“Around 2010, I realized that food was something I could grow naturally, and I was really good at it! It was magical to produce food for my friends and family, and it was good for my soul. Around the same time, I learned a few things about my childhood city, Oakland — including that the city was listed as the 3rd most dangerous city in the country, teen prostitution was on the rise, and there was a nearly 40% drop out rate. That sent me over the edge. I saw growing food as a way for children living in Oakland and facing these statistics to invest in themselves and experience the magic of producing food for themselves and their community. The Grassroots Fund provided seed funding when we first started and the encouragement to keep going. They could see the vision and how hard we were working, and they gave us the mentorship and encouragement to keep going.

One thing I’ve learned in doing this work is that kids can’t care about the environment if they don’t know what it is or have a connection with it. I am proud to, with the support of the Rose Foundation, bridge this gap to understand the difference between the natural and built environment.”

“I grew up moving around a lot in big cities without the influence of nature. When I moved to the Klamath River as a teenager, I met people who get their food and water directly from where they live and who believe they are responsible to take care of and fix the world. Our community knows that social, physical, and environmental health are all interwoven. I could see the lack of clean water and salmon devastating communities in rural Northern California, yet we are completely left out of the conversation and decision making impacting California water. We needed to build power with Tribal members, fisherpeople, rural people, and youth who want to restore our rivers and break down the fish versus farmer narrative dominating these conversations. That’s why I helped start Save California Salmon. Our communities want to restore our rivers and need support to bring together generations of people to address the issues affecting the river and the community. The Grassroots Fund helped us get started, hire our first tribal organizers, and create our Water Defenders Travel Fund to travel to the policy hearings that impact us and happen far from our communities.”

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“Laurel Firestone and I started looking at rural drinking water issues while at the Center for Race, Poverty & the Environment based in the Central Valley. We would visit one community who had issues with brown, foul-smelling water, then another, and another. After some time, we realized this was a regional and statewide problem no one wanted to address. More than 1 million people are impacted by contaminated water; and no one was lifting this crisis up, because many of these impacted communities are low-income communities of color. We founded the Community Water Center in 2006 to end the drinking water crisis, envisioning all communities with access to safe, clean, and affordable water. The Grassroots Fund supported our local grassroots organizing, before we had institutional funding support, and helped build us into a strong environmental justice organization that is making significant progress toward safe water for all in California.”

“My community needed a safe place to be physically active and enjoy with our families, and our local park did not provide that for us. We were afraid of gangs, dogs on the loose, and the poorly lit paths. Plus, there was a lot of trash. One afternoon while walking with my friends in the park, someone tried to kidnap my daughter who was walking over to me. I thought it was time to take back our park, so we got organized with our local leaders, police officers, and the community to express our concerns and find support. We organized cleanings, exercise classes, and other activities to promote healthy lifestyles and a safe place to stay active in the community. The Grassroots Fund has helped us advocate for public transportation and organize meetings with local residents to identify issues within our community and pressure our representatives for change. And that was how we saw that, together, we can achieve big things!”

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