



Greenhouse management program grows future leaders at MacLaren

Story by Thomas Spisla

Photos by Adam Reed

March 1, 2016

Thomas and Adam are both youth in OYA custody. Thomas plans to pursue a career in communications, and Adam frequently photographs facility events.

A small group of people gathered on the first day of December to honor the most recent achievements at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility. Four youth and one staff member, group life coordinator Julio Simental, successfully completed the Greenhouse Management course and are now certified in this area. With the help of a few dedicated instructors and the partnership with Lettuce Grow, a nonprofit that provides garden-based education in correctional facilities, this program was made possible for those who were up for the challenge.

One of the many vocational worksites offered at MacLaren is the greenhouse and farm, and part of the program allows for youth to devote their time to courses such as Greenhouse Management. It is an opportunity for youth to learn the many skills that are associated with gardening. These areas consist of water management, proper lighting, correct temperatures, structural floor plans, and even invasive insects and critter dangers around greenhouses.

“It has taught me how to use things to their full potential,” said one of the graduating students.

The course was taught by Elaine Smith and Priscilla Cuddy, who have both dedicated their time and efforts to the well-being and future development of the youth in this program. Both instructors are certified Master Gardeners and are always encouraged by the passion that the youth exert towards gardening.

“There is no dearth of inquiring minds,” Smith said. It is this mentality that has allowed these young men to continually walk the path towards success.



Photo by Adam Reed



Left to right: Greenhouse Management teacher Priscilla Cuddy, OYA Director Fariborz Pakseresht, and Pringle Creek Community greenhouse manager Coleen Owen listen to youth presentations. Photo by Adam Reed

The final step of the class was for each individual to create his own dream greenhouse. To display competency, the project required all of the areas that were presented throughout the class to be included.

They were not given a budget to base their projects on. However, they were instructed to keep their greenhouses practical, and the point was to make a project that could potentially be attainable upon their release from OYA.

One by one, each student explained his greenhouse and everything about it, from what type of materials would be used to what kind of plants he would be growing. Sustainability was one of two common themes amongst all of the presentations.

The second theme was the need to give back to the community through gardening. All of the students had plans to incorporate their communities by educating them, working with them, and giving proceeds back to them. Creating opportunities for community engagement was the lasting impression.

When asked about what this class meant to him, Kenneth J. said, "We're really learning to take care of something else. These plants need me. For a lot of us, this is the first time that we are put in a situation when something else needs us."

It was made clear during the closing comments that the tremendous work and partnerships between OYA, volunteers, and the youth have proved to be beneficial for the future success of all.

"We are 'growing' future leaders," OYA Director Fariborz Pakseresht said.