

Senior Services Plus receives \$10,000 grant from Mid-America Transplant Services for Community Garden

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Senior Services Plus, a local non-profit organization, has received a generous \$10,000 grant from the MTS Foundation (Mid-America Transplant Services) to expand their community garden. The Compassionate Growers Program, a partnership between Senior Services Plus and the MTS Foundation, will provide the local community with fresh produce as well as learning opportunities centered around organic growing techniques.

Senior Services Plus plans to expand their current garden, which includes thirteen raised container garden boxes, by adding fifteen more raised container boxes and an 18'W x 10'W x 36'L greenhouse. The greenhouse will be equipped with a heating and ventilation system as well as a hydroponic system. The produce is currently distributed to seniors through the Meals On Wheels program and Congregate Dining Facilities. With the addition of the greenhouse, Senior Services Plus will be able to provide fresh produce all year long. John Becker, Executive Director, stated "that increasing access to fresh vegetables locally grown will have a positive impact on seniors health." In order to offset cuts to the Meals On Wheels program, Senior Services Plus plans to sell a portion of their produce to Grassroots Grocery, a non-profit food cooperative located in Alton, Illinois.

Kelly Chapman, Information and Assistance Coordinator and Senior Services Plus Garden Club volunteer, states that "one unique aspect of the The Compassionate Growers program will be the use of Hugelkultur, which is a composting process that uses decaying wood and other plant materials." Hugelkultur improves soil fertility and water retention, which will improve the quality of the produce and increase the sustainability of the project. Senior Services Plus plans to offer educational opportunities to the public on Hugelkultur and other organic growing techniques through a partnership with the Sierra Club. Senior Services Plus is currently seeking volunteers for the project. If you have greenhouse experience or simply have a passion for gardening and would like to volunteer, please contact Senior Services Plus at 618-465-3298 x115