

PowerUP Jax Fall 2016 Grant Winner

3. **Rebekka Allen**
Mt. Herman Exceptional Student Center
Subject/Grade: Transition students ages 18-22
Project Title: Mt. Herman Sunshine Garden Enterprise

Summary of Project:

We are developing a horticulture program to enable our transition students to learn vocational skills. We are currently learning to grow winter vegetables and to propagate plants for our plant sales. Our school has a sensory garden with paths, and play equipment. We plan to add a butterfly garden of native plants which would attract birds and butterflies. This would enrich our garden for all the students from pre-K to age 22 that use the garden daily. We are working with a local nursery to set up a work site for my transition students so that they can participate in community based vocational instruction in a real business. Our plan is to use our greenhouse to grow microgreens and wheat grass for sale to the Garden Spot Nursery. The Garden Spot hopes to sell our product to chefs for local restaurants. Currently we have a lovely green house, but it needs repairs to the fans and the irrigation system so that it can become operational. We need seeds and materials to begin the project.

How many students will be directly involved? Explain any further impact on other students, teachers, the school as a whole, and/or the community.

The eight students in my transition class are involved in this project daily. Students from other classes visit our garden daily and help with planting, watering, etc. Students from pre-K to transition age (18-22) visit the sensory garden daily to use the playground equipment, to practice mobility skills, to enjoy being in an outdoor space with their peers. This space is also used by employees to rest during their break times, to eat their lunch, or to just have a few minutes to enjoy being outside. The entire school community uses this space on a weekly basis. Because our school is located in an inner city neighborhood by Shands Hospital our green space is limited. Most of our property is taken up by the school itself and the concrete parking lot. Due to this, our garden is a wonderful green space that is very valuable to everyone in the school community.

How will the project specifically increase student learning? Be sure to explain the project's connections to existing learning standards. Be clear about what new skills, knowledge, and/or dispositions the students will acquire.

Our students' academic curriculum is based on the state of Florida Dept. of Education access points. These standards are specifically designed to benefit our students who have intellectual disabilities and most have secondary disabilities. The standards are designed to enable our students to reach their potentials, live a full life, and to participate in their communities to the best of their abilities. The garden project is designed to teach vocational skills such as staying on task, completing a simple job such a planting a plant, following directions, ect. In the classroom I incorporate information on plants and gardens in language, math, and science lessons. The students will improve their communication skills through discussions of work and plant topics. They will learn to co-operate in a work setting, to follow through with a job, and to enjoy being outside. The learning opportunities with a project like this are unlimited!

What is your plan for evaluating the success of your project? What artifacts (photographs, samples of student work, testimonials, etc...) would you use to demonstrate the effectiveness of the project?

We will evaluate the effectiveness by noting the improvement in student vocational skills at the end of the year. Currently students are unable to use a leaf blower, to sweep a sidewalk, or dig with a hoe. By the end of the year I hope to see students using simple tools in our garden, working on a project, and improving their communication skills so that they can follow simple directions from staff. If our students enjoy being in the greenhouse and show enthusiasm for being in the garden, this project will be a great success. I hope to establish an agribusiness that will become an on-going project and will benefit students for many years to come. If our students can leave our program and go on to work in some kind of supervised work setting this would greatly enrich their lives.