**Camp Fire Central Texas**

### Nature

**juntos afuera / together outside**

**Purpose**

It is vital that children spend more time in nature to become healthier and happier mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially. Through connecting to nature, children have a sense of stewardship over their resources and tend to thrive personally and academically. A school garden is needed for the after school LEAD club children at Dailey Middle School because the area is a food desert with high obesity rates and few fresh food choices.

### Goals

The goals of the project were to install a small Black History and Latino Culture Heirloom Garden using companion planting, and square foot gardening methods. A great example and joke we tell is: What is the difference in Cajun and Creole Gumbo? Okra! Okra comes from Angola Africa where it is called "Gumbo". Slaves stowed precious seeds away on their voyages to the Americas, and played a huge role in Southern cuisine. Another example includes the Paul Robeson Tomato - named after the famous civil and social rights activist who helped spread the ideas of sustainable heirloom gardening. Discussions were based on the tale of two gardens: an organic heirloom garden, vs. conventional monocrop agriculture, healthy food choices, environmental stewardship, philanthropy, biodiversity, and culinary cultural diversity. The students planted the 6 raised beds with organic heirloom herbs, flowers, vegetables starters and seeds. Harvests were taken home to distribute to families and neighbors, with a message that the seeds inside the produce could be planted for another crop, fresh produce was also used for the school's Bistro of Love cooking program.

### Team

The Project Team was composed of Lenny "Turtle" Scott, Program Director at Camp Fire Central Texas, Madison “Sunshine” Anderson a Camp Fire Instructor for Dailey Middle School, and group of 8-12 students in the after school LEAD school club programs.

### Accomplishments

We have accomplished installing the garden with heirloom produce that has rich cultural history, we created Black History Garden awareness posters for Black History Month for display and Black History Programs, students have learned about cultural connections to ethnic groups based on their seasonal produce and shared culinary experiences, students have investigated the reasons for food deserts and food injustice as related to social justice, tasted new vegetables and herbs, learned about edible flowers and health benefits of different pigments, and finally, students have presented and shared their findings with their peers.

### Lessons Learned

Funding is a big obstacle in creating a successful school garden, schools have plenty of unused outdoor spaces where lawn could be converted into gardens to help feed the community, but materials are needed to create raised beds, deer proof fencing, purchase quality tools and "seed money". Anyone planning to install school gardens should consider who will care for the space over time, creating interdisciplinary lesson plans to utilize the space, a good plan for distribution so nothing goes to waste, and an organized map and work log to track progress and problems.

### Next Steps

Camp Fire will continue to expand the gardens at Dailey Middle School to include a biodiverse wildlife and native pollinator habitat, additional raised beds for maximized production, and we are in hopes of putting in a postage stamp fruit orchard. The group has talked about selling the produce and the heirloom seeds at a small farmer’s market to raise money to help raise awareness and feed the community in need, or handing out seeds to neighbors for home gardens to help balance the local food justice scales.