



# Healthy Time Check



Autumn 2019

By Clint Twedt-Ball, Executive Director

Is health a luxury item? As Matthew 25 digs into a focused neighborhood revitalization effort in Northwest Cedar Rapids, it's an issue I've been spending a lot of time thinking about. I'd love to have you think about it with me.

Start by looking around your neighborhood. Is it designed so people can easily walk or ride their bikes? Is the crime rate low enough that people would feel safe taking walks at all times of day? Are there grocery stores or restaurants close by that provide healthy food? What about the housing? Do you or your neighbors have lead paint, asbestos or other toxic materials in your home? Is your property value rising each year so that you aren't losing money on what could be your biggest investment? All of these are indicators of the health of your neighborhood.

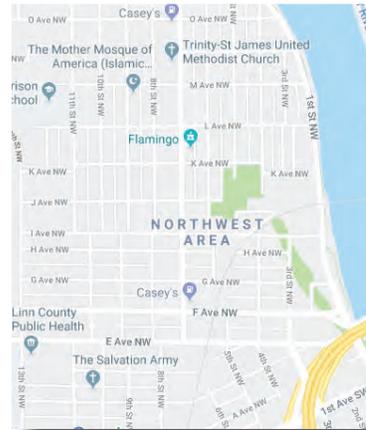


We've been asking a lot of these questions as we focus on our work in the Time Check area. If you don't know where Time Check is, I consider it one of the more special places in Cedar Rapids. Nestled near the river, right across the bridge from the huge Quaker milling operation, it is a cool little place. Named after the "time checks" (IOU's) people working in surrounding factories were paid with, it

has a history of being one of the most diverse working class neighborhoods in Cedar Rapids. It is home to the oldest mosque in the U.S., and Ellis Blvd, at one point its heart-beat, was once lined with several ethnic grocery stores.

With mature trees, quick river access, the state's first urban farm and a ten-minute walk to downtown Cedar Rapids, you would think this area would be bustling with development. Unfortunately, it is struggling. Bike lanes here don't really connect to other places downtown. Many of the houses are on the older side without the necessary renovations to make them healthier. A recent survey found the only places to purchase food in the neighborhood, other than Matthew 25's urban farm, are three convenience stores and three bars. Between all six places there were three salads on the menu and one basket of old bananas in a convenience store.

The result of struggling neighborhoods with fewer healthy options is that they can often become places of disinvestment. Houses can deteriorate. Schools may not be viewed by others in the community as being good enough. Unhealthy neighborhoods can easily lead to the kids living in them being less healthy with fewer opportunities to succeed.



For us at Matthew 25, we will do all we can to give kids and their families a shot at growing up healthy, strong and with a life full of opportunities. This is why we've been working for the last year on an initiative called Healthy Time Check.

The program recognizes that healthy neighborhoods can't be created overnight or by one organization. Because of this, we are meeting monthly with residents, city staff, Linn County Public Health, churches and real estate investors to move forward a plan to improve the health of the neighborhood.

Healthy Time Check is an audacious program that seeks to drive reinvestment into the neighborhood. It aims to reduce the crime rate, increase property values, build new homes, renovate older homes and get more bike and walking paths. It also uses the urban farm as an anchor for healthy food and movement activities every Thursday night during the growing season.



At its essence, it is trying to show that good health is not a luxury. Living in a healthy neighborhood is not only available to those with lots of personal wealth. At Matthew 25, we believe everyone should be able to live in a neighborhood that supports health and opportunity. We appreciate you partnering with us to make it happen.

# Growing Youth

This summer was the third year of our Cultivate Hope Youth Development Program, where high school students from varying social, racial and economic backgrounds learned valuable skills in communication, teamwork and problem solving while working on our urban farm. They not only learned about growing fruits and vegetables, but they also participated in workshops focused on food justice and self reflection, and one day of each week was spent giving back to the Cedar Rapids community by working at different farms or food pantries.



This year the students also spent time focused on food preparation and they created value added food products using produce that they helped grow on the farm. Some of the successful trials were blackberry kolaches, kombucha, mint tea, kale chips, pico de gallo, mulberry bread loaves, garlic scape pesto, and lip balm/lotion made with herbs grown on the farm!

Another highlight of this year's program was called Straight Talk, which took place weekly. During Straight Talk, students were paired up with three different



partners and took time to tell each partner one thing they were doing well and one thing they could improve upon. The goal of Straight Talk was to help students hold each other accountable and provide space for them to become more comfortable with confrontation in the future. Straight Talk went incredibly well, and feedback from the students was that it was very useful in preparing them for future jobs.

Students also took part in a food systems debate. They were broken up into two different groups, the local food system and the global food system. There were workshops focused on comparing each of these food systems, and students were

encouraged to do their own research as well. It culminated in a live debate in front of a panel of judges. The group representing the local food system won the debate, but both teams presented thought-provoking arguments.

According to Laura Greig, our Cultivate Hope Education Coordinator, one of the best parts of the program was the relationships that developed. She said, "Gathering a diverse group of youth from different schools brought students together whose paths would have never crossed otherwise. Watching them turn from strangers, to acquaintances, to good friends through the course of the summer was an absolute joy. By the last day, tears were shed, many encouragements were shared, and numbers exchanged as these will be friendships they carry for a long time."

The Cultivate Hope Youth Program is so much more than just a job, it is a time youth can spend forming meaningful relationships, learning how to become introspective on their own thoughts and actions, and cultivating traits that they will carry on to jobs in their future.



## TRANSFORM

Presented by  Ingredion

Our 4th Annual Transform Week in June was our largest ever! It included more than 325 volunteers working on 22 projects throughout the Time Check and Taylor neighborhoods.

Here are some of the stories:



**2019 marked the first year of the "Transform Your Yard" initiative, which focused on five blocks of general neighborhood clean-up and beautification each day of Transform Week. This included planting flowers, mowing, mulching, weeding, painting, and minor exterior work for more than 15 homes. Having such concentrated effort in the neighborhood made a clear, visible difference in just a day.**

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at Groundswell!*



Our flexible cafe and event spaces can accommodate a wide range of events, including holiday parties, board meetings, concerts, and even weddings. We also offer catering and audio-visual options for your event. Plus, when you rent our space you're helping to support our mission!

Contact us to learn more:  
[groundswell@hub25.org](mailto:groundswell@hub25.org)

Transform cont.



Linda, like many, had home damage occur during the 2008 flood. Her floors took on water and had gotten moldy. Volunteers removed and replaced her flooring.



The sidewalk in Doug's front yard was deteriorating and he received a notice from the city. Volunteers were able to remove the old sidewalk and replace it with 27' of new sidewalk.



Charles and Patrice's porch was in decay and had a lead paint coating. Volunteers rebuilt the porch.



Krista's front steps and landing were breaking down and causing a safety hazard for her home daycare. Volunteers replaced it with a set of wooden steps and higher railings to ensure the safety of the children in her care.

## Cultivate Hope Market -- Furthering Food Education and Building Relationships in the Community



We're winding down for the 2019 Market— our second year at the urban farm – and looking back on this season, we're so happy with the progress we've made in the community.

Right out of the gate, we saw familiar faces and engaged neighbors. Many early shoppers were familiar with the Market from previous years. Once the word got out however, many new faces appeared and became repeat customers we got to know throughout the year.

This was our first full Market season with our brick oven, and our pizzas were an instant hit. It became a centerpiece of Thursday nights out at the farm, with people from the community sitting side by side under the pavilion and enjoying the pizza. This year we also expanded our vendor selection to include not only honey, but also local jams and jellies, candles, greeting cards designed by a local artist, and other items.



In terms of produce, we were successful in sales as well as food education. As new and unique fruits and vegetables became ready for harvest, we provided recipes to show people how they can be easily incorporated into any meal plan. It's very exciting to have people ask questions about produce they've never heard of, purchase it, and come back the next week to tell us about their experience. We even had some families coming to us throughout the summer to ask questions about the garden they were growing with plants from our plant sale. It became clear that our shoppers and neighbors care about what they're eating and how it's grown.



We have also been increasing the movement activities offered during the Market. We've seen both new and returning faces for activities such as yoga, POUND, and tai chi, and we even hosted our first annual Cornhole Tournament. It was such a blast, and our first place winners took home a set of bags and boards made by our Green Iowa AmeriCorps members.

With such a great 2019 Market season, we can't wait to see where 2020 takes us! Thanks to all who support our Market, where proceeds are put directly back into the farm to continue the mission of teaching our neighbors about healthy, local produce and how to use it. See you next year!



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Empowering People to  
Transform Neighborhoods

## More Than Just a Meal

By Aaron Amundson, Groundswell Director



When starting the Groundswell Café, we wanted to create a place that not only made high quality food using local and organic products, but we also wanted to ensure that it was a benefit to all. This is how we chose the

pay-it-forward concept. At this cafe, guests can round up their bill or make a donation to help pay for a meal for someone who can't afford it. Those who can't afford to pay can order and enjoy our super-fresh, healthy food at no cost.

This pay-it-forward concept has allowed us to give out more than \$18,000 worth of food in just one year and feed hundreds of people who are struggling. These people come from a variety of backgrounds and situations.



Let me tell you about the widow who came in asking if what we were doing was real. She recently had an issue with her social security check and wasn't going to have any money to spend for another couple of weeks. When I let her know that it was real and offered her anything off the menu, her eyes welled up with tears. She ordered a large meal that provided leftovers, and made sure to let us know that she would be praying for us every day.



Let me tell you about the people who come in beaming -- eager to tell the staff, or anyone who would listen, that they are moving into a new home or starting a new job. Or the woman who had recently lost her job and came in not for food, but for prayers. Or the refugee women who came in and were so overjoyed that they filled the café with beautiful singing.

Often at Groundswell we are providing more than just a meal. For some it's a place to celebrate, for some it's a quiet place to think. For some it's warmth on a cold day, or a smiling face to talk too. For some people Groundswell simply provides a feeling of normalcy. For those who are living on the edge of society, sometimes just getting treated like everyone else means the world.



Working with these people has changed my life in so many ways. It has opened my eyes to issues that I had never even considered. It's helped me to humanize the forgotten, and it's given me a chance to serve those who are rarely served. I thank God every morning for the opportunity to go in and do the work that I do.



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