

## Successful Environmental Justice Projects Can Come In Small Boxes

*By Ellen McClaran, UUA Green Sanctuary Team volunteer and UU Ministry for Earth board member*

The UU Congregation in Milford, NH (UUCM) is one of our newest Green Sanctuary congregations, receiving its accreditation in November 2012. For one of the required long-



term environmental justice (EJ) projects, the committee chose a simple project with great potential to grow through the years and benefit many people. It also embodies the true spirit of EJ

work – collaboration with another organization and building meaningful relationships with those affected by environmental injustices.

To help address the problem of access to healthy food for many local families, UUCM partnered with SHARE, a program providing assistance to disadvantaged community members, to find families interested in improving their food security by raising some of their own food. The congregation then partnered with the future gardeners to create raised-bed gardens in their own yards. Starting with just three box frames for three families, the project was so successful that UUCM intends to expand the program in coming years, with the ambitious goal of making a home garden possible for as many families who wish to participate.

Here is the story of the “Garden Box Project” (adapted from UUCM’s Green Sanctuary application; photo from its website).

In January 2012, UUCM began a new community service project – the Garden Box Project – the brainchild of Rev. Barbara McKusick Liscord and her husband, Paul. Children, youth, and adults from UUCM and the neighboring community met to launch the effort to assist local families in establishing raised gardens at their own residences. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was chosen for the start-up of the project to honor Rev. King’s call for service to others.

The initial meeting involved building the raised bed garden box frames for three families in UUCM’s neighborhood who have expressed their wish to grow some food as well as personal resiliency during these difficult economic times.

Rev. Barbara worked with SHARE to identify interested families. Each family receiving a garden box was matched with a mentor who supported them in the use of the boxes and provided support throughout the gardening season on everything from composting to harvesting.

Gardening guru David Momenee of St. Patrick’s Church also worked with the families and, along with Reverend Barbara and other UUCM members, hopes to bring in more volunteers and more churches into the project over the next year. The long-term goal is to make personal gardening available to as many people in Milford as possible. UUCM members are also



collaborating with others in Milford to develop a Community Garden.

The second Garden Box Project event occurred on March 17, 2012 – Soil Day. UUCM members and participating families delivered soil and mulch to the boxes at home sites. UUCM members got involved in the Garden Box Project in several ways: donating garden tools and funds to purchase supplies, working to move garden frames and soil, and assisting with administration and organization.

In addition to the garden boxes established by three area families, the children of UUCM created their own garden box on the church property. Next growing season, they plan to contribute vegetables for use in meals prepared for the UUCM Community Suppers.

The Garden Box project was recently the topic of a story in the Cabinet, a local newspaper (<http://www.cabinet.com/hollisbrooklinejournalhollisnews/947910-308/church-begins-work-on-garden-box-project.html>). Learn more about UUCM's Green Sanctuary activities on its webpage (<http://uucm.org/index.php?page=ministry-for-earth>).

If your congregation is interested in in doing a similar Garden Box project, please contact Mike Akillian, Green Sanctuary chair, or Rev. Barbara McKusick Liscord through the UUCM website (<http://uucm.org/index.php?page=contact-us>).