



7.17.2017

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the City of Orlando and Mayor Buddy Dyer's Cities of Service Initiative: ORLANDO CARES, I would like to officially thank Chef Chrissy Benoit for her continued dedication to our program, The Garden, and to her unwavering support of our City's youth!

Mayor Buddy Dyer's Cities of Service Initiative: ORLANDO CARES (orlandocares.net) is part of a mayor's coalition of more than 200 mayors that uses 'Service as a Strategy' to meet a community need. Through a landscape analysis conducted by the University of Central Florida, involving more than 700 stakeholders, the City of Orlando has identified 'Youth Literacy & Community Safety' as the community needs that citizen/professional volunteers can make an impact towards. The Garden is one of the six programs within ORLANDO CARES and started in 2011.

The Garden partners with UF/IFAS & Orange County 4H to implement a 10 week session at our City of Orlando Community Centers. The upper elementary students at these centers grow their own container gardens, tend to an outdoor garden bed together, and learn about Hydroponic gardens. Every week, different speakers come out to the students as 'Guest Speakers' to talk about topics such as nutrition, good bugs & bad bugs, rest, mood, exercise, agricultural careers, farm to table concepts, urban planning and environmental stewardship. At the end of the 10 weeks, the students harvest the plants, vegetables and herbs to create a feast... A Harvest Celebration! This celebration has been led by Chef Chrissy Benoit since she first joined us in 2014! We have these 10 week sessions at two to three centers per season (Spring, Summer, Fall).

The Chef works very closely with the City Staff to curate the different fiscally responsible and enjoyable meals each season as we have different plants we grow for each. She is a subject expert on this and her recommendations have drastically improved our sessions. The Harvest Celebration is an important time as this is where the students see the results of their toil. Since joining us in 2014, she has led this celebration more than 21 times in 14 centers impacting more than 700 students. Chef Chrissy is captivating, creative and has a heart for food & people. The Chef's involvement and recommendations for The Garden has allowed us to share some of the "Best Practices" back to the coalition for other cities in the country with similar programs to emulate.

If you would like to discuss Chef Chrissy Benoit's partnership with the City & ORLANDO CARES' The Garden, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Hiba T. George, MSP, MA

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