Looking back in order to learn
Retrospective with SUSTAIN Community partners
June 2012

The following community partners were interviewed as part of this retrospective:

- Oak Creek Commons: Jim Cole, Sue Aiken Nancy Scott, Chris Aho
- Transition Towns: June Cochran, Norma Cole, Jim Cole, Bev Aho
- Aids Support Network: Karla Quiroga
- Independent Living Resource Center: Jerry Mihaic
- Western Wildlife: Cynthia Perrine
- Master Gardeners: Teresa Lees
- United Way: Rick London

Two community partners where not able to participate: Food Bank and SLO Creek Farms.

The interviews were conducted over a two week period in June. Partners met individually with a SUSTAIN faculty member. The meetings generally lasted an hour. The discussion was unstructured, but there seemed to be three general areas of comments: 1) Review of goals for SUSTAIN, 2) Successful activities and 3) Areas of Improvement

Goals

Every community partner came to this collaboration with generally two goals. The first was to improve or increase relationships with Cal Poly and the second was to execute a project. Every community partner felt the first goal was reached, but the completion of projects was not uniform. Several projects did move to a place of completion while others are continuing.

Every community partner expressed gratefulness for the chance to interface with students. They were extremely impressed with the student’s polite attitude, eagerness to form relationships, and enthusiasm for the community partner’s mission.

Successful Activities

As we were all learning in the process, there was a range of activities during the six-month period, some of these activities worked well. The best practices are listed below.
• When community partners met regularly and frequently (once a week) with the students, they felt communications were good.
• Several community partners appreciated that the students had some project management skills.
• The availability, kindness, and knowledge of the specific mentors were extraordinary in all projects.
• Students were able to have freedom of choice in the projects, which allowed creativity and out-of-the-box thinking.
• Students were for the most part very committed to the projects.

Areas of improvement

As always there are places where things could have been improve. Below are listed some issues and suggestions.
• Safety of onsite activities should be stressed more. For instance, when students are doing construction they should wear close-toed shoes and long pants.
• The sporadic nature of the time students spent on the projects was difficult for some partners. If the time commitment and sporadic nature were clear at the beginning, expectations would not have been violated.
• Some partners would like a dedicated time to meet with students each week.
• Although none of the partners were unhappy about the level of interactions with the students, several suggested that new community partners should understand the commitment and the types of interactions desired.
• Not all partners signed the liability paperwork. Some felt the process was unclear.
• Many partners felt they did not have one point of contact with the Cal Poly faculty team. It would have been good to establish communications methods at the outset.
• Several community partners felt they wanted a bit more closure with the students. This could be done with access to reflections or a final report.
• Some community partners felt there should have been more instruction on sustainability and sustainable design.
• Some partners would like to know what topics the students are covering in classes so they could aid in integration.
• One partner suggested the need for a succinct brochure or flier so SUSTAIN could be explained easily to others.
• Some partners indicated uncertainty as to how much to lead the students and how much to let the students take charge.
• Although the group meetings with the SUSTAIN was necessary, some of the presentations days where too long and time consuming for the community partners.
• One partner noticed that the students felt sometimes stuck between the community partner’s instructions and the faculty’s instruction.
Since the project management class was so helpful, the community partners suggested that each project should have a project manager; possible one that served that role during the entire six month period.

Community partners wanted to know Cal Poly’s and SUSTAIN’s schedule and would have liked a calendar system.

All Community Partners look forward to working with SUSTAIN SLO next year.