Growing Together: Workforce Development through Vacant Land Stewardship
Roots to Re-entry
The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
May 17, 2018
Mission

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society connects people with horticulture, and together we create beautiful, healthy and sustainable communities.
Inspire gardeners and garden lovers
Garden public spaces

Azalea Garden

Logan Square

Pop Up Gardens

26th Street Gateway
Philadelphia Flower Show:
- More than 250,000 attendees
- Yields a $65 million impact on Greater Philadelphia region
PHS Pop Up Gardens:
- Urban greening is a catalyst for improving neighborhoods and helping people reimagine vacant places
PHS Programs/WHAT WE DO

- Grow Community Gardens
- Educate and Support Urban Growers
- Restore the Urban Forest
- Revitalize Neighborhood Parks
- Transform Civic Spaces
- Manage High-Profile Public Landscapes
- Promote Sustainable Practices
- Influence Policy and Practice
- Stabilize and Maintain Vacant Land
Since 2010, R2R has provided citizens transitioning back into their communities from the Philadelphia Prison System with the tools and support they need to obtain meaningful employment in the horticulture and landscape industries.
PHS establishes the first GRC at PPS
Roots to Reentry

provides hands-on training
supplies food for homeless shelters
Roots to Reentry

provide seedlings for community gardens
Roots to Reentry

- Supply 250,000 seedlings to community gardens annually
- Produce 12,000 pounds of organic produce annually
In 2008 and 2009 PHS staff notice repeat visitors on farm and start to see a trend.
Roots to Reentry / 2010-2014

1. Training at the GRC
2. Work-release training
3. Job placement

original program model
The 12-week training program curriculum included intensive hands-on training in:

- horticulture
- landscape maintenance
- greenhouse operations
- organic land care
- hardscaping
- nursery management

Followed by a 6-12 week internship post-release
Roots to Reentry / Present

contextualized learning
contextualized learning
project-based learning
Roots to Reentry/PRESENT

Project-based learning
Roots to Reentry

PRESENT

project-based learning
Roots to Reentry / PRESENT

project-based learning
Roots to Reentry/ SPRING 2018 CHANGES

- Working with Temple University to provide a certificate in horticulture and urban greening
- 4 weeks at the Roots to Reentry site, 4 weeks at the Temple Orchard, and 2 weeks at the compost site
- Extended internship post-release from 6 weeks to 12 weeks
Roots to Reentry/Internship

- Create instant structure upon release
- Act as an incubation period to allow participants time to re-integrate
- Engage local community members to assist with the process
- Provide immediate cash flow
An estimated 30,000 people return to Philadelphia from jail and prison each year.
There are over 40,000 vacant lots in the City of Philadelphia. Many are considered blighted, causing major public health and safety problems in neighborhoods.
Using additional funding received through the Division of Housing and Community Development, PHS would help establish a pathway for entry level positions in the landscape industry for formerly incarcerated individuals who have already been released within the last five years.

Employer partners would include contractors and community organizations that work with the PHS LandCare program.
Philadelphia LandCare / A PARTNERSHIP

a city-wide treatment
Using funding from the City of Philadelphia, PHS targets **key neighborhoods** and **strategically selects sites** for an interim **land treatment**.

This treatment is a **city-wide pre-development tool** that is an **economical, yet pleasing landscape design** that includes a regular **maintenance program**.
The LandCare program takes neighborhood problem spots like this...
Philadelphia LandCare / THE TREATMENT

...and creates safer and more pleasant environments.

resulting condition
Philadelphia LandCare / THE TREATMENT

- Major trash, debris, and weed removal
- Site grading and seeding
- Fence installation
- Tree planting

stabilization process
ongoing maintenance

17 hired contractors stabilize and maintain over 8 million square feet of land through Philadelphia LandCare
Additionally, PHS works with 18 community organizations in the Community LandCare program, which hires local residents to perform maintenance work.
Community LandCare maintains close to 3,000 vacant parcels throughout Philadelphia, totaling 4,500,000 square feet.
Between both programs, there are 25 potential employer partners.
- To provide work for new hires, participating landscape contractors and community organizations were offered larger maintenance contracts, adding 2,000 new parcels.

- 11 contractors were selected for the pilot and they agreed to hire and train returning citizen for the entire maintenance season or to hire a replacement, if necessary.
- To support the work PHS partnered with the Mayor’s Office of Reintegration Services (RISE).

- RISE vetted candidates for the program, hosted information sessions for contractors about tax credits and federal bonding, and provided job preparation and ongoing support services for new hires.
Roots to Reentry/POST-RELEASE TRAINING

- PHS hosted a job fair for over 60 individuals

- 40 people were hired by contractors from the job fair and throughout the season
Participating contractors provided on-the-job training for new hires.

This training included:
- safety, maintenance, and use of equipment
- fence installation and repair
- tree planting and pruning
- plant identification and selection
- mulching and weed control
- concrete pours and retaining walls

program structure year one
Roots to Reentry/ POST-RELEASE TRAINING

- 40 returning citizens were hired, including Roots to Reentry graduates from previous years
- 2,000 additional vacant lots were maintained by PHS LandCare
- PHS connected landscape contractors to RISE, who provided information about tax credits and federal bonding, and offered ongoing support services for program participants
- PHS and partners established a pathway for entry level positions in the landscaping field for formerly incarcerated individuals
- New hires were not prepared for the work that they would be doing, which placed a large burden on contractors to provide on-the-job training, while paying individuals at the full rate.

- Some people quit mid-season when the weather was very hot, because they did not have a clear understanding of the field.

- As with any new job, it's important to match candidates with the right position and manager.

what didn’t work?
Through an additional funding source, the National Fair Housing Alliance, PHS was able to offer a four-week paid training before placing individuals with employer partners.
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

- PHS received referrals from RISE again, but also other partners, including Mural Arts Guild, One Day At A Time, the MENTOR program, and Men and Women for Human Excellence

program structure year two
18 returning citizens participated in a 4 week, paid training in March before the season started.

The training included:

- 4 days a week of in-field training, developing landscape and construction skills.
- 1 day a week of Workplace Leadership Training, developing skills in conflict resolution, customer service basics, financial literacy, and professional development.
- Work pants, work boots, and a set of hand tools were provided.
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

The 18 Bootcamp trainees and an additional 12 Roots to Reentry past graduates participated in an invite-only job fair with 17 LandCare contractors and community organizations.
Roots to Reentry/POST-RELEASE TRAINING

- 35 returning citizens were placed
- Individuals came with training and some could jump right into work
- Employers felt more comfortable hiring people, who had been training with PHS for a few weeks
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

- The curriculum still didn’t exactly align with the jobs that were available with LandCare landscape contractors and community organizations.
- Individuals were not vetted by PHS, so there were some people who were not a good fit for the program or weren’t interested in the work.
- Individuals who needed additional support services were not provided with enough assistance because there were not designated case managers.
- The program did not have dedicated staff to follow up with all the graduates regularly, so some lost touch.
- The Workplace Leadership training did not provide all of soft skills needed beyond the equipment training.
- The training site did not prepare graduates for the type of sites they would be working on.

What didn’t work?
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

- PHS provided multiple information sessions to cover program expectations and conducted over 50 interviews to select 30 participants for the program working with two recruiting partners.

- The curriculum for the training was revised and incorporated feedback from employer partners and past graduates.

- The training was extended by two weeks and included specialized training and on-the-job training with contractors.

- Two dedicated case managers were hired to help connect participants with support services and to provide regular check ins and evaluation.

- A trauma-centered psychoeducation course was added to address how past trauma experiences might influence decision making.
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

training aligns with partner employer's work
d hypers of work sites
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

contractors assisted with training
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

exposure to all types of equipment
workplace leadership skills
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

graduation
• 25 returning citizens have been placed so far, with another cohort graduating in July

• Training better aligned with job opportunities and graduates were better able to use required equipment

• On-the-job training provided a “working interview” and enabled contractors to see if people were a good fit for their team before hiring

• Dedicated case managers provided regular check-ins and helped us be more proactive in problem solving issues

• Psychoeducation workshops provided a forum for individuals to acknowledge and talk about past traumas

• Using the “Remind App” we have been able to stay in regular communication with graduates and invite them to ongoing trainings, such as a financial literacy course

• Through on-the-job training and scheduled work days at new sites, we were able to add new employer partners, diversifying job opportunities
Roots to Reentry/POST-RELEASE TRAINING

- Training better aligned, but we needed additional training staff in order to keep everyone engaged the whole time.
- PHS relied on a referral partner to do the initial recruitment and application process and that did not go as smooth as it could have and started later than expected.
- Case managers needed to be involved more with the training from the beginning so that they could build relationships with the trainees.
- The weather did not comply!! Having curriculum and a back up plan for snow days is essential in the Northeast.

what didn’t work?
Roots to Reentry / POST-RELEASE TRAINING

- PHS will host another roundtable discussion at the end of this season to get feedback from participants and contractors.
- Past graduates will be included in future trainings.
- PHS will manage the application and recruitment process.
- We hope to work with an academic partner to develop a health indicators evaluation to look at health outcomes before and after the training.
• LOOK AT OTHER PROGRAMS. You are not the first to develop this type of model and adapting other programs’ strengths will lead to greater success overall.

• Having employment opportunities identified is essential when developing a training model and helps keep the training funded.

• Training is important, but access to resources and support services is just as crucial.

• Track everything! Program changes for next year, retention, employers who worked out, partners who did not...
• Keep building new employer partnerships to ensure the growth of the program and to offer a diversity of job opportunities for graduates

• Look for partners to help leverage funding or offer employers additional incentives for hiring to get them on board the first year

• Meet with local government officials to share the work and to recruit for the training programs

• Share the program when you get the opportunity-- you may find new partners or people willing to offer support (financial, technical training)
Hiring returning citizens to help revitalize and maintain vacant land in Philadelphia enables residents who live in these impacted communities to have a direct role in improving their neighborhoods.

The landscape industry is a forgiving field and many companies are already hiring returning citizens. These types of programs help formalize this relationship and provide the training necessary to give people a leg up in the hiring process.

Help break the cycle of recidivism that many of these communities are facing. Most people just need an opportunity.

why include workforce development?
thank you!