



DHS News

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BYP participants learn healthy habits while at home

Conducting a gardening and food literacy curriculum virtually may seem nearly impossible, but youth in the summer session of the Braddock Youth Project (BYP) were up for the challenge.

The Braddock Youth Project is a summer and after-school program for teens that is housed under DHS's KEYS Service Corps AmeriCorps program. BYP's gardening and food literacy module is designed to help teens produce and prepare healthier food items through activities like planting and tending gardens, practicing culinary skills, making meals and learning about the health benefits of scratch-made cooking. While the program is typically held in-person, concerns around COVID-19 led this summer's participants to conduct their sessions virtually.

To create the meals, BYP's food literacy instructor, Ben Blatt, partnered with Grow Pittsburgh's Braddock Farms to incorporate fresh, Braddock-grown produce into ingredient boxes that he dropped off at participants' houses each week. Every Tuesday afternoon, the teens would participate in a real-time cooking lesson with the instructor, learning dishes like black bean quesadillas with cucumber salsa, brunch casserole and strawberry pie. The youth also participated in virtual meetings with Robert Grey, a Grow Pittsburgh staff member and former BYP participant, who led a discussion about soul food and taught the teens how to make grits, quick pickles and tacos.

For the gardening aspect of the program, youth were provided with materials to create container gardens at their homes. Grow Pittsburgh provided mixed herb pots, and BYP staff took soil, containers, and seedlings that were started during the school-year session to participants' homes.

"The youth have shown a great deal of resiliency and adaptability that they'll also need to bring to this upcoming school-year. However, a lot of them missed the comradery of working hard together at the community-based garden sites. The youth who opt to be a part of our gardening program want to spend time outside, so we tried to incorporate work projects that did not require them to constantly sit in front of a computer screen," said Jessica Gumbert, youth programs manager.

BYP's school-year component will begin with remote work during the fall term. Staff will look to the school districts for guidance on the return to in-person programming.

To learn more about the Braddock Youth Project, contact Jessica Gumbert at Jessica.Gumbert@allegHENYcounty.us.