



## Master Gardener Volunteers of Cobb County

### Center for Children and Young Adults Project



**Project Location:** 2221 Austell Road, Marietta, GA 30008

**Project Workday:** Thursday (Time varies with children's schedules.)

**Project Chair:** Maureen Lok (770-649-6315)

**Co-chair:** Toni Moore (770-456-9384)

Originally created as a home for younger children, the Center for Children & Young Adults (CCYA) is now a group home for youth and young adults ages 12-21 who have been abused, neglected or abandoned and rendered virtually homeless.

The original planting in the CCYA garden was installed in just one week end in 2001 by Master Gardener Volunteers of Cobb County. The MGVOCC as well as church groups, service organizations and Boy Scouts have volunteered through the years when extra help is needed to maintain and improve the garden.

Teaching responsibility, timeliness, self-discipline and gardening skills to youth who have led transient lives has been a trial and error process requiring patience and understanding, but also structure and consistency. Gardening with the youth and young adults at the CCYA has been rewarding, but not without its challenges. Master Gardeners have had to contend with ever-changing regulations from state agencies that govern the Center and with changes in the population of the youth living at CCYA.

In 2011 the Center's new administrator and staff created an experiential independent living program called Life Works. Youth learn skills by performing and completing certain tasks. The Community Garden at the Center is a key part of Life



Works. Master Gardeners teach residents how to prepare the garden, plant, maintain and harvest the produce. The Center also initiated a new program called TP Dollars, a mock ATM system that allows youth to learn to manage money by paying for rent, utilities, and food. They earn money by doing chores, working, studying and behaving.

Working in the garden provides a way to earn money. Master Gardeners created a garden intern program and youth had to interview for the positions. Those chosen to work in the garden have to get up early to water, weed and sometimes work in the heat to keep the garden alive. There are now eight full-time garden interns who have demonstrated that they can be dependable.

The garden is thriving. It has supplied the main kitchen at CCYA with potatoes, lettuce, peas, carrots, green beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and various herbs. This has been the goal for five years: to provide fresh fruits and vegetables for meals at the Center.

In the fall, lettuce, arugula, herbs and cut flowers are sold at the Smyrna Farmer's Market. The youth at CCYA are excited to be part of the Farmer's Market and earn real money. CCYA has partnered with the youth at Devereux, a long-term residential facility that is home for youth with more serious mental and behavior issues. The Devereux residents grow vegetables on their campus and, with the help of the SIFE college students who mentor them and the residents at the Center, those vegetables are sold at the Farmer's Market and the profits are split.

Providing structure for the youth to work in the garden and providing a way for them to earn money from the garden has been accomplished in 2011. Now the focus is on increasing the yield so that the youth at the Center can sell more produce and earn more money. Visit [ccyakids.org](http://ccyakids.org) for more information.

*The mission of the MGVOCC is to advance the horticultural education and practices of its members and to promote the knowledge of and interest in gardening to the members and to the public.*

For more information contact Carolyn Gentry, Master Gardener Coordinator at the Cobb Extension. Phone: 770-528-4070