

Family Matters School

2023 Project Report



Project Focus: Native Plant & Food Garden, Waste Reduction

Staff Involved: 5

Location: Chicago, IL

Students: 20

The Project:

In the first stage, the children learned about the importance of composting and gained information about the way it works, focusing specifically on how we compost at Family Matters. During the communication stage, the children created a promotional and educational campaign to advertise Family Matters' composting program to participants in other Family Matters programs and for all other users of the building. Still in progress, the action stage involves incorporating compost soil amendment into the building of the new Family Matters Youth Garden. The garden, full of native plants and vegetable plants, will be tended all summer by youth in summer programs and will be, in turn, composted by the children of The School when they return in the fall.

The Process:

All youth involved in Family Matters' programs had the opportunity to participate in education about what materials are compostable and how organic material behaves in landfills (i.e., does not decompose). They created youth-designed informational signage to post on our compost, recycling, and landfill containers. This spring, Family Matters started seeds, and are researching native Midwestern pollinator plants and early-yield crops that may be harvested while school is still in session. The garden will be tended over the summer by youth in the Learning Matters and Chicagobility summer programs, and the harvests will be incorporated into lunches. At the end of the season, when school is back in session, the children of The School will put the garden to bed by composting the plants.

The Outcomes:

The community within Family Matters has created a more eco-friendly environment and reduced the waste that goes to the landfill. Since they began composting with BlockBins in November 2022, Family Matters has diverted more than 265 pounds of food waste from the landfill, equivalent to the CO2 emissions made by burning 12 gallons of gasoline. The yard is also becoming a natural habitat for local pollinators with native plants. The youth will be able to enjoy the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor in the late summer and early fall. They hope that this first-hand, experiential knowledge will extend beyond the walls of Family Matters and will create different choices for the children at home or in their future homes.

