

Growing stronger together: empowering communities through Pennsylvania Horticultural Societies Landcare program

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The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's (PHS) LandCare and Workforce Development program fosters vibrant communities through a simple and impactful greening and maintenance program that has been scientifically proven to improve health and well-being. This presentation, led by PHS's President Matt Rader, will explore the transformative impact of LandCare and its role in nurturing communities by revitalizing vacant land and turning a community problem into a community asset. Matt will share how 13,000 of Philadelphia's abandoned lots have transformed into flourishing gardens, enhancing public health, social cohesion, and improving community safety through scalable, simple greening treatments. Attendees will also discover how the collaborative research efforts between PHS and the University of Pennsylvania have proven the positive impact of remediating vacant land on public health, social well-being, and economic vitality as demonstrated in key impact metrics. Additionally, this presentation will explore PHS's Workforce Development program, which uses horticulture to provide fully paid, hands-on training, job readiness, job placement, and ongoing support for Philadelphia residents transitioning back into their communities from the prison system or experiencing other barriers to securing and maintaining employment. PHS's LandCare and Workforce Development program can serve as a model that other cities can incorporate to effectively use simple, low-cost green interventions to reduce symptoms of urban instability such as crime, violence, and poverty, and directly support health, well-being, and improved quality of life for all. PHS will make the case that "green infrastructure" like clean and green vacant land, public parks and greenspace, and community gardens should be viewed as "must-have" infrastructure for a healthy, thriving city.