

Sustainability in Prisons Project

2020 Annual Report



Two incarcerated beekeepers check on the hives at the Stafford Creek Corrections Center. In addition to wearing their protective beekeeping gear, technicians also wear face masks for protection against COVID-19. While many programs were suspended during the pandemic, a few were able to continue after careful planning and adaptation to prioritize health and safety. Photo by Joslyn Rose Trivett.



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Executive Summary: Sustainability in Prisons Project, July 2019-December 2020

We all need to learn to work together, just like the honeybees work together for survival. We humans need to work together as one to beat COVID-19.

-Incarcerated partner, Yoshio White

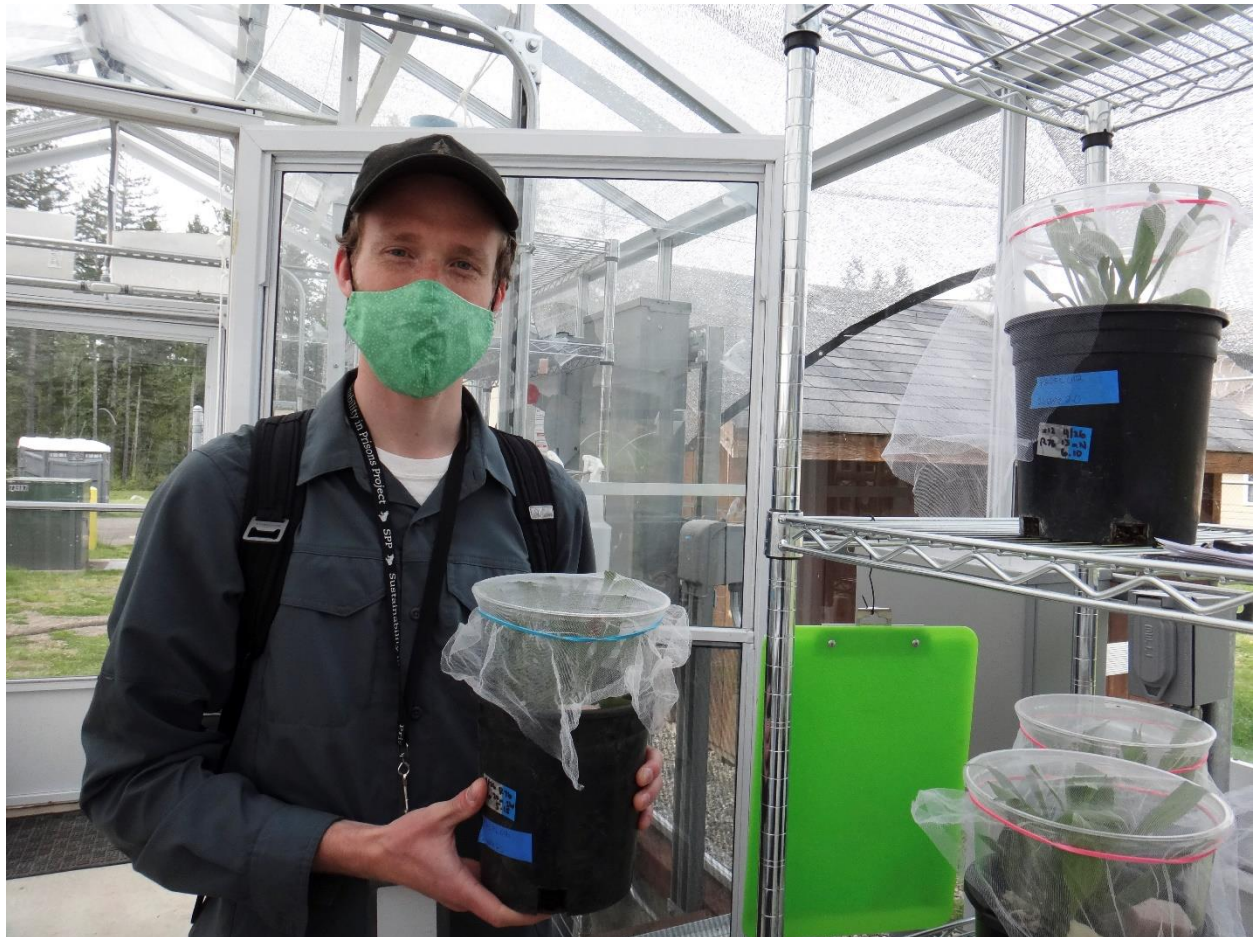
This reporting period (July 2019 – December 2020) was marked by many challenges and changes. We can't describe our work during this time without first acknowledging the significant, global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We acknowledge the loss of life and suffering incarcerated individuals, families, and corrections staff have endured. Human health and safety are our top priority over program operation. As a result, the vast majority of [Sustainability in Prisons Project](#) (SPP) programs were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are still supporting operation of a few programs, but only where interactions can be masked, socially distant, primarily outside or in well-ventilated areas, and with access to proper resources for hand washing and cleaning high touch surfaces. We are hopeful that pandemic conditions will improve and that we can emerge from this time with improved ability to support teaching and learning for an increased number of students.



SPP Beekeeping Liaison, Carrie Hersch, holds a heart-shaped honey comb in a photo taken at a hive cleanup day at the Washington Corrections Center for Women. Photo by Shohei Morita.

Despite these tumultuous times, SPP has maintained our commitment to bringing nature, science, and environmental education into prisons, though in an adapted format as our direct support is limited.

Over the past year, we have shifted to working remotely and navigated major staffing changes resulting in a smaller team available to respond to new education planning and development needs. During the pandemic, we shifted our focus to developing more peer-led and remote education, COVID-19 planning, program proposals, process improvements, and policy and guidance documents. Through these challenges, SPP and the many partnerships that make our work possible, have demonstrated resilience, creativity, and care. Our work to increase access to empowering sustainability and environmental education is as relevant as ever.



Former SPP Butterfly Technician, Keegan Curry, wears his mask while helping out in the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly program at MCCCW. Photo by Marisa Pushee.

SPP was founded by [Washington Department of Corrections](#) (WA Corrections) and [The Evergreen State College](#) (Evergreen) in 2003, and has grown to include many partners. The full SPP annual report aims to acknowledge all contributing partners and describe all science, environmental education, and sustainability programs in WA prisons. It is more challenging to report on our work given the ongoing pandemic as programs are suspended and some contributors simply didn't have capacity to supply program information similar to previous years. During this reporting period, SPP partners reported **199 programs and 179 partner organizations** statewide. Our executive summary highlights select programs, partnerships, and accomplishments as well as goals for the 2021 calendar year:

Peer-led Gardening Curriculum: SPP and partners completed the first phase of curricula development and launched a new peer-led gardening course at Stafford Creek Corrections Center.

Planning & Organization Improvements: SPP-Evergreen developed multiple process, guidance, and template documents to support creation and curation of education materials, organization function, effective program operation, and clarity among partners.

Training & Advising: SPP-Evergreen team requested additional anti-racism/anti-oppression education which was delivered by Evergreen faculty over two days. SPP-Evergreen also hosted a series of advising sessions throughout the pandemic to learn from former program participants and others with the lived experience of incarceration.

Beekeeping: SPP-Evergreen staff curated and delivered monthly beekeeping educational packets to all facilities and helped develop a new scholar-level beekeeping certification in partnership with the Washington State Beekeeping Association (in progress).

New Asset & Sustainable Operations System: WA Corrections has nearly completed transition to a new asset and sustainable operations management system to track recycling, waste, energy systems, and facility maintenance management. This system will improve reporting and help identify priority projects.

Solar Energy Education: SPP-Evergreen developed a new partnership with Olympia Community Solar that allows donors to sponsor solar energy education packets to be sent to prison facilities.

Policy & Legislation: With WA Corrections support for the concept, SPP-Evergreen developed proposed statewide guidelines for successful peer-led programs in prison (review in progress).

SPP-Evergreen staff drafted new Self-Supporting Program policy for the Evergreen State College to grant college credit to currently incarcerated students successfully completing SPP certificated internships.

SPP-Evergreen contributed to and testified in support of Washington State House Bill 1044, Pathways to Post-Secondary Education in Prisons.

Biomass Boiler Project: WA Corrections secured grant funding to replace the outdated and failing fuel oil hot water heating systems at Larch Corrections Center with a biomass boiler. The project will reduce the facility's net greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 91%, and will provide an example for other agencies pursuing greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Ecology Education: SPP-Evergreen worked with University of Washington – Tacoma Restoration Ecology faculty and students to develop education materials on Salish lowland prairie ecology.

SPP Short Film: Former SPP Butterfly Program Coordinator and Evergreen Master of Environmental Studies Alum, Keegan Curry, completed a short film featuring interviews with former SPP program participants.

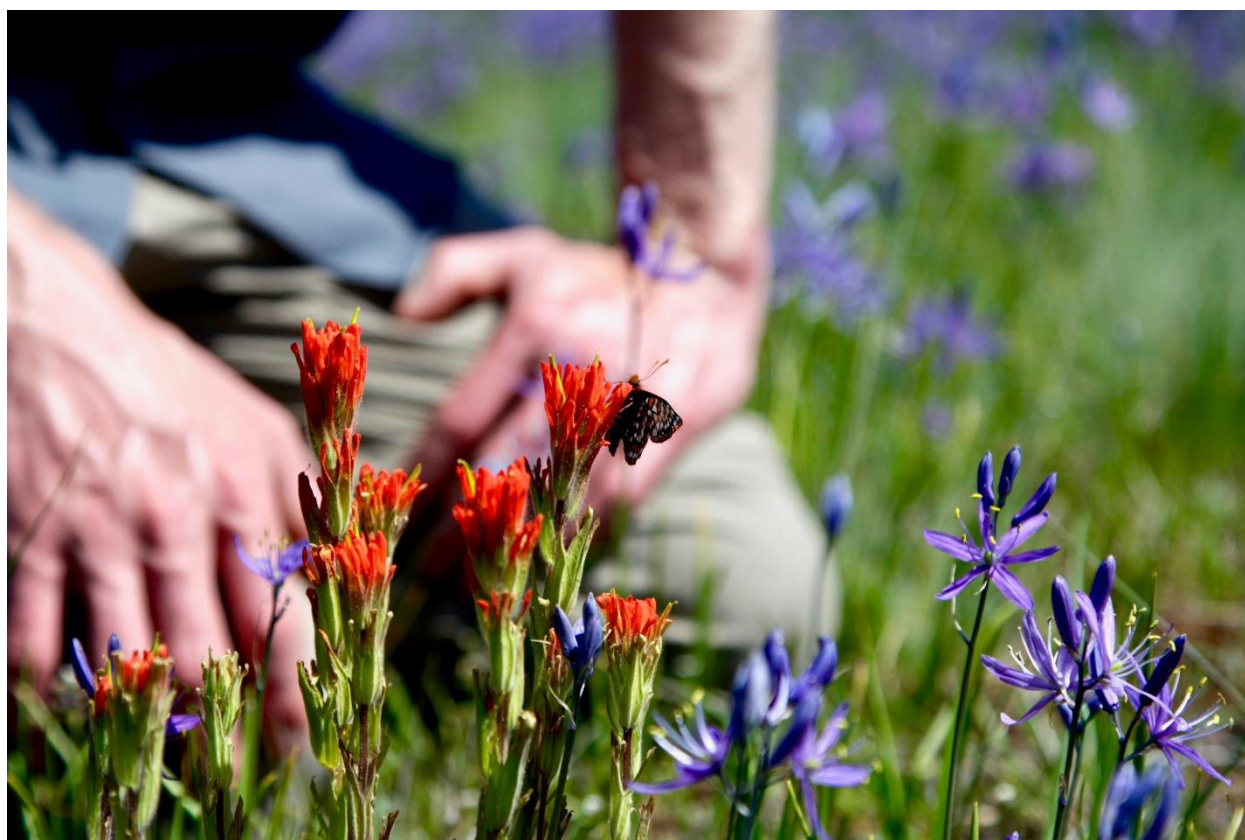
Table 1. Anticipated Programs Highlights, 2021

Program/Project	Partners and facility	Planned outcomes
Adapting & Restarting Programs; Increasing Remote Education	All facilities	Adapting program operation and developing plans for safe operation; increasing opportunities for remote education
Peer-Led Gardening Course	All facilities, incarcerated students, staff sponsors and experts	Enhance gardening curriculum with practicum, more modules on advanced topics & incorporating input from pilot; support start-up of new programs in other prisons

Peer-Led Composting Course	All facilities, incarcerated students, staff sponsors and experts	Working from education content developed for a single facility, develop a peer-led composting course for statewide use
Training & guidance to increase access to fresh produce in prisons	All facilities	Identify education & training on preparing produce for kitchen use; work with partners to develop statewide guidance on increased access to fresh produce
Expanding Evergreen Education in Prisons	Pilot at single facility	Work with partners to propose expansion of established SPP programs to include other Evergreen education services in prisons
Developing Statewide Resources	All facilities and partners	Work w/partners to complete peer-led education policy for DOC & partnership resource document for partner orgs & DOC
Certifications and academic credit	All facilities and academic partners	Award academic credit to currently incarcerated SPP certificated internship students

Being able to connect with nature in this way, there's a therapeutic component that comes into that. The science part is your mind working, but the nature part is your body connecting to nature. When you have those two components merged together, you're working as a whole.

– Formerly incarcerated partner and Evergreen State College graduate, Carolina Landa



A Taylor's checkerspot butterfly rests on top of a flower in the wild. Photo by SPP Staff.

I'm excited to see more programs, and we need more programs like that. We need individuals to feel validated, to feel like they're successful, to have knowledge, and to gain a skill. That's how we're going to change.

– Formerly incarcerated partner, Liz Louie

Conclusion

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to SPP during these challenging times. Your support, continued investment, and dedication to this work are much appreciated. This year has proved our resiliency and only strengthened our dedication to supporting empowering environmental and sustainability education for incarcerated students. Our partnerships among incarcerated people, corrections staff, scientists, students, and program partners are impactful, innovative, challenging, and successful. We are dedicated to learning, adapting, and continuous improvement. We remain committed to addressing all stakeholders' needs. We aim to foster a culture of mutual respect, combine resources to increase capacity, and prioritize education and training. Together we are supporting positive change for individuals, communities, and ecosystems.