

# "Growing Greens" with Children in Southeast Alaska

Joy Lyons

## Summary

More children eat fresh greens thanks to the Association for the Education of Young Children - S.E. Alaska (AEYC) and their partners. Children, care providers and parents learn gardening and food preparation skills of locally grown produce through the "Growing Green" program. Nearly 2,000 people have been positively impacted by the popular, ongoing program.

In 2014, 27% of young children, in Haines, Wrangell and Juneau increased the amount of fresh and cooked greens served to young children in early learning programs and in their homes.

## Challenge

Children in Southeast Alaska have limited access and exposure to fresh vegetables. Fresh produce is expensive in this geographically remote and wet region.

Thirty-two percent of Alaska children are overweight by the time they enter kindergarten (2009, AK Dept. of Health & Soc. Svc. report).

Children under age five experience the highest poverty of any age group. Families with young children struggle financially and often lack time for food preparation due to balancing work and child care. There are few opportunities for young children to learn how to grow and prepare fresh produce.

Families who make a positive connection with growing and preparing

## Solution

By providing gardening activities, on-going education and continued technical assistance, AEYC and partners increase the amount of fresh and cooked greens served to young children in thirty early child programs in three communities.

Children and their instructors learn through hands-on activities by using sprout kits, indoor grow labs, and outdoor raised gardening beds. Children experience gathering traditional Alaska greens during local harvest events. Early childhood teachers receive "Educational and Edible Gardening" training. Parents gain knowledge and confidence in growing and preparing greens with children.

Children document their stories to encourage others to grow and eat food.



## Your Involvement is Key

**You can help young children understand the importance of growing their own food. Join a local gardening group or local food coalition to see how you can volunteer.**

**In Juneau: [www.changingtide.com/food-sustainability/resources.html](http://www.changingtide.com/food-sustainability/resources.html)**

**In Haines: [www.facebook.com/pages/Haines-Community-Garden/190631247644503](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Haines-Community-Garden/190631247644503)**

**In Wrangell: [www.wrangellcommunitygarden.com](http://www.wrangellcommunitygarden.com)**

## Results

"Growing Greens" sprouted 600 new child gardeners and vegetable eaters at 30 child care centers and Head Start programs in three towns. There are 2,226 children under 5 years in the area, and this high impact intervention reached 27% of children. The program also served 103 teachers and 1,240 parents. The total number of people reached is 1,942, showing a considerable impact.

Teachers received training, gardening equipment and supplies, and are now linked to community partners for on-going technical assistance with grow projects. Thirty child programs now have sprout kits, 10 have grow labs, 4 have raised garden beds; all can be reused.

### Contact

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*"The edible gardens project, the first of the partnership's projects to come to fruition, gets children and families connected to their food source and encourages them to try healthy foods like leafy greens."*

**- Nikki Love**

## Sustainable Success

Gardening activity centers are now embedded into the curriculum of Head Start and child care programs in these communities.

Documenting positive experiences of the programs creates a positive feedback loop, as early childhood teachers, children, and parents enjoy the benefits of healthy nutrition. Gardening is now part of the norm for the programs, with new teachers, students, and parents learning and passing knowledge on to new participants.

Digital Stories created through the project inspire early childhood programs and parents to garden with children, and to continue seeking opportunities to connect children with locally grown vegetables for life-long increased health and nutrition.