

American Swedish Institute

2600 Park Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55407



JeffersFoundation.org

Summary

■ Seven Smart Pots Big Bag Bed Fabric Raised Beds ■ Serves PICA(Parents in Community Action) Head Start children and families ■ Supports health and nutrition initiatives ■ Reflects the diverse taste and culture of PICA Head Start Families ■ Provides sensory experiences for children ■ A gathering place for families of all cultures

Photos



ASI dominates the landscape on Park Avenue



These preschoolers walk to the ASI gardens. The fenced-in area is safe.

(Right) ASI staff supply simple lessons and activities in the gardens.



(Left) 'Pop-Up' gardens offer an inexpensive and flexible garden opportunity.

(Right) Families are always welcome to visit, harvest and work in the gardens.



Details

General Information:

The American Swedish Institute (ASI) and Parents in Community Action (PICA) Head Start Park Place and Portland Village have an ongoing partnership that invites preschool students to ASI to participate in a variety of activities and utilize their outdoor campus for open play. PICA Head Start Park Place and Portland Village locations do not have outdoor play facilities or safe spaces appropriate for elevated "pop up" gardens. ASI and PICA Head Start see gardens as a place for wonder, learning and unexpected joyful play. These gardens have the potential to bring young children into meaningful contact with the food they eat, urban nature, and their immediate neighborhood. They believe that gardens can teach children to construct a sustainable future for themselves and the neighborhood and act as play environments in which preschoolers can create meaning and explore sensory elements.

Garden Site:

The garden at ASI is located on the campus Festival Grounds, adjacent to the parking lot, allowing PICA

Head Start classroom and families, neighborhood residents and museum visitor access. This area is safely separated from Park Avenue by fencing and plantings and receives full sun during the Minnesota growing season. There are five "pop-up" gardens. The garden area receives frequent watering from a timed sprinkler system, with additional water access available on the exterior of Nelson Cultural Center building permitting the preschoolers to fill watering cans and water their choice of gardens, grass, or trees.

Garden Product:

During the spring of 2015, ASI worked with the PICA classroom teachers, family advocates, parents and Director of Health and Nutrition to identify a complete list of appropriate plants to grow in the garden. Their intention for the garden was to reflect the diverse tastes and cultures of the Head Start families, and to take the fresh produce home. The vegetable garden served as a place for school nutritionists, cooks, museum staff, visitors and neighborhood families to harvest produce that they could cook and share together.

Education:

PICA Head Start uses the New World curriculum which allows classroom educators to feature monthly themes that encompass all areas of early childhood development. Through this curriculum structure, the vegetable gardens augment lessons on farms, families, the neighborhood, the five senses, gardens, and bugs. The gardens support the health and nutrition initiatives in the PICA Head Start centers. Head Start meal times are integral to Head Start daily lessons including encouraging preschoolers to try food that they have never seen or tasted before. The Head Start staff was involved in decisions regarding what to grow, prepping “pop up” garden bags, planting and maintaining the gardens with the students, harvesting produce, cooking, and of course, eating!

Student Involvement:

The seven gardens allowed students to be involved in every step from preparing garden bags, planting, watering, weeding, and cutting flowers for classroom use. PICA Head Start preschoolers participated on a weekly basis when school was in session. Head Start families that live in ASI neighborhood had access to the gardens when school is in session and when it was not. The gardens provide opportunities for relationship building between the families. These activities also supported ELL (English Language Learners) students through vocabulary development in the garden, at the table, and in lessons and read-alouds.

Supervision and Maintenance:

Gardens are supervised and maintained by Youth and Family Program staff at ASI, which includes year around museum educators (avid gardeners) with assistance from their facility team. PICA Head Start staff, preschoolers and parents were involved in the maintenance and care of the garden. Minneapolis Step-Up interns helped provide additional summer garden support. Vandalism was not a problem, perhaps due to the open access and purposeful welcoming of neighbors and museum visitors.

Sources of Funds and Assistance:

The grant from Jeffers Foundation provided start-up costs for the raised pop up garden beds, soil, tools, supplies and signage.

Sustainability:

ASI continues to supplement its contributed revenue sources with grant requests and special projects donations that help fulfill the mission of providing a gathering place for all people to share experiences around themes of culture, migration, the

environment and the arts, informed by enduring links to Sweden.

For more information contact:

Ingrid Nyholm-Langi
ingridnl@asimn.org