

# THEORY OF CHANGE

## Core Problem

City Blossoms is addressing the core problem of the inequitable access to safe, engaging, community-led green spaces and garden-based education across Washington, DC. There is a mental, emotional, communal, and physical cost to being disconnected from nature and people living in urban environments have fewer opportunities to engage with the natural world. Green spaces that are available are often not activated or safe due to a lack of community input. School gardens and garden-based education are often thought of as a “nice to have” rather than a necessity for a holistically healthy life.

## City Blossoms Model

City Blossoms’ mission is to cultivate the well-being of our communities through creative programming in kid-driven gardens. Our target audience is children in marginalized communities, particularly Black, Latino, and children from immigrant backgrounds in Washington, DC. Gardens and green spaces are critical for thriving communities. Our models for garden-based programming provide opportunities for exploration, learning, and finding safety and identity. Our gardens are designed and led by neighboring children and their families which facilitates community cohesion and creative cultural expression. Gardens and green spaces also provide a canvas for storytelling and self-expression. We believe in garden-based programming that promotes youth voice and leadership and provides opportunities to facilitate deeper learning on a myriad of academic subjects.

## Inputs

Staff; Children and youth; Board; Volunteers; Community members; Funding; Land; Schools; Early Childhood Centers; Partnerships; Tools

Assumptions: City Blossoms needs human capacity to effectuate its vision. Physical space is a critical aspect of providing access to nature. Community engagement through partnerships, the board of directors, volunteers, etc. is central to effective programming. Children and youth are primary partners in creating change.

## Activities

**Early Growers Program:** connects young children ages 2-6 to nature and food.

*Excursions; garden builds; in-class workshops; teacher trainings; resource sharing*

**School Garden Partners Program:** creates gardens and garden-based programming in partnership with K-12 schools.

*Field trips; in-class workshops; teacher trainings; garden builds; resource sharing.*

**Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative Program:** high school students operate their own garden-based business and receive in-depth programming on entrepreneurship, food justice, and environmental education.

*After-school workshops; product making; growing seedlings; community engagement; field trips.*

**Community Green Spaces Program:** community-centered, large gardens that include a mix of edible plants and flowers and are open spaces for engagement of children, youth, families, and neighbors.

*Open Times; field trips; workdays; community events*

**Resources and Trainings Program:** City Blossoms staff develop tools and coaching for educators to engage their classrooms on their own.

*Resource creation; one-on-one coaching; garden builds; speaking engagements; group trainings.*

Assumptions: Providing opportunities for every age group from 2-19 creates a pathway for children to engage with nature at every stage of their development. Providing in-school and out-of-school activities is the best way to engage children with the natural world. Adult (teacher, educator) engagement is critical for sustainability of these activities.

## Outputs

Number of children and youth who participate in the program; number of green spaces; number of partners; number of schools and early childhood centers; number of lessons taught; number of hours of programming held

Assumptions: The more opportunities for programming mean more children will have access to green space. Higher outputs mean more impact.

## Outcomes

### Short term:

retention rate; outreach from parents, partner organizations, schools; increased opportunities for self-expression, engagement with nature, opportunities for exploration

### Medium term:

increased feelings of ownership over the spaces; increased knowledge of culture and history of community; increased feelings of stewardship; increased feelings of connection to nature; increased feelings of place and safety; increased interest in garden-fresh food; increased feelings of connectedness to neighbors

### Long term:

increased holistic communal health; increased physical, mental, spiritual, socio-emotional health of participants; increased well-being of the planet

Assumptions: the more time spent in gardens and garden-based programming the deeper impact children and youth receive. There is a relationship between self-expression and feelings of ownership, stewardship, and connectedness to the space and people in the gardens. Health measures can only be measured over long periods of time.

## Impact Goal

**Children and youth are physically, mentally, socio-emotionally healthier. Communities enjoy more community cohesion and communal health.**

- Children and youth that are under-resourced have regular and easy access to safe green space that provides opportunity for education, engagement, and self-expression.
- Gardens are built and maintain programming at schools and early childhood centers that are under-resourced throughout the District.
- Gardens and green spaces are only considered effective when they are community-led.
- Garden-based education is considered essential.
- Communities that are systemically under-resourced have more access to investment, and schools, early childhood centers, and communities are equitably resourced.

## Vision

We envision cities with abundant, accessible green spaces where communities thrive, and children build lifelong connections to the natural world. We imagine a future in which all children can easily establish a sense of place and self-identity within their own communities and can continue to pass on their culture and history through these abundant green spaces. We imagine every school and early childhood center with a lush outdoor classroom in which a connection to nature is nurtured throughout their academic careers. In the future, we believe city gardens will become ubiquitous and synonymous with safe, joyful spaces where neighbors can engage with one another and the natural world.