



Sunrise Project: An Interview With Emily Hampton by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg (CMG): *We once had a big garden center right in the beautiful east Lawrence that closed and seemed like it would remain closed or be turned into something far less than it was. What led people to commit to transforming this center into the Sunrise Project?*

Emily Hampton: The Sunrise Garden Center had been for sale for about a year when my colleague, Melissa Freiburger and I decided to pursue securing the site for our newly formed nonprofit organization. Melissa and I had been coordinating Healthy Sprouts, a farm to preschool program at Douglas County Child

Development Association for several years. Funding was running out and we were looking at different ways to sustain programming. I had seen some amazing examples of urban agriculture and food justice centers around the country and found that nothing similar existed in Lawrence. Being familiar with the garden center, we decided it would be the perfect site to operate such an organization.

We worked with a committee for many months and decided we needed to partner with other businesses to be successful. We soon discovered that Dave and Susan Millstein were looking for a new site for Central Soyfood and reached out and began building a relationship with them, which led to the purchase of the site. Other local businesses aligned with our mission also joined forces and the site will now serve as a collaboration between Central Soyfood, Lawrence Organics (Moon on the Meadow and Mellowfields Farms), Seeds from Italy, One Heart Farm and Sunrise Project (our nonprofit). The farmers began using the greenhouses in the spring and Seeds from Italy is working on getting their special use permit approved, after which they will begin renovating the garage.

Sunrise Project is working on getting a building permit and will begin renovating the former retail building in the fall, with plans to move in late winter. Currently, we are managing a youth garden in front, and we will eventually also use one of the greenhouses for educational purposes.

CMG: *Tell us a bit about the roots (background) and wings (goals) of the programs the Sunrise Center has coalesced or created -- Healthy Sprouts, Food*

Rocket, Summer of Service, and the Lawrence Fruit Tree Project?

EH: As I mentioned, the organization started with Healthy Sprouts farm to preschool program, which works with several local child care centers to offer cooking, gardening, farm connections and curricular support.

Lawrence Fruit Tree Project was founded by Skyler Adamson in 2009.

They were getting ready to file for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status around the same time, so we joined forces to create Sunrise Project.



Since then, Melissa started our Food Rocket cooking and gardening after school program at Cordley and New York Elementary Schools. Summer of Service was previously housed at United Way of Douglas County and was just transferred to Sunrise Project this year. Through this program, we match youth ages 12-18 with volunteer projects throughout the community and offer social justice workshops throughout.

We are also currently working on a temporary project with Douglas County and the Health Department to gather stories and feedback from the community to incorporate into the county's stand-alone food system plan. Ultimately, we are working toward social justice utilizing the vehicles of food, the environment and community engagement.

***CMG:** What a huge project this is, and obviously one that takes strong organization, a deep commitment, a whole lot of program development and fund-raising, and so much more. What led you to make the leap into serving as executive director when you're also working with people closely to launch so much in so many ways? How have you found continued inspiration, energy and courage to devote yourself to this work so fully?*

EH: As co-founder of the organization, Executive Director was the natural position for me. My responsibilities are a little more administrative in nature while Melissa, our Director of Programs, focuses more on the hands-on programming. However, as the only employees, we share most of the work. While it is a lot of effort and can be stress-inducing, we are both people who are extremely passionate about social justice and engaging people who are often underrepresented in local food, the environment and the community in general.

Our program participants are the ones who inspire us to continue this important work. It's amazing to discover all of the untapped energy, knowledge and skills in our community and it's a true privilege to be able to offer space and opportunities to utilize our community's strengths to make social change.

CMG: *Dream time: where do you see the Sunrise Center in five years, and how can people help us get there?*

EH: In five years, Sunrise Project will still be operating our four core programs, but will be settled at the former Sunrise Garden Center site, which will serve as a neighborhood center inclusive of people all ages, backgrounds and cultures. We'll have a vibrant space where community members can come together and share knowledge, skill and ideas related to food, the environment, social justice, leadership and civic engagement. There are intersections between these topics that we look forward to demonstrating more clearly over time. We also hope to collaborate closely with the businesses on-site and develop ways to generate revenue to sustain our programs. We will continue to need financial and volunteer assistance from the community. As a new nonprofit, it is difficult to secure large grants, so we will depend on the community to help us to continue our work long into the future. If interested in donating and/or volunteering, visit <http://sunriseprojectks.org> and learn more.

