

Pranav Parekh

Interviewee → Pranav Parekh, Volunteer Coordinator

Location → The Homeless Garden Project

00;00;00;25 - 00;00;22;11

Unknown

It's going all right. It's going. I have you hold it just like. Like waist level. Like a little like. Okay. All right. And then he says like 2123, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. And it turns out a little bit. And I.

00;00;22;14 - 00;00;55;08

Unknown

Can try one more time. Yeah. 123456789 ten. All right. I think we're good. All right, I'll have this going to. I'll just put that up right there. And then that will be the cameras on it. Yeah okay. So could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your role here? Sure. So my name is Pranav Park.

00;00;55;13 - 00;01;14;11

Unknown

I'm the volunteer coordinator at the Homeless Garden Project. So what that means is that we have lots of volunteers that come through both as individuals to the farm, but we also have lots of groups. So just before you guys got here today, we had a group of first graders. I was giving them a tour of the farm and then doing some little activities around.

00;01;14;14 - 00;01;36;21

Unknown

All right. And then you give us a little bit of detail about how house. So both in your role and also just kind of the general. Yeah. So the homeless garden project, we've got three main goals. The first being to build a path out of homelessness, the second one being the better our local food systems, and then third being to foster community stewardship of the land.

00;01;36;24 - 00;02;02;23

Unknown

So in my role, I kind of touch on each of those, but primarily the second two. So when it comes to community stewardship, that's a big part of my role. It's helping people come to the farm, feel connected to the land, to what we grow, and just feel connected to community. I think one of the special things about volunteering is that people just want to give back, but a lot of times they're also wanting to

connect with people around them who think similarly and want to make this place their home.

00;02;02;23 - 00;02;21;29

Unknown

So that's what I do in my role. But in terms of the organization as a whole, what we do is that we hire, 20 to 25 people each year. And our transitional employment program, so we call these people are trainees. And what they are are people who are either actively experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

00;02;22;02 - 00;02;41;08

Unknown

And so we hire them on they work part time throughout a one year program. So that's Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.. So if they show us that they can work those four days consistently, then we'll hire them to take them on. We do have a waiting list. A lot of times it's okay with folks in the back.

00;02;41;11 - 00;03;00;14

Unknown

It's probably okay. And so then what with that, the way that that works is that they are getting paid throughout that time. So they're getting consistent income, but they're also getting social work support. So that's one of the biggest parts of what we do. So we have a huge social work program that helps them both with things as simple as checking in.

00;03;00;16 - 00;03;29;26

Unknown

How are you doing? Know where do you sleep last night? How can we help you all the way through? Until the very practical side of things like how do I build a resume? How do I apply for jobs, how do I apply for housing? And so in doing that, throughout the year, working with us, they'll spend the warmer months of the year at our farm here so that I'll be planting, growing, harvesting and then taking the ingredients from our farm and then processing them to turn into the products that we sell at our store.

00;03;29;28 - 00;03;49;13

Unknown

And so that's how part of how we raise money. And then we also with the rest of the produce that we have here, how about half of it goes towards our CSA program. So that's community support. Agriculture. People can buy shares, which means that they'll come each week, pick

up a big bag of groceries and it gets harvest harvested for them fresh here.

00;03;49;15 - 00;04;13;14

Unknown

And with the other half. What we do is we have our Feed two birds program. So that is a way of us donating the food that we produce here to different nonprofits and organizations around the county to help provide fresh, local organic food, to different organizations that serve vulnerable people and vulnerable populations. Because we don't believe that, you know, fresh, organic food should be behind this paywall.

00;04;13;14 - 00;04;37;12

Unknown

It often is. And so then, yeah, then in the colder months, our trainees will move to our workshop, which is where, like I said, they'll take ingredients like our lavender strawberries, lemon balm, kale, processed them and turn them into soaps, bath and body products of all kinds, baking mixes, strawberry jams, kind of everything you can imagine. Strawberry.

00;04;37;14 - 00;04;56;20

Unknown

And throughout the course of this one year program, about 94% of all of our trainees find both full time employment as well as permanent housing. So it's really a very effective way of getting people back on their feet and connecting them to community. Yeah. And it's so much like going, yeah, no problem.

00;04;56;22 - 00;05;19;09

Unknown

So why don't we touch a little bit about what it's like to walk us through what you do? Sure. Yeah. So my role is awesome and then it's super multifaceted. So I get to work kind of across the different departments on a day to day. I'll either be in the office doing lots of email outreach, or I'll be here at the farm leaving farm groups.

00;05;19;09 - 00;05;38;12

Unknown

And so over the course of the year, we usually get between 1500 to 2000 and occasionally 2500 volunteers over the course of the entire year. So a lot of those volunteers are out here at the farm. So I'm checking in with them, making sure they know what they're doing and

feeling connected to everybody. But then we also have volunteers who help make lunch.

00;05;38;14 - 00;06;01;02

Unknown

So we have a lunch program for all of our trainees Tuesday through Friday, we provide a lunch that is made onsite for these volunteers kitchens. And so I help to coordinate all of that happening because it's cooking for 30 people every day. So over the course of a year, that's 6000 meals. So I'm helping to make sure that the cooks have all the ingredients they need.

00;06;01;04 - 00;06;21;24

Unknown

They're getting here on time. They feel supported. So a lot of my role is sending emails. We have lots of events. So I'm recruiting volunteers for different events. Checking in kind of across the board. We have an internship program. So I'm also doing check ins with interns. And then we have a number of events like our days of service.

00;06;21;29 - 00;06;49;17

Unknown

So that's where we'll get about 100 volunteers to come to the farm, have a day of service in honor of either Martin Luther King Junior or farmworkers. And so on that day, I give speeches and I also recruit speakers to talk to the community. So they're really special days. So my role kind of in totality is recruiting volunteers, making sure they feel supported, leading volunteer groups and then organizing events.

00;06;49;20 - 00;06;56;07

Unknown

I want you to tell us a little of, like, what inspired you to kind of get.

00;06;56;09 - 00;07;18;07

Unknown

There? Yeah, totally. So I grew up here in Santa Cruz. So Homeless Garden Project was always around. I volunteered as a kid, but then myself, I also had a level of housing instability growing up. So there were times when my mom and I were living in shared housing spaces and times where just recently I've been living in my friend's trailer for quite some time.

00;07;18;07 - 00;07;38;27

Unknown

So I dealt with housing instability myself, and so this felt like a special place. And so then when I was in university at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, I got what's called a projects for peace grant. So there it gave me \$10,000 to do community work with a program of my choosing. And so homeless garden Project was my natural choice.

00;07;38;29 - 00;08;04;12

Unknown

I came here, so that was two summers ago. Brought in solar panels, different boots, lockers for the trainees, hosted some events. And then as soon as I graduated this past year from university, I saw this role was open and it was just a full circle moment. I love working in the community I work here. I'm also a high school soccer coach, so just doing work with people and making sure people have.

00;08;04;14 - 00;08;24;07

Unknown

I like to think of it as third spaces, so I don't know if you know the term third space, but it's like somewhere outside of home and work because that people can feel connected and have a space that they take ownership of and feel proud to be in. So yeah, that's what I love about the role. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for sharing that with us.

00;08;24;09 - 00;08;44;25

Unknown

Could you could get into like the specifics of gardening activities, what you do here. I know we talked about, what you do with your first year. But I go over, like, different things people do. Totally. I mean, in all honesty, it's a super wide range, so we have a certain selection of, I guess, tasks that require training.

00;08;44;25 - 00;09;06;19

Unknown

And so a lot of times volunteers won't get to those just for safety reasons. So like weed whacking or doing any sort of sawing things with sharp tools. But besides that, the volunteers are essentially like our farm crew. So they come on, they'll help us from everything from planting. So we do transplants, eating from our greenhouse. Then we'll also do lots of weeding.

00;09;06;22 - 00;09;34;02

Unknown

They'll flip composts, do mulching. Again, like I said, lots of harvesting as well. So we have people come through, pick lots of lemon balm, mint, all the different herbs, strawberries, things like that. And then we'll also have volunteers come, like I was saying before, and help with cooking lunches. So that's a really fun one because they get to take ingredients from the farm and then put them into fresh salads or soups or whatever they want to make.

00;09;34;05 - 00;10;00;06

Unknown

So, do you have any specific stories for sure about your time here, either with volunteer groups for people that just actually have a chance to not. Yeah. Yeah, I've got a cool one. There was it was early on in my time here. I had a group coming. They were from an alternative schooling system. And so that was serving kids who other schooling programs hadn't worked out for them for whatever reason.

00;10;00;09 - 00;10;24;01

Unknown

And so when they came here, there was kind of an exterior shell up for a lot of them. Naturally, just from having dealt with the world and its hardships. And so then they came in and it was cool to watch as I gave them a tour around the farm, you know, had them try out some of the nasturtium flowers and eat a little bit of mint and pick a strawberry to watch kind of their eyes glow and then start to feel connected to the land.

00;10;24;03 - 00;10;42;23

Unknown

And at 1.1 of the kids found a little snake, just a little gardener snake. And so I showed him how to pick it up, and he was so excited after picking it up and one of the other kids was talking about like, oh my God, he's so scary. And the kid who picked it up said, no, this is just my homie.

00;10;42;25 - 00;11;03;02

Unknown

And so having that moment was pretty special to me because it's a kid who came in with walls up and then left feeling connected not only to the plants, having had a nice time eating strawberries and everything, but also feeling connected to the animals and just yeah, feeling vulnerable and connective. And so that was pretty special to me.

00;11;03;04 - 00;11;08;09

Unknown

So that's a really great story. I it was.

00;11;08;11 - 00;11;38;12

Unknown

Favorite part about your work here? It's the people for sure. I mean, I, I don't mind doing email outreach and everything like that, but where I'm happiest is when I'm not behind a computer and when I'm bringing people out here, I think usually, I love the kids. So, like I was telling you, I had a group of first graders, and so having kids out here, it's pretty special because it's not only giving them a chance to just connect to nature, but also to kind of break down some of those stigmas around homelessness.

00;11;38;12 - 00;12;02;00

Unknown

I think just by working around people and realizing that where we all, you know, we all bleed red, we're all the same, we're all human, helps kids to grow and, you know, be respectful of people around them just because they're people, too. And so, yeah, favorite part is definitely leading volunteers around. I mean, I'm super blessed in the sense that volunteers are here to give.

00;12;02;05 - 00;12;13;04

Unknown

And so I just get to deal with the most wonderful people. So yeah, it's,

00;12;13;06 - 00;12;18;01

Unknown

Anyway, I know we are in,

00;12;18;04 - 00;12;35;05

Unknown

Yeah. Do you have changed my perspective on anything in particular? I just kind of across the board, I think across the board, if you have anything specific in mind that you'd like to talk about, then, feel free to or just kind of in general, like, how do you think maybe not even for you, for other people.

00;12;35;05 - 00;12;59;03

Unknown

Like how do you think attitudes people are? Yeah. I think one of the cool parts of what we do, in terms of changing perspectives that

people might have, is that we give our trainees lots of opportunities to show their own talents. So kind of two main ways that we do that. One, being at our store, we have the opportunity for trainees to become consignors.

00;12;59;03 - 00;13;15;28

Unknown

So that means that they if they have their own things that they can create. We've got a volunteer, not a volunteer trainee at the moment who is an incredible knitter. And so she knits all of these wonderful sweaters and stuffed animals. And so when she does that, she's able to then sell them at the store as products.

00;13;15;28 - 00;13;33;03

Unknown

So it's a way of us supporting our trainees and their talents. And so that's really cool because it means that people get to come see all these great sweaters. And when I'm there, I get to be like I did. You know, one of our trainees made all of these. So not only is she working here with us in her free time, she's also creating these incredible pieces.

00;13;33;05 - 00;13;57;17

Unknown

But then also, almost all of our public events will have give trainees the opportunity to speak. And so it shows that a lot of our trainees just have the most incredible writing and their writing voice and speaking voice is beautiful. And I think it breaks down a lot of people's perspectives on just why and who becomes homeless.

00;13;57;19 - 00;14;21;01

Unknown

You know, we're all a couple paychecks away from being homeless. And so we get people here who are just so incredibly talented. And so I think it it helps to change people's perspective to see, you know, anyone can have this kind of talent. And also anyone can become unhoused because the systems in place aren't as supportive as they should be.

00;14;21;03 - 00;14;29;29

Unknown

Is there anything else you would like to know?

00;14;30;01 - 00;14;49;29

Unknown

Just, I mean, honestly, just come on out here. I mean, come out to the farm. Super welcoming of everyone. I think this space, like I was saying, I really just want to be inclusive and open. Welcome to everyone who wants to be here. So come on over. You can volunteer if you want to be in community talking to people, do it.

00;14;49;29 - 00;15;10;05

Unknown

Come hang out. If you're just needing a space to zone in on your own thing, slow down, put some headphones on and just do some weeding. Pick some flowers and feel free to. But yeah, just want people to come over and have a nice time. Yeah I, I think that's everything that we want is cool. So much down.

00;15;10;07 - 00;17;37;27

Unknown

Audio and thank you for.

Roman Gioglio

Unknown

So on Wednesday, we do a longer circle check in where there's a question of the week that I help come up with. And so everyone gets the chance to answer that. And then we have a job skill of the week. So we are always focused on kind of employment skills. So when people move on to their next job that they're kind of, already aware of a lot of the job skills being that we're a job training program, we want to have people leave here and be really successful at their next job.

00;03;36;06 - 00;03;57;14

Unknown

And then we also have a quota the week on Wednesdays, and then throughout the week. We also do kind of on the job training. So like this week we talked about workplace culture and conflict resolution for a couple hours in the morning. So I help kind of facilitate classroom sessions as well so that people are kind of also learning those job skills.

00;03;57;16 - 00;04;02;13

Unknown

Amazing. How do you make like such a big impact?

00;04;02;15 - 00;04;13;04

Unknown

Oops. Why don't you answer that? You can. It's just, alarm.

00;04;13;07 - 00;04;35;23

Unknown

So, so, how do you think that the Homeless Gordon project kind of gives back to the community in different ways? Yeah, I think right before this interview is talking through how the farm and the organization really brings together a whole different variety of people. So, like today, they were first graders. There was, volunteers here today.

00;04;35;23 - 00;04;57;22

Unknown

And then there was also trainees who were going through the program. And so a big impact is we bring a lot of different types of people together, all with the common goal of growing local, healthy food and then also helping people, you know, go into meaningful and gainful careers in the community. The biggest I think impact we have is obviously through our job training program.

00;04;57;25 - 00;05;21;18

Unknown

And so, through that, we're helping people find housing and another form of employment. And so we support about 20 to 30 people a year in that program. And the program is really successful. 95% of people who graduate end up moving on to a job and housing. And so it's really a successful program. It works for a lot of people.

00;05;21;21 - 00;05;48;09

Unknown

And so we're really helping people kind of take that next step when they're coming out of a recovery center, or some people are coming out of a recent incarceration, and then a lot of folks are coming from living on the streets for a while and sleeping rough, being homeless. And so this is an opportunity to kind of get back into the workforce, kind of transition into employment, so they can kind of reach their other goals in the community and in their life.

00;05;48;11 - 00;06;18;26

Unknown

What's and then, what inspired you to kind of come work here and, you know, help out and do all the amazing things you do? Yeah. This is kind of a confluence of a lot of my interest, both personally and professionally. I worked on a couple of farms here in Santa Cruz County before this job. And then right before this, I worked at Housing Matters, which is a local homeless service agency, and I worked at one of their shelters there, and I was doing case management work and supporting people on their journey to housing.

00;06;18;28 - 00;06;46;22

Unknown

And so I've always, you know, known about the homeless Garden project. And when I saw the job open, I was really excited to kind of both connect my interest in social equity, in community development with kind of farming and organic practices here in Santa Cruz. And so it's really just a cool place where, again, a lot of people get together, a lot of ideas kind of cross and really kind of inspiring and motivating place.

00;06;46;24 - 00;07;21;07

Unknown

And when I first came out and kind of interviewed for the position, you could just feel that the farms are really peaceful, lovely and encouraging place for people. And I was really motivated to kind of

be a part of that atmosphere, help give back kind of to the community. Yeah. And then, do you have any specific stories you could share about your time here, either working with, you know, the volunteer groups, anybody else?

00;07;21;09 - 00;07;31;05

Unknown

Definitely have to think through it for a second.

00;07;31;08 - 00;07;55;05

Unknown

I think, you know, I work directly with the trainees and kind of support them, help hire them, and then get to see them when they're here for the whole year. And so I see a lot of different people come through, and I see a lot of people really start the program feeling unsure about themselves, feeling like maybe they don't know their place, in the community.

00;07;55;07 - 00;08;24;00

Unknown

And when they come here, it kind of instantly feels like they have a home somewhere. And I think that's one of the really big motivating, pieces about my job is I get to create this environment for people to come, you know, do something meaningful with their day in their life. And so for a specific story, I think, you know, there's, one person that comes to mind.

00;08;24;00 - 00;08;45;13

Unknown

And they when they first came to the farm, they had like really low confidence. They weren't sure if they could even kind of work a job after being out, kind of working for, for many years. And over the time and over like the first month, they really gained a lot of traction here and showed that they, you know, could be a leader in our community.

00;08;45;20 - 00;09;09;13

Unknown

And they kind of graduated a few weeks ago. And, we always do a graduation circle for people when they leave the program. And they just got some of the most outstanding, like positive reinforcement and being like a leader that everyone was going to miss them and just seeing kind of from where they started to kind of where they ended is just really beautiful.

00;09;09;13 - 00;09;37;00

Unknown

And I think a testament to how empowering and motivating the farm and the community here is. And then there's a few more questions. What do you think that are either one thing or a couple of things that are really essential that you think either volunteers or trainees kind of gain from coming here? Yeah. Like what do you think that in what ways is it either change their perspective, their lives on that?

00;09;37;03 - 00;09;39;12

Unknown

Yeah.

00;09;39;15 - 00;10;06;21

Unknown

I think this is a place when you're on the farm and here everyone kind of rises to the farm, I like to say, which I mean, what I mean by that is kind of the environment, so peaceful. It's so motivating and empowering that I feel like people really find their best self here. So both trainees volunteers, they kind of find a different version of themselves that they didn't know.

00;10;06;24 - 00;10;27;05

Unknown

And maybe if you kind of met people, you know, in a different context, it'd be a very different experience. But the farm really brings people together in a special way. And one thing that I always, you know, people always mention is just how peaceful it is here and how they feel also like they're giving back to their community.

00;10;27;08 - 00;10;49;27

Unknown

They feel like part of their community again. They feel useful. You know, being on a farm, there's always something to do. Like, that's the great thing about being on a farm and having this job training program, having volunteers is in this context, there's always something for people to do and make a contribution. And then I think people always get to kind of meet new people.

00;10;49;27 - 00;11;12;25

Unknown

Like, I've met so many different types of people from so many different backgrounds. And, I don't think I would have met them if I wasn't here. So I think, you know, you get to meet a lot of unique people. And sometimes you meet, like, a director of an organization

or owner of a company or someone that's from out of the country, like there was someone here from Switzerland yesterday.

00;11;12;25 - 00;11;38;14

Unknown

So just kind of, like, all over the world, people, and you get to meet a lot of different people. And then is there anything else you would like us to know for us to kind of wrap up with? Yeah. I mean, I think the biggest piece are our organization is really sustained by our, engagement with the community here in Santa Cruz and beyond.

00;11;38;16 - 00;12;02;06

Unknown

And so a really great way to give back is to come out, volunteer, kind of see what's happening here in real time, make connections between people you might not usually get the chance to talk talk to you. And then, you know, our store is a really great, great place to get involved. And so we during the winter season, we make over 60 products in our workshop.

00;12;02;08 - 00;12;25;11

Unknown

And that's kind of where the job training program moves when it's cold and wet here on the farm, as we go into our workshop and we make soaps, salves, lotions, dried flower wreaths, over 60 products, including baking mixes, spices and so you can purchase all of that stuff at the store. And then also our organization is really run by individual donors.

00;12;25;11 - 00;12;52;05

Unknown

And so we don't get a lot of like government grants or big donations from organizations. It's really driven by people who come out to the farm or know our work well and who kind of give us, you know, generous donations so we can keep the work going. So it'd be great to see anyone who's interested out here on the farm or at our store and just kind of getting involved in whatever way feels good for them.

00;12;52;07 - 00;15;19;15

Unknown

I think that's cool for the interview. Yeah. Go ahead and take audio for you. There you go. You.

Alisha Ramani

Interviewee → Alisha Ramani, Tech Intern

Location → Grant Park

00;00;01;18 - 00;00;17;15

Unknown

Okay. All right. We're going to be good to go. Okay. Started. Let me double check. I believe it is. I'll just put it on now. Yeah, I'll put the cameras on. You're gonna have to watch this one because it turns off. I don't want the audio. Okay. I'm just hitting record on both. We'll do, like, a, like, a classic, you know?

00;00;17;17 - 00;00;38;00

Unknown

Yeah. Like a. Oh, we can all just cut it to. I think it's. Oh, yeah. But we'll do like, a club to sync it up. All right, you'll do that. All right, all right. Can you do like a. Okay. Ready? Yes. All right. Hi. It's nice to see you. I was wondering if you could first tell us, like, just you.

00;00;38;00 - 00;00;47;27

Unknown

Who are you? What's your name? Yeah, sure. My name is Alicia. I'm a junior, and I go to a school called Pinewood in Los Altos.

00;00;47;29 - 00;01;17;03

Unknown

Did you do any sort of. Okay. Could you tell us a little bit about your role within the home? Yeah. So I'm technically an intern, and I'm working with the homeless Garden project on a community app. And what I noticed talking with people in the homeless garden project is while they're, their program is amazing, and they help trainees find jobs through workforce training and development and learning how to use IT skills.

00;01;17;06 - 00;01;48;13

Unknown

The program is only one year, and unfortunately, with that, the connection completely ends after that one year, program. And trainees don't have anywhere to go if they need access to resources or help. So I'm creating a community app, like I said, where I'm going to provide trainees with, direct messaging with the organization as well as communication with other trainees, so they're able to share a job and housing opportunities amongst each other, and they're able to help the entire community succeed.

00;01;48;15 - 00;02;12;23

Unknown

I wasn't expecting any of that at all. Yeah. Could you explain a little bit about, like, how it operates and how what you're doing ties into how? Yeah. For sure. So, the program is one year, like I said. And throughout the program, they're implementing ways where trainees, like unhoused people can learn how to use IT skills on the internet and learn how to apply to job opportunities online.

00;02;12;23 - 00;02;31;27

Unknown

So that way when they leave the program, they're equipped to use the app that I'm designing. And so it's just a great way for them to practice building up to getting a job, like a permanent stable job. Through using my app. That's really interesting. Thank you. So there's the sort of say you're working on, like this technology?

00;02;31;29 - 00;02;54;29

Unknown

Yes. Have you incorporated yourself into that as well? No, I would I've always been wanting to go to the homeless garden project. But it's really important to me that I go to meet with the trainees. And I haven't had time to, take off of school days yet. And trainees only work from Monday through Friday, so I'm hoping soon, but not yet.

00;02;55;02 - 00;03;20;02

Unknown

That's really interesting. So, kind of working from a distance. Yes. All the work that I do is remote with pronouns. I don't know if you talked to him. We interview. Yes. He's so incredible. He's so nice. But he's been my mentor throughout this entire process. That's really cool. So what kind of work? He and I have weekly check ins where he reviews the app, and he sends it to people internally in the organization and also to trainees.

00;03;20;02 - 00;03;39;24

Unknown

And he provides me that feedback. What kind of stuff do you do? You probably like directly with the trainees? Yeah. So my work is not as involved with the trainees. It's more through Pranav and he's the intermediary connection. Got it. So what kind of stuff have you gained personally?

00;03;39;27 - 00;04;03;04

Unknown

Yeah. I mean, I've learned a lot of technology stuff. Like, more of the, more of the technical side of things. But I've also learned so much about communication and being part of a team and also collaboration. And when things get harder, when people give me feedback, do not take that so personally. What kind of collaborations have you done?

00;04;03;07 - 00;04;23;02

Unknown

Yeah. So like I said, Pranav sends me a feedback from people in the organization and sometimes they're like, I love it. And sometimes they're like, you need to change x, y, and Z. So it's that process of constantly refining and making changes that has helped me so much individually. Yeah, 100%. Do you feel like you made an impact on those other people?

00;04;23;04 - 00;04;53;18

Unknown

Yes. I mean, I'd hope so. But we'll see more when I get in one on one, get in one on one situations with them. Yeah, absolutely. That's really cool. Thank you. I didn't know there was actually aspects of communications and what kind of happens. Right. Got you into that? Yeah. So, there's a program at my school called Pilot Scholars Program, and we learn about social entrepreneurship, and we each individually take on a project that's interesting to us.

00;04;53;19 - 00;05;18;22

Unknown

And Pranav came to speak with us early in the year, and I was so captivated by his story and his dedication to the organization. And there's so many things that the Homeless Garden Projects Project wants to do, but they don't have the time or the resources or the funding to do so. It was really, gratifying for me to be able to provide some of that support when they might not have, like, the people or the resources to make that happen.

00;05;18;24 - 00;05;27;29

Unknown

It was really cool. Do you remember? It was a really long time ago.

00;05;28;01 - 00;05;56;10

Unknown

Yeah, I don't know. You probably get better quotes from Pranav. That's okay. So what's your favorite part about working in this space? That's a great question. I think just working closely with

Pranav, I he's such an incredible mentor and person. He's always so receptive to my concerns or whatever I bring. And, you know, he's a fellow young person.

00;05;56;10 - 00;06;16;03

Unknown

He's going through the same. He went through the same things that we're currently going through. So he's just so understanding and I love working with him. So that connection this also brought me a lot of joy. Yeah. Of course. That's really cool. What do you think? Do you plan to have like, a future working with Homeless Garden Project?

00;06;16;03 - 00;06;39;24

Unknown

How long do you think this will last? Yeah, so I'm currently finishing up my work with the organization, and I'll always be around to make adjustments or improve the app if necessary. But I'm currently working on expanding and working with other organizations who might need a similar kind of technology for the people that they serve. And I haven't worked with any organization or organizations yet.

00;06;40;00 - 00;07;01;19

Unknown

I'm still in that, trying to contact other organizations and seeing if they'd like my services. But yeah, that's how I plan on expanding my project. That's super interesting. It's really cool that you kind of found your niche. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. I'm sorry to both of you guys. Could you tell us a little bit about how your app, like, works?

00;07;01;19 - 00;09;12;26

Unknown

Like, if I was going to be someone who was using the app and trying to, like, better myself with it, I guess. Yeah. What's the process for that? That's a great question. So, after people.

00;09;12;28 - 00;09;30;26

Unknown

All right. That started. So for the interview, I'm going to ask you. This is perfect. Just that I'm going to stand here and to look over here and not into the camera. Yeah. And then we should be good. And I'm just going to read a couple of questions and feel free. Yeah. Don't don't answer if you feel uncomfortable.

Mike Erikson

Interviewee → Mike Erikson, Head of Crop Production

Location → Homeless Garden Project

00;00;01;20 - 00;00;19;18

Unknown

All right. That started. So for the interview, I'm going to ask you. This is perfect. Just that I'm going to stand here and to look over here and not into the camera. Yeah. And then we should be good. And I'm just going to read a couple of questions and feel free. Yeah. Don't don't answer if you feel uncomfortable.

00;00;19;18 - 00;00;47;13

Unknown

There's not going to be any questions like that though. It's just going to be about, you know, the work here and everything. Yeah. So, could you please introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about your role here? Yeah, my name is Mike Erickson, and I am the crop production manager here. I, I take care of the crop plan, and then all of the, associated work off that crop plan to bring the production into.

00;00;47;15 - 00;01;08;24

Unknown

Bring it to the people, the CSA members, you know, our lunches, farm stand sales, a number of things. And then if I guess I could just have, But I was good. Yeah. Just for, I know, a little over here, and then we can have facing this way. Just because the way the camera is, you get both sides of your face has to be you facing this way, like this.

00;01;08;27 - 00;01;20;19

Unknown

I think that would be. That's good. Y'all. Let me just move this just a bit to the lighting. Good.

00;01;20;21 - 00;01;59;20

Unknown

Coverage a little bit more. This way. This way. Just turn. Yeah. Turn your chair a little bit more towards the camera. All right. And then. Yeah, just we're gonna look over here, and then I think, okay. With me. So could you tell us a little bit about, how the Homeless Garden Project operates? Yeah. Well, we're a job training program, and, you know, we give people from the homeless community an opportunity to come out here and, you know, help us, farm, you know, to bring it all to make it all happen for our CSA program.

00;01;59;23 - 00;02;33;04

Unknown

Yeah. Could you run me through a little of what your day to day might look like? Just kind of like your usual schedule of what, you do here and, like, kind of the people you interact with. Yeah. I show up an hour early before the crew gets here. You know, with my other farm management colleagues and, you know, we bring out the, the dry erase boards with all the weekly work panel, all the items, and, we just kind of go over it and figure out who's going to do what and just delegate.

00;02;33;04 - 00;03;05;07

Unknown

Just basic like that, you know? And, yeah. And everybody goes to work, and I make sure that that everybody has an opportunity to, like, flow through all of the departments they have have a well-rounded experience, you know, because it's a job training program. But like, I'm really you know, I'm a farmer in my heart, you know, and in the larger scheme of things like, you know, and so, you know, big picture wise, I would really love to have people come through here.

00;03;05;07 - 00;03;23;14

Unknown

And then when they're done, they could like just look at a piece of land and just know exactly what it takes to get that up and running and producing food for themselves and their people or whatever it is. Yeah. Yeah. I think that totally is like, amazing. And it's going to be a good little clip for what I'm doing here.

00;03;23;17 - 00;03;36;25

Unknown

Do you have any specific stories you could share about your time here? Any anecdotes or funny things? You know, many good things. Anything like that.

00;03;36;27 - 00;03;56;03

Unknown

I've been out here for 35,000 hours working. This is my 18th year, so I've seen a lot, you know, and a lot of the stories are kind of like.

00;03;56;05 - 00;04;16;29

Unknown

There's some stuff that happens here, you know, like on the street and stuff. It's live out here, you know, and it may not be the most appropriate story, but it's the first one that I think of, right? I was on my way to work one morning. I was listening to the radio, and they said that the computer zone on Mission Street had been robbed, an armed robbery.

00;04;17;01 - 00;04;42;15

Unknown

So I thought, that's kind of. That's kind of something. Wow. And that's the way we're working out here. It's a beautiful morning, 11:00 Am, and everything's groovy. We're just like, doing hand weeding and all this kind of stuff. And then we hear, a couple of guys near an argument on the street, and then all of a sudden we see, like, one guy running across the crops toward the pond, and the other guy was chasing him, holding a pistol.

00;04;42;17 - 00;05;11;05

Unknown

Right. And then we figured out, oh, these are the guys who did the the armed robbery on Mission Street, right? And after it was over, I guess they got an argument with each other and the whole thing went sideways. But it was a such a juxtaposition from our nice, peaceful, like, utopian, you know, tribal gardening community. It was like it was such a such a contrast that, you know, we all just had to laugh.

00;05;11;08 - 00;05;32;16

Unknown

You know, probably edit that out, but that's that's a story for you. Interesting story. Wow. Yeah. Scary too. Yeah. And like, you know, I mean, I just want to mention that I look at this whole thing like a, I like to call it a kaleidoscopic community. And the reason for that is, is because, you know, all the patterns are similar.

00;05;32;17 - 00;05;57;13

Unknown

You know, we're growing, you know, a huge variety of crops. And we'll usually grow those same crops every year, maybe get rid of some, bring some other ones in. Right. And then while all that stuff's in flux for all the people. Right. There's different volunteers. People graduate from the program. So there's all this ebb and flow, like socially, you know, with, with the crops and everything.

00;05;57;15 - 00;06;19;29

Unknown

You know, there definitely. And thank you so much for this tweet. That's really, really interesting. Could you tell me a little bit about what your favorite part of being here is? So that can be you like the work you do. The people? My favorite part of it is just like knowing that I'm belonging to this awesome community, right?

00;06;20;01 - 00;06;48;22

Unknown

And it feels really good, to include new people in know to to really see their transformations right within a year that they're in the training program. You know, and, you know, I think I see transformation before that a lot of the time, you know, and it's just it's just a joy, you know, to to be that effective in people's lives and to make a difference.

00;06;48;24 - 00;07;09;23

Unknown

You know, when times are really rough with homelessness and the economy getting worse and everything like that, you know, so, you know, in the midst of all the, the chaos and uncertainty in the world, you know, we're still strong and we're we're getting stronger to match that. As it gets worse. Yeah. And I'm here for it. I'm down for it still.

00;07;09;26 - 00;07;50;23

Unknown

And I'm committed to it. You know, it feels great. In what ways do you think that the garden, fosters, like, a community for the local area? So that can be, through volunteers, through trainees? Yeah. Anybody who kind of comes here in general. Yeah. Well, I mean, if they decide to come here and volunteer or, you know, anything or like, volunteer with lunch or whatever it is or even even come, you know, like, as a customer picking berries, you know, like, you know, you know, if when they're on this side of the curb, they're part of our community, right?

00;07;50;26 - 00;08;06;23

Unknown

And we want everybody to come back. You know. Yes. And if you had to pick, what do you think? Or what would you hope would be the most essential thing somebody would learn coming here?

00;08;06;25 - 00;08;11;20

Unknown

That they're not alone.

00;08;11;23 - 00;08;25;07

Unknown

I really like that. That's amazing. Yeah. Did you elaborate a little bit and tell me why you think that is? Yeah, I think I can a little bit. So one thing is like.

00;08;25;09 - 00;08;53;29

Unknown

Like in the, you know, if you're homeless. You're pretty marginalized out there, right? And all of a sudden you're judged. You're like, you know, lumped into this whole, like, broad category. And it's not all that fair, you know, and people are homeless for all kinds of different reasons. And there's still a bunch of stereotypes and there's there's kind of like nothing to do out there.

00;08;54;01 - 00;09;12;24

Unknown

I mean, people are trying to get it together. They've got to, like, survive. They've got to eat and maybe go to shelters and figure all that out. But there's like, it's just a lot of hanging out and people don't want you around, you know, it's like alienating for people, right? And then they come here and everything's like the opposite, right?

00;09;12;26 - 00;09;22;02

Unknown

And so there's just so much, so much healing with that inclusion.

00;09;22;05 - 00;09;52;26

Unknown

And then, what do you think the program is going to look like kind of going into the future? Like, what do you think? What are your hopes for that? Well, I mean, we're really excited about acquiring this land for real. And, so, yeah, we're actually, like, purchasing, like, minus four acres of this land. And, that's really exciting because we're going to get all that whole back area beyond the fence and the whole entire back area to the train tracks.

00;09;52;27 - 00;10;14;09

Unknown

It's about a football size of a football field or two. And so that's a really challenging big change for us. And then we'll have like our buildings up here and a barn and maybe even a commercial kitchen, which is pretty exciting because then we can include, you know, other

farmers to come in and, you know, make their value added products and stuff like that.

00;10;14;10 - 00;10;33;09

Unknown

And, you know, it's just more inclusion for for more community support and, and connectivity, you know, once, and then I'm not sure how involved you are in this, but, I know that the products here kind of get turned into things that are sold at the store. Yeah, that like they tell me a little bit about how that works.

00;10;33;09 - 00;11;01;07

Unknown

And then also, how people, like I guess, benefit from that, both like from skilled buying and all that. Yeah. Well, most of those products are, you know, made from stuff grown here at the farm. You know, there's like, tea mixes and a number of things and soaps and stuff like this and all kinds of stuff that uses a lot of the herbs that we grow and lavender and, and other things.

00;11;01;09 - 00;11;30;21

Unknown

And, so, you know, we'll harvest it, dry it, you know, all this procedure and then, it goes down to our workshop downtown and then, you know, part of the crew just has experience manufacturing products and stuff, and that's all transferable skills, you know. And then what do you think that, the program's going to look like going into the future or what would you like it to look like?

00;11;30;23 - 00;11;56;09

Unknown

I would like I would like people to stay longer. And I would like to I would love to set up the opportunity for like if we had enough, like, you know, like, growth with our organization. Let me put it this way. I fantasize about if we had enough growth to support actually hiring trainees when they're done with their year year to where they can still work here.

00;11;56;12 - 00;12;14;05

Unknown

You know, and we've actually I've interviewed a lot of people who have said similar things about that. So, that's definitely, been like a common just thing that I've noticed. And then we were having a couple technical glitches at the beginning of this, but if you okay

with you if we just like, briefly touched on a couple things from earlier just to make.

00;12;14;08 - 00;12;32;15

Unknown

Yeah. Yeah. Cool. Yeah. Sorry about that. The camera was doing some weird stuff with the lighting and everything, so I just want to make sure we have kind of what we need. Would you mind introducing yourself and your role one more time for me? Okay. My name is Mike Erickson, and I manage crop production here at the homeless garden project farm.

00;12;32;17 - 00;12;51;17

Unknown

Perfect. And then, I really love what you said about community? Could you touch a little bit more on that just to make sure, like, we kind of have that. What was the question though, again? The question was, how do you think that the homeless garden project gives back to the community in different ways?

00;12;51;19 - 00;13;20;09

Unknown

That we give back to the community or aid the community at all, both in Santa Cruz? Yeah. Well, you know, I've got a new answer now. Okay. I'm ready for it. Okay. So, you know, I mentioned the stereotypes about homeless people and, you know, a lot of people that they might be phobic of, of homeless, homeless people, you know, they might assume that they're going to like, you know, ask them for money or Haslam in some way, or they might feel threatened or whatever.

00;13;20;12 - 00;13;52;27

Unknown

So this is such a good mix, this interface here of the farm. Right. Because like once you once you step onto the farm, you don't really you can't really judge by appearance. You don't know who is who, right? You don't know who is who. So, you know, a lot of people come here where they wouldn't, you know, make a decision to go, like, hang out with homeless people, you know, and, so, you know, maybe that might just kind of like, demolish some stereotypes, like us being in the community.

00;13;53;00 - 00;14;12;15

Unknown

You know, give somebody, give people like, maybe a different idea of, like, what? The homeless people are actually human beings, you know?

I love that. And then, just a couple more questions and then we're going to wrap up. Could you tell me a little bit, more about what kind of crops are grown here, maybe like, for this season as well as I know it kind of changes, like you said, you told me a little bit about the things that you grow here.

00;14;12;17 - 00;14;37;07

Unknown

Yeah. Like our star crops, everybody has to have highest demand is strawberries, you know, and we are like, you know, really, we're basically right at the ocean here at this site, right? Yeah. You know, strawberries, you know, they love the coast. So we have really, really good strawberry crops. People always say these are the best strawberries I've ever had in my life.

00;14;37;07 - 00;15;04;21

Unknown

So I think there is some special mojo to them. And then, you know, we'll grow tomatoes. My favorite time of the year is like, in August and September, when all the peppers and tomatoes and eggplant and baseball and all that stuff. I love to cook with is, is is available. So you know, grow that tomatoes, winter squash, zucchini, you know, lettuce, cabbage, romanesco almost everything.

00;15;04;23 - 00;15;27;05

Unknown

We just can't grow stuff that demands a lot of heat. You know, stuff that does well inland. Like we can't really grow garlic or like okra or melons or anything like that. All right. And is there anything else you would like to touch on that? Maybe my questions and address or anything else you'd like me to know? No, not I think.

00;15;27;08 - 00;15;47;02

Unknown

Sun, thank you so, so much for coming out here. And can you time out of your day? I really thank you. You were a very good. Did I do all right? Okay. Which was good for my audio. All right. Maybe I'll go into a radio and broadcasting when I retire. You said you have the right voice. It's a very like.

00;15;47;04 - 00;20;52;07

Unknown

I don't know, like you said, the sound kind of, like, loud, too, I.

Alexis

Interviewee → Alexis, Retail Sales Manager

Location → Homeless Garden Project Store

00;00;00;09 - 00;00;31;26

Unknown

And then we can go ahead and get started. I have the camera rolling now. So could you go ahead and introduce yourself and what you do here? Sure. My name is Alexis and I have a retail sales manager for the store here, downtown Santa Cruz, for a homeless garden project. And, Yes. Awesome. So could you tell us a little bit about how you became involved in the store and, like, kind of how you ended up kind of working here?

00;00;31;29 - 00;01;02;07

Unknown

Yeah. It's actually, a real true blessing. Because I'm technically retired and, took a year off and got really bored and wanted to come back to work inside, which were at the career center. And they hooked me up with a nonprofit that it's seniors are 55 and over to reenter into the job market. And so that's how that nonprofit connects with other with other nonprofits like this place here.

00;01;02;09 - 00;01;25;03

Unknown

And so that's how I was I was placed here. And then eventually they hired me on as the employee. That's amazing. That's a really cool story. Yeah. Thanks. What do you think is your favorite part about working here? The people that come in, from all over the world. But also, I'm just amazed about, how many products that we make.

00;01;25;05 - 00;01;49;17

Unknown

We have, up to 60 products that, we, most of them we do make, and I get to, brag about how, have our, trainees, actually, not only do they learn to garden and farm at, at our farm, but they also go into our workshops and help make these products by hand.

00;01;49;19 - 00;02;10;18

Unknown

They get to package them and label them, and they also get to put their name on them as well. So that's pretty amazing. Yeah, that's really amazing. I know that they like package everything. That's great. Yeah. How do you think people, like, feel when they come into the store? I think what do you think makes it, like, where customers

will come in and just kind of experience everything that you have here.

00;02;10;18 - 00;02;33;08

Unknown

What you think that's like, It's pretty, I think they think it's pretty amazing when I, you know, give them the spiel about what we do. And, you know, our nonprofit has been around for 35 years. And, how we help, the marginalized and homeless. And it's on the job training 20 hours a week, minimum wage.

00;02;33;08 - 00;03;00;13

Unknown

And how they do our farm and garden. And I go to our workshop. I'll make all these products. Awesome. Do you have any favorite product here? I have gosh, I have several favorite products, actually. I love all the lotions that we have. We have six different types of lotions, and they're all really great. And then also, I like our the less soap that we make.

00;03;00;15 - 00;03;33;14

Unknown

And then, our lavender sachets are really cool. I actually have one. I have one in payment in my car, so it always smells like lavender. And I suggest that to everyone. That's also clearly you know a lot about everything that sells here, which makes sense. Yeah, but I have I have the fortunate I think I was fortunate enough to go into the workshop and help make and be a part of the workshop for a few weeks when our store was down and we're, redone.

00;03;33;16 - 00;03;56;27

Unknown

So, yeah, refurbished. So I wouldn't have that. So I actually learned how to make lavender, lavender, lotion, and I bottled it, and I labeled it and I got to put my name on it as well. It was fun. And then I've also been out to the farm a couple of times and was part of that, a couple of different times with, and with amazing out there.

00;03;56;27 - 00;04;23;07

Unknown

It's the conservatory of everyone is how, you know, everybody looks out for each other and, and backs each other up and supports each other. And it's all about teamwork out there and, yeah. So it was really cool. I got to pick strawberries and cut, and we made of up to

five, 50 pounds. We picked thousands of sterling berries in one day, a couple of hours.

00;04;23;10 - 00;04;42;29

Unknown

So it was pretty cool. Well that's great. I'm glad you've had like kind of first hand experience with that part of it. Could you kind of tell me also like for the documentary, how do you think, like, having these experiences both working, on the like with the growing things, but also in the store, like, how do you think that positively impacts people and, like, teach them new skills?

00;04;43;02 - 00;05;15;00

Unknown

Oh, it's, positive. It's like they it changes their life forever. You know, we, you know, they they actually, we actually our percentage rate went up to, 94% success rate. So for this is stats from last year. So we're doing really well. Yeah. Impact is huge. Yeah definitely. I noticed that too when I went and I did a couple of other interviews I think I really saw there's a lot of like positive change going on.

00;05;15;00 - 00;05;35;22

Unknown

Yeah. All right. Is there anything else you would like to share? Any final thoughts, things you'd like to kind of get it up? Gosh. I just I feel blessed and I'm, proud to be a part of this and represent that we are here to help the homeless and our mission is to help end homelessness. I think it's huge.

00;05;35;24 - 00;05;46;27

Unknown

And, I'm really proud to be a part of it. All right. I think that's going to be everything we need. Thank you so, so much. Especially because I know this wasn't, like, super scheduled or anything, so I'm really grateful.