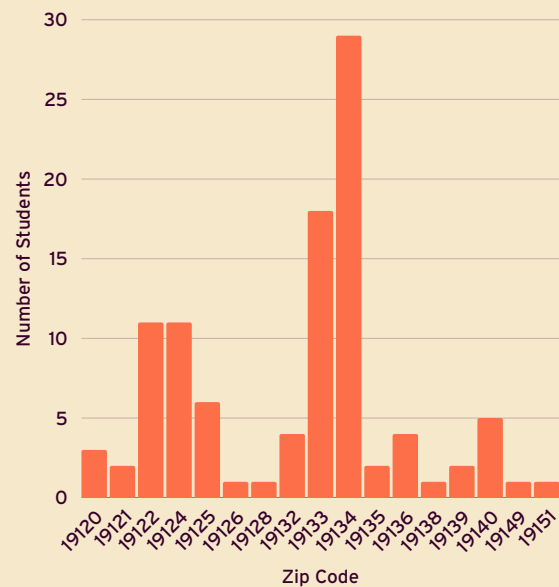
YOUTH PROGRAMS BY THE NUMBERS

Across both Semillas del Futuro and Raíces de Cambio, NSNP **served 102 youth** between the ages of 13 and 18. Of these 102 students, **56% are returning participants**. Through NSNP's contract with the Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC) an average of **37 youth received a \$165 stipend per month** for their participation and completion in program activities.

Students' Race and/or Ethnicity



Youth Served by Zip Code



GARDEN PROGRAMS

NSNP's gardens welcomed **1,519 visitors** during the 2025 season through our Campesinxs program, garden tours, public and private events, and service and cultural immersions. This is a **34.3% increase in garden visitors** from the previous year, and this increase is largely due to our partnerships and connections with groups, universities, and organizations such as Drexel University, PECO, the Episcopal Academy, Temple University, the University of Pennsylvania, West Chester University, the Wagner Free Institute of Science, and many more.

Our **Campesinx program** provides **30 neighbors** with the opportunity to rent and manage garden plots at Las Parcelas to grow their own produce. This year's membership included **23 neighbors who have stewarded their beds for 3+ years** and **seven new gardeners!** Throughout the year, Campesinxs participate in potlucks and workshops on topics such as pest management, composting, and tomato pruning, serving as an important educational resource that fosters community-led knowledge and stewardship.



Above: Iris Brown teaching an alcoholado workshop to Drexel students.



Above: volunteers at a monthly volunteer day with fresh produce.

Service Immersions are transformative experiences that combine community service and personal growth. School groups, corporate teams, or any other organizations looking to make a meaningful impact, our Service Immersion program offers a unique opportunity to engage with an important green space.

Cultural Immersions offer participants the opportunity to attend workshops and learn about Puerto Rican culture through hands-on experiences. These immersions take place in our gardens, allowing participants to connect with the neighborhood's cultural traditions and history. The hands-on experiences range from cooking and storytelling to history lessons about the community and a dive into the significance of preserving Puerto Rican traditions.

Garden Tours invite schools, community groups, and organizations to explore NSNP's six garden spaces while learning about community resilience, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation. A multitude of topics are discussed within these garden tours, including gentrification, community organizing, neighborhood and organizational history, and Caribbean diaspora foodways.



NSNP'S THREE PILLARS IN ACTION

Photo by Solmaira Valerio

CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Cultural preservation helps people appreciate their foundations, learn about cultural traditions, and celebrate them. We firmly believe that celebrating Puerto Rican cultural heritage is essential to our work.

SECOND ANNUAL PUERTO RICO TRIP

While many urban gardens in the region offer agricultural training and grow food for their communities, NSNP is the only organization in the Philadelphia region that delivers programs and services that center on the “culture” in horticulture.

As part of NSNP’s cultural preservation effort, selected youth participated in three Spanish-learning sessions and several months of educational workshops about Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican culture, which encouraged them to reflect on their heritage and imagine what their journey to Puerto Rico might look like.

Drawing on longstanding connections with educators, artisans, and community members in Puerto Rico, the youth programs team shaped an itinerary designed to immerse youth in cultural practices and agricultural traditions. For example, youth traveled to Loíza for a vejigante mask-making workshop, learning about the masks’ symbolism in resistance and cultural pride, and engaged in bomba workshops in the mountains. For our primarily second- and third-generation Puerto Rican youth, this annual trip is often their first opportunity to visit the island and connect with their heritage. This experience does more than educate—it inspires, helping youth return to Philadelphia with a renewed sense of diasporic belonging, leadership, and responsibility.

SEEDS & PLANTS

Through NSNP’s Campesinx program and youth-led farm stand, it aims to provide seeds, plants, and produce relevant to our community and rooted in our culture.

Working with the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society and Truelove Seeds, NSNP was able to offer our Campseinx members seeds and seedlings they are familiar with, not only for eating and cooking, but also for caring for and planting. From specific tomatoes to ají dulces or gandules, providing culturally relevant plants encourages traditional cooking and appreciation of where we come from.



NSNP Youth at Camp Tabonuco in Jayuya, Puerto Rico.



VOCES JÓVENES DESENMASCARADAS

During Hispanic Heritage Month, NSNP's Semillas del Futuro youth were invited by Council Member Quetcy Lozada's office to display some of their culturally relevant artwork in the art show, *From 215 Con Mucho, Mucho Amor*, at City Hall.

Throughout the summer, NSNP's Semillas del Futuro youth program focused on the traditional Puerto Rican practice of making vejigante masks and costumes, a symbol of Puerto Rican identity and resistance.

NSNP youth who traveled to Puerto Rico visited Corporación Piñones se Integra (COPI) in Loíza, Puerto Rico, where they learned about the history and artistic process of creating vejigante masks. When students returned to Philadelphia, they deepened their understanding of the vejigantes. Artist Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, in collaboration with CAICU and Mural Arts Philadelphia, led a workshop on costume-making in which students created their own vejigante costumes using plastic tablecloths and papier-mache masks in their own style. This work resulted in **youth displaying seven vejigante masks and one full costume at City Hall throughout Hispanic Heritage Month**, titled *Voces Jóvenes Desenmascaradas*.



FESTIVAL CREACIONES DE ENSUEÑO

For our Summer Program culminating celebration, Festival Creaciones de Ensueño, Semillas del Futuro students took the lead on planning and hosting. Featuring our partners Photography Without Borders and Los Bomberos De La Calle, the event exhibited youth artworks from over the summer, including handmade traditional Puerto Rican vejigante masks and robes. Youth invited family and neighbors, creating a photo booth backdrop for guests to use, and cooked for neighbors in Norris Square Park.

In addition to professional development experience, the event connected youth to their culture. One participant, Liliana Colon, found new meaning through bomba and plena, traditional Afro-Puerto Rican music and dance taught in the art group. For Liliana, learning bomba became a form of empowerment and self-expression, helping her find her voice as she prepares for college:

“My skirt sways in one hand, the other raised in defiance. The rhythm isn’t just music, it’s memory, it’s emotion, it’s everything I’ve been too scared to say out loud. This is bomba, the traditional Afro-Puerto Rican dance. And for me, it became my lifeline.”

Liliana Colon

LAND STEWARDSHIP

NSNP's land stewardship pillar emphasizes the importance of community-built efforts, care, and long-term commitment, which are crucial to preserving the environment for future generations. Besides NSNP's general garden and land work to ensure the organization maintains its spaces, it increases opportunities for community members to benefit broadly from access to community land. This year, NSNP focused on bringing together the Philadelphia land steward community and on continuing its commitment to securing the land it uses.

YOUTH LAND STEWARDSHIP SERIES

From mid-March to June, NSNP's Garden Educator, Sky, met with the Semillas del Futuro students for a seven-part series **exploring the meaning of land stewardship, how to practice it, and its connection to them.**

The series included how plants can support our physical health; an introduction to NSNP's gardens and other community gardens practicing stewardship throughout the city; a focus on El Batey and its role in food production; honoring the Taíno people of Puerto Rico; and more.

To deepen students' connection to land stewardship, they participated in acts of service, showing reciprocity with the land and affirming **"what you give to the land is what you receive from it."**

The series also emphasized the resilience of community gardens. Showcasing resilience in NSNP's gardens, the group highlighted the work of Grupo Motivos and the African Diaspora showcased in Villa Africana Colobó. Outside of the resilience that helped build NSNP and its community, the group learned about other community and urban agriculture gardens throughout the city by watching the documentary *Free the Land*.

Through learning about these different types of resilience, students learned why people start and maintain community gardens, not just for themselves but for their community.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Every fourth Saturday of the month, the gardens are met with helping hands from all throughout the community. Outside these monthly volunteer days, volunteers visit NSNP's spaces through service immersions or project-related activities.

In 2025, NSNP hosted nine regularly scheduled volunteer days and ten small-group service days, i.e., service immersions. Collectively over these 19 days, **211 volunteers** lent a hand in our spaces and clocked **806 volunteer hours, providing NSNP with \$26,017.68 in hourly work**, according to Independent Sector.

STEWARD FOCUSED EVENTS

Land Stewardship Mixer

With support from the Claneil Foundation, Las Parcelas welcomed **67 land stewards, gardeners, and growers** to build and strengthen relationships through conversations, food, and workshops in July 2025. Beyond networking, the event aimed to reinforce local stewardship of land and food systems - both critical components in combating the pressures of food insecurity, cultural erasure, displacement, and the loss of green space across Philadelphia.

Environmental Educators Mixer

Continuing community connection, NSNP and Drexel University co-hosted an Environmental Educators Mixer to bring together educators from across the city and diverse backgrounds. Working with a cohort of educators from Drexel University, Community College of Philadelphia, Dirt Baby Farm, Cooperative Nursery School, Central High School, Lankenau Environmental Science Magnet High School, Sankofa Community Farm, Academy of Natural Sciences, and Feeding Philly Youth, we were able to prepare multiple workshops and intentional time for guests.

The **90 attendees** not only met other environmental educators but also participated in multiple workshops: Everyone is an Environmental Educator, Youth Environmental Justice, NSNP Garden Tours, and Design Your Own Tote Bag.

Multiple photos from NSNP's Environmental Educator's Mixer.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Youth development initiatives help young people develop their leadership, teamwork, and communication skills, which are essential for becoming positive leaders.



NSNP Youth posing at City Hall with their citation from City Council.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS WORKSHOPS

In 2024, NSNP launched a Know Your Rights workshop series, led by Noelia Rivera-Calderón, Esq., teaching youth how to organize their concerns, navigate school policies, and advocate for themselves after students voiced concerns about neighborhood safety and school policies.

To continue the series in 2025, additional sessions were led by longtime community organizer Sylvia Metzler. Metzler's sessions focused on the right to protest peacefully. Through hands-on activities, books, and honest discussions, the sessions connected key activist moments like Black History Month, Women's History Month, and Earth Day, in teaching students how communities have historically organized to effect change and how they can do the same.

Focusing on school policies, Chalkbeat - Philadelphia, a nonprofit news organization covering local education, taught NSNP students how to report school issues safely and on the record.

By participating in this series, youth are not only learning about their rights, but are building the skills, confidence, and tools to lead change in their schools and communities.

SUMMER YOUTH LEADERS

Each summer, NSNP selects six Youth Leaders to support our instructors throughout the six-week summer program and play an active role in shaping it. Youth leaders assist during workshops, lead group circles, share feedback and suggestions on program activities, uphold positive behavior and leadership qualities, and serve as role models for other youth in the program. For this year's summer culminating event, Youth Leaders proposed offering face painting for attendees. This fun activity became one of the most popular elements of the celebration. Several of them also gave speeches that reflected on how the program and their experience as Youth Leaders helped build their confidence.

YOUTH-LED FARM STAND

Raíces youth are responsible for crop planning, harvesting, weighing, and packaging produce to sell at our weekly Farm Stand. This year, seven Raíces apprentices worked together to identify one another's strengths and divide responsibilities, fostering greater team cohesion, ownership, and accountability. From July to November, they **hosted 15 Farm Stands and provided more than 112 new and returning customers with fresh, culturally affirming produce.**

After earning ServSafe certifications, Raíces youth implemented new systems for food safety, organization, and cleaning at Farm Stand, improving safety and efficiency. Youth also brought Farm Stand to the Youth Growers Market at Rittenhouse Square and Tacony Creek Park, where they engaged with a wider customer base, strengthened their marketing strategies, and developed their entrepreneurial skills.

The apprentices also launched their first bilingual Farm Stand Visitor Survey to collect customer demographics, visit frequency, feedback on accessibility, cultural relevance, and produce use. This initiative deepens youth connections to the community and allows them to see the tangible impact of their work on providing fresh, affordable, and culturally affirming food in their neighborhood.

SCARE IN THE SQUARE

Youth coordinated and executed Scare in the Square, an annual Halloween event alongside Friends of Norris Square Park. Youth spent several days designing and creating their own costumes, carving pumpkins, and producing decorations for the park's neighborhood trick-or-treat celebration.

Semillas students during a garden day!



Raíces students leading their Farm Stand.



Raíces apprentices in El Batey harvesting.



CHALLENGES & FUTURE PLANS

BOARD RECRUITMENT & STRATEGIC PLANNING

NSNP is grateful to be partnering with Fernando Chang-Muy of Solutions International as we embark on strategic planning. Although we had envisioned launching this process in 2025, a calculated self-assessment identified the need to prioritize strengthening our board of directors, as three members, including Chair Andres Celin, completed their service. Seizing the opportunity to build capacity, we were thrilled to welcome nine new members to the board, each bringing expertise in accounting, fundraising, law, education, communications, land stewardship, food systems, and nonprofit governance. As newly configured board-staff committees define their immediate goals, we are intentionally setting ourselves up for an efficient and productive strategic planning process in 2026.



NSNP's new and outgoing Board Members at their orientation.

LAND SECURITY

In 2025, NSNP worked with the Public Interest Law Center and pro bono counsel at Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP to file a lawsuit for ownership of a key parcel in Las Parcelas that remains in the name of a deceased person. While litigation is ongoing, this action marked an important step toward land security for NSNP's most renowned garden. With support from the William Penn Foundation, NSNP will continue to advance its land security goals for 17 additional parcels within Las Parcelas, Villa Africana Colobó, La Paz, and Mini Love Park over the next two years.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

A series of burglaries at our home base in Norris Square over a 3-day period in September 2025 prompted NSNP to take steps to improve our overall safety and security. With support from Largo Consulting Services, which provided a free assessment with recommendations, and help from our friends at Philly Community Wireless, NSNP installed additional lighting and surveillance equipment around our perimeter. Thanks to the McLean Contributionship and the William Penn Foundation, we look forward to completing kitchen renovations at our headquarters, as well as sustainability and accessibility upgrades throughout our gardens.

FINANCIALS & FUNDERS

FISCAL YEAR 2025

July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

ONE-YEAR FUNDERS

- Allen Hilles Fund
- Anonymous Donors and Foundations
- Barnes Foundation
- Claneil Foundation
- Circle Thrift
- City of Philadelphia Environmental Justice Fund
- Christopher Ludwick Foundation
- Independence Foundation
- McLean Contributionship
- Philadelphia Food Justice Initiative
- Philadelphia Foundation Forman Family Fund
- People's Media Fund
- Philadelphia Foundation Henrietta Tower Wurtz Fund
- Philadelphia Foundation S. Albert Fund
- Public Health Management Corporation
- Rite Aid Foundation Healthy Futures Grant
- Rite Aid Foundation Strengthening Cities Grant
- Rosenlund Family Foundation
- Seybert Foundation
- Sheila Fortune Foundation
- White Richardson Fund

MULTI-YEAR FUNDERS

- Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation
- Merck Family Fund
- Nelson Foundation
- USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant
- William Penn Foundation Creative Communities Grant
- National Philanthropic Trust Cultural Treasures Grant
- William Penn Foundation Improving Public Spaces Grant

REVENUE BREAKDOWN

Revenue Total: \$777,808

Grants: \$428,457

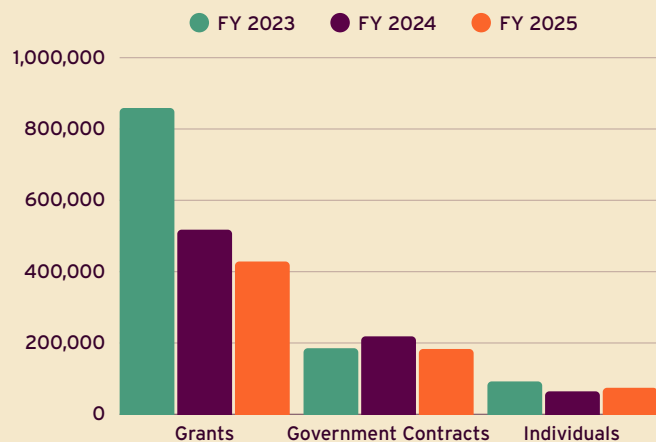
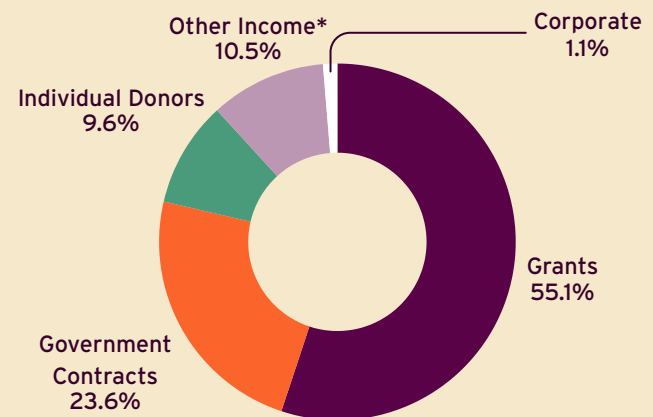
Government Contracts: \$183,186

Individual Donors: \$74,388

Corporate: \$10,105

Other Income*: \$81,672

We note that NSNP records all revenue for multi-year grants in the year in which the grant is awarded. The apparent sharp decrease in grant revenue over the past three fiscal years is due to the receipt of significant multi-year grant funding in FY23, all of which was reported in that year.



*Other income includes Board of Directors' giving, garden rentals, garden tours, service immersion payments, event donations, program income, interest income, and office rental income.

A background photograph showing a community event. In the foreground, a person's hands are seen holding and examining various fresh green herbs on a white table. The person is wearing a black and white polka-dot bracelet. To the left, a large glass bottle with a black cap is partially visible. In the background, several people are standing, including one wearing a grey t-shirt with a name tag that says "Steve". Another person is wearing a black and white patterned top. The overall atmosphere is bright and focused on fresh produce.

CONTACT US

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Photo by Solmaira Valerio