

My World My Garden Sister Walls

Food security is a challenge the world over in both developing and developed countries. The challenge is not that we cannot provide food. “We” can provide instant gratification, but this is a short term and band-aid solution. The challenge is being able to provide sustainable food sources. The solution is to transfer skills and to develop sustainable locally based food sources. This is the intent and underlying objective of the [My Arms Wide Open, My World My Garden Cause](#) through the establishment and management of My World In A Garden® vertical food walls.

My World In a Garden®

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Our goal is to construct two sister Vertical Food Wall Systems based on the design and technology of the living wall designed by acclaimed South African artist, Dylan Lewis - <http://www.designindaba.com/news-snippet/untamed-garden>. The original wall was an important component of Lewis’s “*Untamed*” exhibition in beautiful Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens in South Africa. Timed to coincide with and celebrate the country’s hosting of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. *Untamed* is a thought-provoking showcase of sculpture, poetry and architecture, which explores the lost balance between humankind and nature. We intend to take it a step further by using the technology and design to create living food wall systems.

Using Lewis’s original design, My Arms Wide Open is proposing to build two identical live walls as food walls that will use both vegetable and fruit plants in place of the regular plants used in the original design. One will be located in the Town of Cradock, Eastern Cape, South Africa. The other, a mirror of the Cradock live food wall will be located in the Downtown Eastside, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada at the Ray-Cam Community Centre.

The Vancouver living vertical garden, like its sister wall in South Africa, will bring focus to community, food security and family. In each instance, we run our *Iziko Labahlali* (Mindset) Program to engage the younger members of the community directly. The first program related to the food wall project will be run at the Ray-Cam Community Centre in the beginning of August 2011. You can find out about the program at: <http://myarmswideopen.org/causes/my-mentor-my-coach.html>.

DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE, VANCOUVER

In Vancouver, My Arms Wide Open proposes to build the garden the new Library/Housing/Childcare complex to be built at the 700 block of Hastings Street – a location proposed the City of Vancouver as an ideal location for the garden. Partners in this project include the Vancouver City Library, Vancouver YWCA, Cause We Care Foundation, Streethome Foundation and the Ismaili Muslim community of B.C. For more information on the new Library project, please visit: <http://bit.ly/n9uklN> and <http://bit.ly/pTvvwB>.

We have met with the City of Vancouver on a number of occasions and they are supportive of our program. The new Library's location will provide visibility within the community as a whole but also at a location that is focused on mothers, children and youth. In addition to this, Ray-Cam senior staff have committed to the program. The garden will be maintained and harvested by Ray-Cam's children and youth members from Lord Strathcona Elementary School (who also attend the Ray-Cam Centre Programs), under adult supervision and working with the participants of the Iziko Labahlali Program.

During the spring and summer growing seasons, the garden will generate multiple harvests as well as a limited number of harvests in the autumn and winter seasons. The fresh vegetables harvested will support both Ray- Cam's ongoing food program as well as their own community food bank. A portion of each harvest during the growing season will be canned or frozen to augment fall and winter food requirements.

During the fall and winter, the garden's bottles not being used for vegetables and fruits will be replaced with suitable plants to maintain the wall during the off-season and allow for preparation of new vegetable seedlings for the spring. In addition to the fruit plants grown in the bottles, we intend to plant several fruit trees around the wall to support the surrounding community's need for fresh fruit.

The fundamental emphasis, however, is on the educational opportunities that the garden and its supporting activities offer for the children and youth of the Vancouver Downtown Eastside.

The project will create collaboration and a sense of ownership across the community – ownership by the children who will work in the garden; their families, as a result of their own children's involvement; and other families in the community who will benefit from the garden's harvests. The intention is for this project inspire other children and youth within the community to take similar steps and spawn additional Vertical Food Wall Systems across the community.

CRADOCK, EASTERN CAPE

In Cradock, South Africa, My Arms Wide Open intends to build the garden at the site of the [Masizame Community Centre](#). The garden will be built, maintained and operated by graduates of My Arms Wide Open's Iziko Labahlali program. The food harvested from the garden will support the children of [Nomzamo Day Care Centre](#) and will be sold in the communities within Cradock through existing networks of mini-stores. The plants grown in the garden wall will be chosen based on local culture and community needs. The children, and their caregivers who attend the library and community center each day, will maintain the garden year round.

The ultimate goal of each vertical garden is to turn it into a community enterprise, providing fresh fruit and vegetables at low cost to community members. Although this aspect is relatively longer term, a part of the program for each of the sister walls will include teaching other youth from within the community how to establish their own 'mini-walls'.

SUMMARY OF BENEFITS

The benefits of the project include:

- Addresses food security challenges in both communities by providing a sustainable fresh vegetable and fruit food source
- Supports the children and youth in each community by engaging them directly in the projects. As a Food Security education and learning program, 12-20 students from the local schools and Ray-Cam will be involved working approximately 2 hours a day on the garden
- Transfers skills around vegetable and fruit growing, business skills and community engagement and capacity building
- Engages the community across generations
- Creates a model and funding for community based enterprises built around food growing and harvesting
- Creates an opportunity, over the long term, to employ 3-5 FTE positions in each community working with the youth in the community.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Working in teams, the children and youth in each community will be responsible for helping plant, maintain and harvest the Vertical Food Walls. Youth who have participated in and completed the Iziko Labahlali Program will lead the teams. Collaborating with partners like [Rain City Strategies](#) and others, My Arms Wide Open will develop a full maintenance plan and curriculum for the youth to learn and work from in supporting and maintaining their vertical garden. A teacher's guide will also be developed.

The education and functions the team members will receive and perform include:

- Education about growing and tending vegetables and fruits in an urban environment
- Supporting the building of the initial wall by preparing the vegetable and fruit plant seedlings
- Preparing the 2-litre pop bottles for use in the wall including the soil preparation and seedling plantings
- Tending the plants as they grow with water and fertilizer
- Replacing any damaged or dead plants as needed
- Harvesting fruit and vegetables from the individual plants and the surrounding trees (as they mature)
- Cleaning and packing harvested food for use in the food bank or for sale to local residents
- Switching plants seasonally as required
- Maintaining the wall structure, under adult supervision from members of Ray-Cam staff and the community

CHARITABLE COMPONENT

Each of the garden walls, in their current design, allow for a total of 1,920 individual plastic pop bottle 'plants' (although more can be added depending on the final design and requirements in the communities). This creates an opportunity for the Ray-Cam Community Centre wall to create a funding source for both communities subsequent to raising the funds to build the wall.

This is a non-profit community project designed to create a direct benefit for the community and its members through the project, the food produced and donations received each year. Utilizing an integrated marketing campaign, My Arms Wide Open, in collaboration with Ray-Cam, intends to 'sell' each of these plant containers in the Ray-Cam Community Centre Wall for an annual donation of \$50 a year with a 4-season commitment. This will generate further benefits outside of the food harvested from the Garden wall. For each donation of a plant container in the Ray-Cam Community Centre Wall, the donor will also be credited with a container in the Cradock, South Africa wall. By selling all of the containers in the Ray-Cam Community Centre Wall, the total of the donations collected from the sale of the plants is estimated to be \$96,000 per year. The gross proceeds will be split 50/50 between Ray-Cam and My Arms Wide Open to support their respective members in establishing other community initiatives and support of the Live Food Walls.

My Arms Wide open is a Federally Registered Charity and can issue donation receipts for tax purposes.

MARKETING & AWARENESS

My Arms Wide Open, working in conjunction with its partners, will launch an integrated media campaign that will include community events, social media, eNewsletters, BLOGS, other on-line forums and mail-outs to its current and potential supporters to raise awareness, garner support and solicit donations. The campaign will also be linked on-line to a number of our partner sites to increase awareness and donations.

TIMING

We expect to have the Ray-Cam Community Centre/Library wall constructed in time for the fall of 2012 and the Cradock Wall in time for Spring 2012. The walls are intended to be a 10-year project. After 10 years, the youth and members of the communities will continue the projects as community enterprises.

GARDEN WALL DESIGN

We anticipate the walls will be designed in an arc or “S” shape and will be 40’ long x 6’ high. The design will allow younger children to tend to the lower part of the garden and older youth to maintain the higher areas. A 1’ high concrete footing will support the frame and a number of individual ‘cages’ with divided slots, each of which will house a plant in a cut/modified plastic 2-litre pop bottles.

SECURITY

Security is a challenge where anything of value is concerned. The choice of locations in both communities lends themselves to providing a measure of security for each of the walls. As in other projects, My Arms Wide Open intends to create awareness of the project throughout the community and it’s direct connection to the children of the community as their project and a food source. We will also engage various members and organizations within the community to keep a watchful eye, including security at the proposed location, the local police precinct, the Parks Board and young adults and older teenagers within the community.

CONSTRUCTION COMPONENTS REQUIRED

Once the wall’s design has been finalized, the following materials, labour and other components are required:

Concrete Forms and Footings

\$25,000

- Approximately 2.5 – 3 cubic metres of concrete (estimated at \$200/cu metre)
- Rebar and related materials
- Concrete delivery

Forming and Framing Materials **\$15,000**

- ¼" or 3/8" plywood (depending on wall design) and 2 x 4's
- 1" Angle iron and rebar to build the metal frames that hold the 2-litre bottles

Garden Materials **\$10,000**

- Soil
- Seeds
- Location to grow seedlings (My Arms Wide Open is in the process of securing this location.)
- Recycled plastic pop bottles (from landfill)
- Vegetable plants (for the growing seasons)
- Non-vegetable plants (to replace the vegetable plants in the off-season so the wall still retains its attractiveness)
- 'Young' fruit trees
- Miscellaneous small garden tools
- Available water supply
- Garden tools (shovels, heavy rakes, pruning shears, etc.)
- Protective mesh and railroad ties for soil enclosure
- Wheelbarrows
- Short & medium sized ladders
- Water hoses
- Shed to store tools and supplies

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT **\$5,000**

Included in the project will be the development of a curriculum for the participants to use. This will include a trainer and trainee version of a workbook.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

In total, My Arms Wide Open is sourcing grant and donation funding of \$55,000 to supply the construction and garden materials for the two walls and to develop the curriculum:

Ray-Cam Community Centre Wall: \$30,000
Cradock Community Centre Wall: \$20,000
Curriculum: \$ 5,000

CONCLUSION

The Ray-Cam Community Centre and Cradock Walls project support the Centre's and local communities food security programs and contributes to the Downtown Eastside's food bank and provides a much-needed charitable revenue stream for both Ray-Cam and the community of Cradock to support additional community based initiatives.

GET INVOLVED

You can participate and support the communities in East Vancouver and Cradock by providing **funding, your time, your expertise, materials or referrals.**

Go to: <http://myarmswideopen.org/donate.html> and click on



Be a part of the Solution!