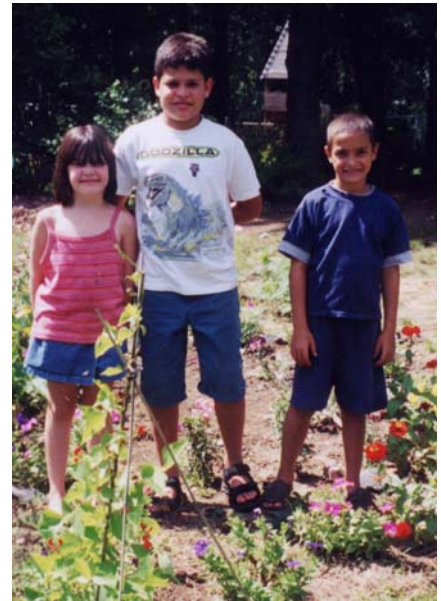


Client: The Sisters of St. Joseph
Framingham, MA

Designer: Nina Shippen
Weston, MA

Completion: Fall, 2000



The mission of the Bethany Hill School is to offer affordable housing to 40 families while strengthening them with encouragement, respect, and goal-oriented learning opportunities. Toward that goal, the school plowed up a plot and invited residents to create a community garden. They enlisted COG's help to design the garden.

By the time the COG designer became involved in the project, the residents has selected their plots and begun planting. The designer's role became one of gardening resource for the summer. She met with the gardeners on Thursday afternoons and taught by example. She answered questions, made suggestions, and demonstrated gardening techniques as she worked in a plot of her own. When she arrived each week she found the gardeners had made notable improvements: the plot was enclosed to protect it from marauding animals, a section was dug for the children, and a perennial boarder was planted.

At the end of the growing season, designer and gardeners celebrated

their bounty with a harvest dinner. Home grown vegetables became lasagnas, flowers were arranged into centerpieces, and the children presented the designer with a large bouquet in a red plastic beach bucket. A resident created awards for all the gardeners and for the "garden architect."

Although there were some setbacks along with the triumphs, people in demanding life situations were able to enjoy their gardens. They gained confidence in their abilities to garden successfully. A group of neighboring residents emerged as a stronger community. Some of the children will grow into gardeners.

Work at Bethany Hill is ongoing. Next season will bring a more formal design.

Both adults and children have tasted the satisfaction of learning new skills and of growing one's own food, an incentive to begin gardening as soon as the ground thaws. As the relationship between the designer and students developed, it was satisfying and surprising to learn that the realization of a garden encompasses far more than its design.

