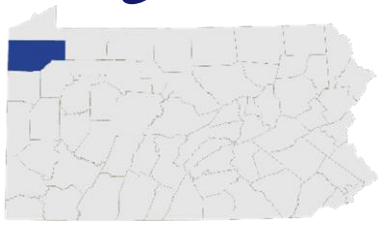


# My Story



## Growing Blessings

Meadville Area Recreation Center

By John Brittain, Community Member

*"I needed fellowship not just to stay clean, but to have a better life. The garden is a prime example of fellowship, community, and unconditional love."*



A majority of my life I have not felt like I was a part of something. I was a pariah of sorts. For various reasons, I entered adulthood feeling overwhelmed by my interactions with the public. My late, great, aunt Joy (known by many in the Meadville community as Joy Link) was an immense advocate for networking. Her presence in my life had multiple purposes, but perhaps the greatest one was being a living example of taking initiative with the sole intention of connecting with her peers. When I entered recovery from drug addiction, she told me that I could not and should not have strived for abstinence alone. She understood that I needed fellowship not just to stay clean, but to have a better life. The MARC Community Garden is a prime example of fellowship, community, and sheer unconditional love. Here, we have an entity, thanks to every single individual responsible for its formation, that



**Keystone Fund Investment:** \$345,000

**Total Public/Private Investment:** \$863,500

offers Meadville residents a chance to not only experience the fellowship that Joy spoke of, but to also learn the very valuable and profound joy of gardening while becoming more self-sufficient.

Gardening offers ways to achieve

better nutrition. I believe very strongly in a plant-based diet, and in a world full of processed foods, this garden can educate others who may otherwise not know of the unadulterated nutritional benefits of plant-based foods. This is my second year renting a plot. I'm indescribably grateful for the tremendous opportunity to rent a space to grow whatever I please; have access to various herbs, garlic, and fruits and vegetables; network (a.k.a. mingle with other gardeners); and to make new friends, all at a very, very reasonable price. The

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garden encourages a pay-it-forward, unconditional love type atmosphere via the shared work sessions, which is a primary component in networking. I had very little confidence in myself in terms of interacting without the social lubricating properties of drugs and alcohol, but this gift to the community has blessed me with four different men and women with whom I have connected. They have now gotten me involved in various activities within the city. In what can be perceived as an intimidating world, the people I've met at the garden have played a major role in the reduction of how overwhelmed I can feel.

Thankfully, there are multiple individuals with decades'-worth of gardening experience who, quite eagerly, have answered all of my questions. I never knew what I was missing until my very first plants (which were kale, beets, and carrots last year) had sprouted. This joy is available to anyone! In my second year, I've been blessed with that same irrefutable joy of witnessing my crops come to life in the soil provided by the garden. If I were to narrow down the entire experience into two words, I would say *sharing* and *caring*. Last year I ran into a situation that interfered with my time spent at the garden. Several individuals were more than happy to offer rides or anything else to ensure my participation. It's apparent that there are no expectations, aside from everyone just enjoying the gift of fellowship and getting their hands dirty.

I can honestly say that my experience gardening has been a major stress reliever. While weeding either my plot or other parts of the garden, tilling, planting new soil, planting my seeds, and attending workshops, I literally feel like I



am immersed in an abundant oasis of life and education. And I think it's amazing that gardening is being taught to the students of the middle school!

I am quite pleased and ecstatic that this project has come to fruition and has thrived as well as it has; it is a valuable asset to the city and its residents. I believe that perhaps one of the biggest accomplishments is that the garden offers the opportunity for a better way of life that encourages the importance of internal health using what Mother Earth gives us. Without hesitation, I'd recommend this to anyone. I praise the work and dedication of the gardening coordinator Kerstin, as well as everyone else that contributes! This community is helping to combat the epidemic of illness due to poor diet. I thank everyone for making this available to me! What a blessing!

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