

Southside Occupational Academy

2022 Judges Choice Award Winner

The Project:

The students in Room 305 Horticulture classes in the Urban Agriculture Program read about the decline in the monarch butterfly population. They decided to take action and commit to developing a permanent Southside Monarch Butterfly Conservation Program to increase monarch habitat spaces on their main campus and in the neighborhoods their students live in. They hope to serve as a model to the greater Chicagoland area to show that, with the appropriate accommodations and assistance, people with disabilities can be actively involved with programs that bring positive change to our communities and to our environment.

Horticulture students harvested, labeled, and distributed milkweed seed packets to 300+ families of students at Southside. An additional 150+ seed packets were available for distribution at the Flower & Garden Show, and even more will be available for distribution through their participation at the 95th Street Farmers Market and connections with community gardens in the school's attendance area.

The program they designed is cyclical in nature to follow the life cycle of the monarch butterfly and the needs of the insect at each stage of its development. As they researched actions we could take to support monarch habitats, they chose activities that correlate with the seasonal changes in our environment and climate in the Chicago area.

The most significant aspect of Southside's program is the fact that all of the student participants are young adults with disabilities. The accommodations and assistance required to meet the needs of their students ranged from hand-over-hand assistance and prompting to independent functioning with minimal prompting. This assistance and these accommodations are well worth the effort to provide the opportunity for people with disabilities to participate in environmental action. Most environmental and conservation programs do not include or even consider people with disabilities as their participants. The monarch conservation at Southside serves as an example that the Earth belongs to us all and we are all capable and valuable beings who can make a positive difference for the future of our environment.

Project Focus: Habitat Restoration

Staff Involved: 8

Location: Chicago, IL

Students: 48

