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Dear Friend of Collective Roots,

My name is Saree Mading and I have lived in the City of East Palo Alto for most of my life. I grew up in East Palo Alto and attended local schools. During my childhood, I remember that we had a grocery store by the name of Value Max. At that time, community members were able to shop for fresh fruit and vegetables without having to drive to other cities such as Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Redwood City, or Mountain View. Value Max closed its doors over 17 years ago. Since that time East Palo Alto residents have not had a full service grocery store.



It is with great joy that I announce that Collective Roots is leading a collaborative effort to open a Certified Farmers' Market in East Palo Alto in Spring of 2008. We have secured a site, and Wolfram Alderson, the new Executive Director of Collective Roots happens to be an expert in the development of community based farmers' markets. One of the reasons I am writing to you today is to urge you to support this effort by making a donation that will enable this dream to come true for a community that has waited too long for a reliable source of fresh food.

The lack of fresh fruits and vegetables in our community has exacerbated the problem of obesity, the rise of poor eating habits, and contributed to the pandemic levels of debilitating health conditions among children and youth in our community. I see these effects every day as Administrator at East Palo Alto Charter School, (EPACS). Many of my students are not eating healthy fresh foods. While over 70% of the children at our school qualify for federal school meal assistance, this is not enough--many of our children are missing meals daily or eating fast food or junk food. These challenges seem overwhelming and that is why it is vital for schools like ours to partner with organizations such as Collective Roots.

Collective Roots became a partner with my school in 2003, and the results are astounding! Please come and visit our huge organic garden and see for yourself how the programs at EPACS are promoting nutrition and exercise as part of the school's curriculum. The organic garden has become an integral part of the school and is cherished by students, teachers, and families. Staffed by talented teachers provided by Collective Roots, we are able to educate EPACS students in the areas of environmental science and food systems, as well as enjoy the garden as a place for fun and purposeful health promoting activities. Additionally, Collective Roots provides field trips, garden work days for families, and other events at the school to help the students, families, and the broader community realize opportunities to participate, share common ground, and celebrate fresh healthy food.

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You may be aware that East Palo Alto has a long history of health and environmental disparities. Data suggests that EPA residents suffer from asthma, obesity, and cancer at disproportionate numbers. A dramatic example of risks lurking in our community was the occurrence of an explosion last year at a nearby toxic waste handling facility that caused a toxic cloud of material to impact our school garden site, requiring the total removal of all plants in the garden. The garden, now fully recovered and redesigned, is a testament to the commitment of Collective Roots in providing healthy settings for children and youth to learn and to grow. Low-income communities like East Palo Alto often face obstacles such as this, and struggle to provide residents reliable access to fresh, high quality food.

Safe, health promoting, outdoor activities are lacking in our community. Research indicates that minority parents are twice as likely as non-minority parents to say that their child never participates in an outdoor activity and three times more likely to say their child does not go to a park, playground, or beach. Compounding the problem is that fact that the average child today spends over 6 hours per day with electronic devices, including television. In addition to providing a consistent source of nutritious whole food, the EPA Community Farmers' Market will also provide a much needed destination point where people, young and old, can walk and gather together, socializing in a community based setting that purposefully promotes well-being, local culture, and youth development.

With your support, the EPA Community Farmers' Market will open in Spring of 2008. I urge you to support this critical step for Collective Roots in its work that continues to dig deeper into our community and make a real difference. A unique aspect of this market is that it will engage youth in key leadership roles by involving them in the management and general operation of the market. The funding we receive to support this community initiative will assist with start up costs, and hiring a market manager who will serve as a leader in engaging youth who seek employment skills and ways to make a difference in their community.

Your donation to Collective Roots supports an exciting range of programs that are enriching schools and communities. Collective Roots now provides garden based learning to over 500 children at two schools in the Ravenswood City School District. With your support, Collective Roots will continue outreach and expansion to other schools serving low income communities. Please consider supporting the work of Collective Roots at this critical juncture in our development. Whether you have supported us in the past, or are just now becoming familiar with our work, please know that your contribution will go far and touch the lives of many like myself who greatly appreciate your generosity and partnership in the development of our schools and community.

Most sincerely,

Saree Mading
Member of the Board
Collective Roots