

***For Immediate Release: Groundbreaking at the Seeds of Change Garden
Event Reschedule!***

Where: Freedom House, Russellville, Arkansas

When: March 13^h 12:00-1:00 p.m. (Rescheduled from February 20th)

Contact: Audra Butler Hankins at (479) 229-4861 or Meredith Martin-Moats at 479-957-0551;
meredithmartin_moats@yahoo.com

Friday March 13th at 12:00 pm Freedom House staff and residents, organizers from the McElroy House: Organization for Cultural Resources and community volunteers will break ground on the Seeds of Change garden, a soon to be created garden space of butterfly and bee attracting flowers, raised beds filled with berry bushes, and a container garden of vegetables to be used in the Freedom House cafeteria. In a recent workshop with the McElroy House: Organization for Cultural Resources, Freedom House residents voted to name the garden Seeds of Change, a reference to the space as a site for healing and possibility. Freedom House is a CARF accredited center offering comprehensive substance abuse and dependency treatment with a focus on holistic healing.

The gardens will include custom-built raised beds for berries and a network of container gardens for heirloom vegetables. The gardens will make use of preexisting flower beds in front of the dorms and counseling offices where colorful heirloom, butterfly and bee-attracting flowers will be planted. These will include both native plant perennials and annuals grown from seed by Freedom House residents. The gardens will be tended to by Freedom House residents and volunteers and will be incorporated in the daily activities of the center.

The gardens will serve as ongoing teaching tools for Freedom House residents, incorporating the preexisting gardening skills of many residents while also offering hands on experience with gardening for Freedom House residents, staff, and in the larger community. The flower beds will be filled with plants known to support our depleting butterfly and bee populations, encouraging not only beauty but also supporting the pollinators we need for global plant health. The flower gardens will also offer place of beauty to explore ideas surrounding grief and healing in all its forms.

Residents and community members alike have specifically asked for container gardens, which work well for people who may not have access to tillers, own their land, or live in apartments. Residents will experiment with a variety of donated containers, all of which will serve as working examples of how food can be grown in even the smallest of spaces.

Blueberries are known for their health benefits, are easy to maintain and benefit from pine needles, which are abundant at Freedom House's space. ABC Greenhouse and Herb Farm has donated regionally grown blueberry plants as well as heirloom flowers. McElroy House will work with experienced gardeners to install easy to use drip irrigation systems for the berries to decrease water usage and experiment with other water harvesting options, ensuring the garden space is a place to think holistically about resource usage. The pre-existing pecan trees on site will also be incorporated into the larger garden plans.

Counselors will integrate the gardens into their sessions and residents will be encouraged to use the space in creative ways, focusing on how such resources can be of use after they leave Freedom House. The McElroy House will offer community wide workshops and interactive media resources focusing on the gardens for residents of Freedom House and the larger community alike. The gardens will serve as both literal and metaphorical spaces to come together to build locally-based and community-led solutions around larger issues of poverty, access to resources, wellness, and cross-cultural understanding and unity.

Community members are encouraged to attend the groundbreaking and/or donate heirloom seeds and plants passed down in their families, helping populate the garden with plants that are deeply connected to the land and people of this region. The Seeds of Change Garden Project is a partnership of The McElroy House: Organization for Cultural Resources and ARVAC and Freedom House and will work to invigorate and re-envision ARVAC's

Garden Project, a program distributing free garden seeds within their nine county service region.