

Resiliency Gardens Taking Root

A story of community viability and aid through an initiative directed by a former community engagement manager. This short vignette is part of our “Virginia Food Systems and COVID-19 Story Collection Project” that aims to highlight, collect, and share stories of hope and resilience in our food system amidst the pandemic. Find out more about this project and view our entire series on [our website](#).

June 22, 2020

By Hunter Hilbert and Katie Trozzo

VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation

<https://foodsystems.centers.vt.edu/>

As the coronavirus pandemic continued to take its toll, it left Duron Chavis without his community-oriented job. His new predicament sparked the idea of a Resiliency Garden Initiative. Using his experience as a community engagement manager at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, Chavis stepped up to aid in providing food security locally through raised bed “resiliency” gardens.

The Resiliency Garden Initiative’s 6’ X 4’ raised bed gardens allow enough room to grow vegetables like potatoes, kale, collard greens, melons, and other vegetables. Each garden structure requires six bags of soil—each containing three cubic feet. Chavis started a fundraiser to secure community support and donations for the purchase of 1,300 bags of soil to fill the raised beds that were placed throughout the City of Richmond. In the weeks following the dawn of Resiliency Gardens, more than \$19,000 was raised. The fundraiser attracted community support and donations from almost 400 people. The successful launch of the project is credited to all supporters and donors and the help of “dozens of volunteers” (Davis, 2020).



Chavis’s raised beds. Photo retrieved from Urban Views RVA

While reflecting on losing his job at Lewis Ginter, Chavis said he has “known that his mission is larger” than working at the botanical garden (Davis, 2020). He also recognizes that the Resiliency Garden and other projects of care are a part of “his life’s work” (Davis, 2020). Further, Chavis strives to be an advocate for “racial equality” in a constant, continued sense (Davis, 2020). In addition to holding recognitions and accolades in connection to Hope in the Cities’ Community Trustbuilding Fellowship program (2015), Leadership Metro Richmond (2011), and being a certified conflict resolution trainer for the Alternatives to Violence Project, Chavis writes poetry that is reflective of his past.

*“I got all this work on me who got time to chill
I got all this work on me who got time to chill
I got all this work on me who got time to chill
I got all this work on me who got time to chill
I’m Southside born and raised off of broad rock
My pops ran the block I used to ride and watch
Fast forward they den gentrified the spot
Half a million dollar home remember fiends was
getting rocked
I was busy skipping school rolling Dutches of the la
At the age of 17 caught a couple of bullet shots
What you know about semi-automatic rounds
letting off
Ducking for your life and flashbacks before you 21
I seen death blowing kisses at me
We not cut from the same cloth my type of stitch is
different family
I’m from a place where ain’t no such thing as plan
b...”*



Chavis, pictured above. Photo retrieved from Urban Views RVA

Untitled by Duron Chavis

Read the full poem on Duron Chavis’ Facebook page.

You can read more about the time Chavis spent at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden and his tenure there [at this link](#). Further, you can receive more updates from Duron on [his personal Facebook page](#) or via his [Happily Natural Day](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. This vignette is derived from [an original article](#) by Bonnie Newman Davis from April 28, 2020.

Reference

Davis, Bonnie N. (2020, April 28). *SOWING SEEDS OF HOPE DURING COVID-19*. Retrieved from: <https://urbanviewsweekly.com/2020/04/28/sowing-seeds-of-hope-during-covid-19/>