Fruit Share

Fruit Share, a volunteer organization, is dedicated to picking and sharing fresh fruit grown in backyards throughout Winnipeg. Fruit owners make their fruit available for picking by registering with Fruit Share which connects owners with volunteer fruit pickers. Once picked, the fruit is shared three ways. One third goes to the homeowner (if desired), one third is split between the volunteers and one third is given to community organizations that can use the fruit (e.g. Winnipeg Harvest, Siloam Mission, seniors at Fred Tipping Place, etc.). While avoiding waste of unwanted or excess fruit is one objective, Fruit Share is also committed to strengthening communities by fostering the idea of neighbours helping neighbours. There has been a lot of interest and excitement among community groups focused on neighbourhood renewal. Fruit Share was started by Getty Stewart in 2010 with 10 volunteers in the South Osborne Area.

Some Challenges

In the first summer of 2010, over 1,600 pounds of fruit was gathered during 20 different picks. Interest and excitement about the project grew and Getty realized there was an opportunity to expand Fruit Share into other neighbourhoods. However, growth required funding for a summer coordinator to help schedule picks and manage the number of requests being received. Until then, Fruit Share operated without funding and without a governing Board. They wanted to keep it "community driven" and as flexible as possible so it could be adapted by any community. Getty’s vision of keeping Fruit Share as simple and "bureaucratic-free" as possible needed to change because being a “loose group of volunteers made it difficult to obtain necessary funding and insurance. In 2011, the group overcame this challenge by finding two parent organizations, Food Matters Manitoba and the South Osborne Community Cooperative, which enabled them to secure a grant from the Winnipeg Foundation and the necessary insurance to grow Fruit Share. And grow they did. In 2011, their second year of operation, Fruit Share harvested 7,386 lbs of fruit with 201 volunteers with a total of 97 picks.

In 2012, the group plans to continue to grow its fruit rescuing operation while also determining the best structure for Fruit Share moving forward. A formal structure will offer certain benefits, but Stewart wonders “Will Fruit Share volunteers be as enthusiastic about serving on a volunteer board, attending meetings and participating in strategic planning as they are about picking and sharing fruit?” A predicament the group hopes to solve by the end of the year.

Success can also be a challenge! The growth of Fruit Share was so quick that they are still playing with different ways to make coordination of picks as easy and efficient as possible.

Thank you to Getty Stewart, Founder of Fruit Share and Sagan Morrow, Fruit Share Summer Coordinator for sharing their experiences and lessons learned.

For more information about Fruit Share, please visit: http://www.fruitshare.ca/

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LESSONS LEARNED

Both the coordinator and founder of Fruit Share feel that what makes it so successful is that they are giving people a chance to share their abundance. "Whether it is time, fruit, or simply enthusiasm - people love to share." They are happy to share some of the key lessons they have learned in getting this initiative up and running...

Be prepared to go beyond the scope of what you originally thought you would be doing. Although the original concept was simply sharing fruit, several workshops have been held with volunteers and community members to provide them with options for the fruit that is picked; including lessons in using a cider press for apples as well as fruit preservation.

It is very important to find at least one enthusiastic partner with whom you have common goals. This doesn't have to be a formal partnership but someone you can rely on as a sounding board to help you to figure out next steps and how to achieve those steps.

A partner or champion who knows a community well is the key to a successful initiative. For example, if the current Fruit Share staff and volunteers are not familiar with certain areas of the city, it can be difficult to "get the word out" and find people who wish to share or pick fruit in that area. Along with local champions, they have found that local media, such as community newspapers, are often interested in doing "good news stories" but you must be prepared to do the work to get the news out and generate interest in the story.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Communication is hugely important - don't forget the listening part!
- Find an enthusiastic partner with whom you have common goals.
- Don't be afraid to try new things and run with it.
- Have fun with what you are doing!
- Use Social Media!

Look at other initiatives you admire and see if you can apply those concepts to what you want to do. For example, ArtsJunktion collects excess goods from companies and repurposes these items by making them available to teachers, artists, general public etc. Fruit Share is a similar idea of sharing something that is in abundance and could go to waste. This idea of "share your junk" can have many applications!

Communication and good energy are key to getting an initiative up and running. The Coordinator has four volunteer team leaders for different parts of the city. Volunteers have stuck with them and they believe it is primarily due to the constant communication and support provided.

In addition, it is important to have fun! "Enable people to have fun and create stories out of their experiences." Stewart and Morrow advise "If people are not happy with what you are doing, figure out what their expectations are, and how expectations and actions are not lining up." Sometimes you will have to agree to disagree but at least you have communicated.

Speaking of communication, Fruit Share has found that using social media such as Facebook, Twitter and a website (with a blog that is constantly updated) has been key. They have found that volunteers like the use of this technology and that "social media hits the mark!"