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My passion for cooking has always been of particular importance to my life, imbuing me with a profound appreciation of the central role food plays in shaping one's life. When choosing a problem to address in my Action Plan, I was drawn to a food-related issue not only present in my hometown, but also present around the world. "Food deserts" are geographic areas where there is little access to healthful food in a one-mile radius, and are especially prevalent in low-income neighborhoods where the only food available is often from fast food chains or convenience stores. During my time at BELL, I sought to expand my knowledge of food deserts, focusing on the affect food deserts are having on the growing rate of obesity in America.

In an effort to combat food deserts in my local area, I created the Agriculture Club at my high school, the Brunswick School. The seven members of the club, including myself, use the gardens located on Brunswick's upper campus to grow fresh produce for donation to the local food bank, Neighbor to Neighbor. After weeding, fertilizing, and mulching the two garden beds allocated to the club, we planted an initial crop of beans, squash, eggplant, tomatoes, potatoes, brussels sprouts, carrots, lettuce, spinach, beets, and lavender to attract pollinators. While the club initially planned to plant only a few different crops in one bed to gauge how prolific the plants would be in their current location, it was decided that while we had all the members together, we might as well put in the extra effort to plant several more varieties of crops in both beds in the hopes of being able to harvest as

much produce as possible. The gamble paid off as all of the crops planted, barring the beans, took root and grew explosively, producing an initial harvest of spinach and lettuce within a few weeks. Through the Agriculture Club, I hope to be able to create a lasting impact on local communities that are devoid of nutritious foods by providing a dependable source of locally grown fresh food for families and individuals unable to find or afford the same on their own. Furthermore, by making healthful vegetables more readily available to the clientele of Neighbor to Neighbor, I hope to help combat the growth of obesity in local food deserts.

Despite thorough planning, I soon learned how challenging leading any group or organization can prove to be. Although a seemingly simple task, watering the garden turned out to be unduly difficult due to the unfortunate location of one of garden beds (many feet from any water source), eventually becoming the most difficult hurdle faced by the club. However, thanks to the organized nature of the club and the dedicated members, including a vice president and secretary of the treasury, we were able to determine an equitable watering schedule, while solving the issue of insufficient irrigation by installing solar powered rain barrels to provide a conveniently located water source. Leading the Agriculture Club as its founder and president has not only allowed me to employ many of the useful leadership skills I learned from BELL, namely public speaking and leadership skills, but also has allowed me to witness firsthand the varying levels of effectiveness of different methods of leadership.

After the first bunch of produce was delivered, people immediately began to take heart to the new fresh, healthful options available. Witnessing the interest the members of the Neighbor-to-Neighbor community have taken in the fresh donations has shown me the difference the work of the club has made, while also giving a glimpse of our future potential to affect even greater change, inspiring me to continue to expand the operations of the Agriculture Club. The immediate acceptance and integration of fresh produce into the diets of the members of the Neighbor to Neighbor community allowed me to realize that the widespread issue of unhealthful eating and obesity in America is not the result of a common dislike or refusal to eat healthful foods, but rather is the result of the lack of access to fresh and healthful foods experienced by many Americans. Next year I look to continue to inspire the same interest and excitement over locally grown food options by inviting specialists from the New York Botanical Garden to teach classes on how to affordably grow your own produce in whatever space available as a means of inspiring people to develop a personal commitment and involvement in their health with fresh food as the vehicle. I also hope to garner a substantial membership of underclassmen, who will then be able to continue to run the club at Brunswick once its senior members graduate.

By guiding and working together with the other members of the club through the variety of challenges we faced, I was able to expand my knowledge on how best to lead others, while realizing what form of leadership best suited me. Working with the members of the club allowed me to learn about the importance of flexibility as a

leader, both in your response to difficult situations and in your approach to situations requiring collaboration between all members of the club. For other Leadership Institute students modeling their action plans, I would say that the two most important pieces of advice to remember would be to pick an issue they are passionate about and are eager to commit their time to improving, and to not let themselves become intimidated or discouraged by the apparent difficulty of the issue at the center of their action plan. No matter what challenge one may choose to address, I've learned that through sincere devotion and unflagging optimism, the amount of change one committed individual can affect is nearly limitless.