

SOULFUL SEEDS

TOGETHER WE GROW

2025

ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

At Soulful Seeds, we have always believed that gardens can do more than grow food—they can grow connection, confidence, and community. In 2025, that belief continued to guide every seed planted and every relationship nurtured across our growing sites. Building on the transformative progress of 2024, we deepened our presence in the neighborhoods we serve, strengthened the systems that support our mission, and expanded opportunities for neighbors to learn, work, and thrive. What began as a vision in 2017 continued to evolve into a community-driven movement rooted in dignity, belonging, and shared purpose.
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This past year, our work was shaped by the priorities outlined in our 2025 Strategic Plan. We focused on expanding responsive food access, education, and vocational programming; strengthening culturally relevant offerings; and developing new systems for gathering meaningful community feedback. That input directly informed our planting plans, program enhancements, and outreach efforts. We also invested in organizational capacity—expanding our team, improving communication channels, and reinforcing the financial foundation that allows our work to thrive across multiple growing sites. These efforts ensured that our programs remained accessible, inclusive, and aligned with the voices of the neighbors we serve.

As we closed the year, we also prepared for the future outlined in our 2026 Strategic Plan. We laid the groundwork for strengthening infrastructure, standardizing service delivery, and deepening engagement across staff, board, volunteers, and partners. We began designing an endowment program to support long-term sustainability,





expanded our calendar of events to foster community connection, and continued building partnerships that are woven into the fabric of the neighborhoods we serve. These forward-looking efforts positioned Soulful Seeds to grow with intention—ensuring that our gardens remain places where people can build skills, find belonging, and experience the healing power of community and food.

We are profoundly grateful for the donors, partners, volunteers, and neighbors who made this year possible. Your belief in our mission allowed us to expand our reach, strengthen our foundation, and continue building healthier, more resilient neighborhoods. Together, we cultivated more than gardens—we cultivated connection, resilience, and hope.

We are excited for our Co-founder Dee Schafer-Whitten to take on the role of Board Chair, and we welcome Allison Pedley as our new Executive Director. Their leadership and passion will take Soulful Seeds to new heights

With appreciation,

John Lipinski, *Board Chair*
Cara Montoya, *Executive Director*

At Soulful Seeds, we understand that true food security requires more than providing meals—it demands addressing the conditions that make access to healthy food unequal in the first place. Our work is grounded in the belief that lasting change comes from strengthening the systems, relationships, and opportunities that help communities thrive. Guided by our mission and values, we focus on removing barriers, improving the social determinants of health, and stewarding our resources responsibly so that our efforts create long-term impact rather than temporary relief. By cultivating spaces where neighbors can grow food, build skills, and support one another, we are committed to serving those most in need with solutions that honor dignity, connection, and sustainability.

Vision

A thriving community

Mission

Building connection and resiliency through neighborhood gardens

Values

We support health and healing.
We act with respect and dignity.
We prioritize environmental stewardship.
We cultivate partnerships.
Everyone is welcome!



Together We Grow

Outputs from 2025



552
new volunteers



3,186
volunteer hours in 2025



595
Board of Director volunteer hours

Fresh Food Grown & Shared



8,913
pounds of food harvested

3,393
people served through food distribution

1,222
households served

Economic Opportunity

618
hours of Same-Day-Work-and-Pay shifts

$12,000
in immediate-income gift cards distributed

Sustainability Wins

209
cubic yards of compost produced

$31,141
in cost savings from composting

167,838
pounds of waste diverted from landfill

Education & Skill-Building

1,480
total programming hours



ACCOMPLISHMENTS









A Year of Meaningful Progress

Not every success can be captured in numbers. While data helps us understand the scale of our work, the true impact of Soulful Seeds is reflected in the relationships we nurture, the programs we strengthen, and the sense of belonging that continues to grow in our gardens. This year, our accomplishments showed what is possible when neighbors, partners, and staff come together with shared purpose. We deepened the quality and consistency of our programs, expanded access through new initiatives like Jueves en el Jardín (Thursdays in the Garden) and our Mobile Market, and partnered with local agencies to host several community pop-up markets. We also became a Recovery Friendly Workplace, reinforcing our commitment to dignity, healing, and opportunity. Our first large-scale fundraiser marked an exciting step toward long-term sustainability, while steady growth in our workforce development program and a significant expansion of community programming created more spaces for learning, connection, and support. Together, these accomplishments reflect a year defined not just by what we produced, but by the community we strengthened and the future we are growing.

→ 182%

Increase in programming hours

→ 72%

Increase in new Volunteers



VOLUNTEERS







Volunteers are the heartbeat of Soulful Seeds, and everything we accomplish is rooted in their generosity and commitment. This year, neighbor volunteers, corporate teams, and individual community members showed up with steady hands and open hearts, helping us nurture thriving gardens, support our programs, and strengthen the connections that make our work possible. We are especially grateful for the dedication of recurring groups like Second Baptist Church, Crossroads Women's Program, and STEP2, whose consistent presence brought energy, compassion, and a deep sense of community to our sites. Corporate partners — including Patagonia, Morgan Stanley, American AgCredit and many others — also made a remarkable impact through teamwork and service. Whether joining us for a single morning or returning regularly, every volunteer played a vital role in sustaining Soulful Seeds and growing a more connected, resilient community.

WHERE BELONGING TAKES ROOT

Some stories rise above the rest. While every moment in the garden leaves its mark, a few remind us why this work matters so deeply. In 2025, one story from our Soulful Seniors program illuminated the heart of our mission — showing how connection, care, and a welcoming space can transform not only a day, but a person's sense of self and belonging.

On Friday mornings, before the sun fully warms the garden beds, a small group of older adults gathers at Soulful Seeds. They come for different reasons — to move their bodies, to learn something new, to spend time outdoors and others — but they stay because of what they find here: connection, purpose, and a sense of belonging that is increasingly rare.

For one 77-year-old participant, Soulful Seniors has become more than a weekly activity. It has become an anchor. She shared that she has "plenty of opportunities to be of service to others," but nothing compares to the feeling she gets when she steps into the garden. Working alongside Soulful Seeds' staff — whom she describes as "friendly, personable, patient, and knowledgeable" — has become the highlight of her week. Their warmth creates a space where she feels welcomed, valued, and connected to something larger than herself.

As she put it, "Being a part of the Soulful Seniors group has affected my spiritual soul in so many positive ways."

She is not alone. Participants describe Soulful Seniors as a place where they can show up exactly as they are — where they can learn, contribute, and feel seen. They talk about the healing power of tending soil, the comfort of familiar faces, and the confidence that comes from learning new skills.

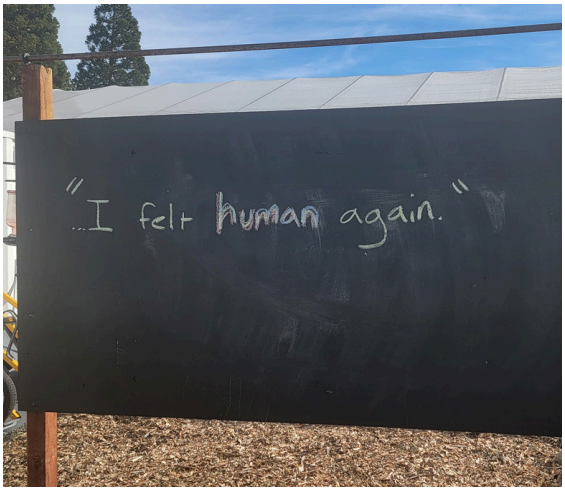


PROGRAMS



Food Access

In 2025, Soulful Seeds' Food Access Program continued to nourish our community in ways that go far beyond the harvest. Thanks to the generosity of volunteers, donors, and partners, we **distributed 6,594 pounds of fresh produce** directly to **3,393 neighbors across 1,222 households**, ensuring that families living in and around our garden communities had reliable access to healthy, locally grown food. But the impact was felt not only in kitchens; it was felt in moments of connection, learning, and joy. One neighbor shared her excitement after watching our team harvest each morning, telling us, "I'm very excited for my tomatoes, salad, and trying eggplant for the first time." Another reflected on the empowerment that comes with learning new skills: "I really enjoyed learning how to cure the garlic and onions. **I learned something new.**" And many spoke about the emotional nourishment they found in the garden itself: "Picking the peas was a wonderful **exercise in mindfulness. I am so excited to come back**!" These voices remind us that food access is not only about calories—it is about dignity, education, and belonging. Through daily harvests, neighbor-centered distribution, and hands-on learning, Soulful Seeds continues to cultivate a community where everyone has access to fresh food and the opportunity to grow alongside it.



Workforce Development

In 2025, our Workforce Development Program continued to create meaningful economic opportunities for neighbors seeking stability, purpose, and a pathway forward. Through our Same-Day Work-and-Pay program (SDWP), participants completed 15 workdays, contributing **618 hours of hands-on orchard and garden stewardship** while earning immediate compensation and building confidence through purposeful work. One participant shared, "I got to exercise my skills and capabilities and **it made me feel human again**. I got good exercise." Alongside SDWP, our Arborist Apprenticeship Program advanced significantly: our first apprentice reached the halfway point of their two-year training, and we proudly hired our second apprentice to join the cohort. Together, apprentices helped maintain and expand our urban orchards—planting, pruning, and caring for the trees that sustain our long-term food access efforts. These programs do more than provide income or training; they **address root causes of food insecurity** by creating pathways to employment, strengthening local food systems, and offering neighbors the dignity of meaningful work.





Education Programs

Our education programs continued to strengthen community resilience in 2025 by giving neighbors the knowledge, confidence, and practical skills to grow, prepare, and enjoy nutritious food. Across all sites, we hosted **248.3 hours of educational workshops**, creating hands-on learning experiences that supported both food independence and personal wellbeing. At Our Place Campus alone, participants engaged in **170.5 hours of cooking classes**, where 94 neighbors learned practical ways to prepare healthy meals using fresh produce from our gardens. Through gardening workshops, participants gained the skills to grow and sustain their own food, while our nutrition education helped individuals understand how balanced choices support long-term health. These programs do more than teach techniques — they build confidence and spark curiosity. Together, they reflect our belief that access to food must be paired with the knowledge and community support needed to truly thrive.

Green Waste

Our Green Waste Program continued to anchor Soulful Seeds' sustainability efforts in 2025, transforming community waste into a resource that strengthens our soil, reduces environmental impact, and lowers operating costs. With the support of key partners like the Grand Sierra Resort and the Great Basin Community Food Co-op, we diverted **167,838 pounds of green waste** from the landfill. Even with intentionally scaled-down compost production to match our operational needs, we still **produced 209 cubic yards of nutrient-rich compost** and **sequestered 40.8 tons of carbon in our soils.** These efforts generated **$31,141 in cost savings**, reinforcing this program as one of our most important sustainability pillars. By turning waste into nourishment for our gardens, we continue to model regenerative, community-driven stewardship that benefits both people and the planet.

Advancing Our Four Impact Priorities

Every program at Soulful Seeds works toward four core impact priorities: creating healthy neighborhoods, increasing access to fresh food, strengthening personal independence, and building meaningful social connections.

SPECIAL PROJECTS OF 2025



At Soulful Seeds, special projects give us the space to pilot new ideas, test solutions sustainably, and scale only what truly meets community needs. By experimenting thoughtfully and in partnership with neighbors, we can refine programs before expanding them, ensuring every initiative strengthens our four impact priorities. This approach allows us to innovate responsibly while staying grounded in what works for the communities we serve.

Mobile Markets

First piloted in 2025, our Mobile Markets special project tested a new model for increasing fresh food access by bringing produce directly into the neighborhoods surrounding our garden sites. The goal of the pilot was to reach neighbors who face transportation barriers and to distribute more food and educational materials where they are needed most. The results showed that this approach is both efficient and deeply aligned with our mission and strategic plan, successfully expanding access while strengthening community connection. With a strong first year behind us, our next steps include establishing a consistent 2026 schedule and increasing community awareness so more neighbors can benefit from this successful special project.





Arborist Apprenticeship Program

Launched in 2025 through the USDA Urban Orchard Grant, our Arborist Apprenticeship Program became a standout special project, creating a state-certified, two-year pathway into arboriculture while strengthening the long-term care of our urban orchards. Using a staggered onboarding model, we employed two apprentices who received formal education and hands-on training with our Garden Manager and the May Arboretum Society. This successful special project advances our workforce development goals and reflects our mission to create meaningful economic opportunities rooted in land stewardship. Our next step is planning for long-term sustainability so the program can continue beyond 2029, when grant funding concludes.

NEIGHBORHOOD SPOTLIGHT

Each year, Soulful Seeds highlights one of the neighborhoods where collaboration helps us deepen our impact. In 2025, we are proud to spotlight our partnership with NoteAble Music Therapy Services (NMTS), a nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities and other needs through music therapy, adaptive arts, and community engagement.

Located in the 89512 zip code, NMTS serves a community that faces some of the highest barriers to food access in Washoe County. This neighborhood is designated by the USDA Food Access Atlas as both a Food Desert and a Food Swamp, meaning residents experience limited access to fresh, healthy food and an over-concentration of low-nutrition options. These challenges are compounded by transportation barriers that make it difficult for many families to reach traditional food resources.

In 2025, our partnership with NMTS allowed us to bring fresh food and hands-on learning directly into this community. Together, we hosted pop-up Mobile Markets on their campus and organized a volunteer day to plant their courtyard, transforming the space into a small but meaningful source of beauty, shade, and fresh produce. These efforts increased access to nutritious food, provided neighbors with educational materials, and strengthened the sense of connection between NMTS participants, staff, and the surrounding community. The collaboration also demonstrated how food, art, and therapeutic engagement can work together to support health, independence, and belonging.

Looking ahead, we see tremendous potential for this partnership to grow. By expanding the courtyard plantings, increasing Mobile Market frequency, and engaging more volunteers, we can grow more food on-site and serve more residents in the surrounding neighborhood. This partnership reflects our commitment to open collaboration with like-minded nonprofits and our belief that sustainable, community-driven solutions are built through shared effort. By working together, we extend our reach into communities of greatest need and continue building a healthier, more connected Washoe County.



Our Team

Staff

Cara Montoya, *Executive Director*
Sage Tomita, *Garden Manager*
Kimberly Esse, *Program Coordinator*
Alana Boise, *Assistant Garden Manager*
Seth Crowther, *Arborist Apprentice*
Zevis Jacinto, Arborist Apprentice

Board of Directors

John Lipinski, *Board Chair*
Dee Schafer-Whitten, *Secretary & Co-founder*
Brittany Gamboa, Treasurer
Janice Bailey, *Board Member*
Melody Bauer, *Board Member*
Joleen Palmer, *Board Member*
Josh Wallin, *Board Member*
Earstin Whitten, *Board Member & Co-founder*
Cori Zancanella, Board Member

Awards and Acknowledgements

100% Giving Board Award, Community Foundation

Certified People's Garden, USDA





2025 CONSOLIDATED FINANCIALS

Revenue and Support	2025 without Restriction	2025 with Restriction	2025 Total	2024 Total
Government Grants	$244,020	$0	$244,020	$162,448
Private Grants	$1,500	$73,000	$74,500	$74,020
Contributions and Events	$213,210	$10,000	$223,210	$127,693
Contributions, Nonfinancial	$86,086	$0	$86,086	$85,171
Total Revenue and Support	**$544,816**	**$83,000**	**$627,816**	**$449,332**

Expenses	2025 without Restriction	2025 with Restriction	2025 Total	2024 Total
Programs and Gardening	$406,376	$0	$406,376	$253,046
Management and Support Services	$132,027	$0	$132,027	$150,995
Total Expenses	**$538,403**	**$0**	**$538,403**	**$404,041**

Change in Net Assets	**$66,016**	**$23,397**	$89,413	**$45,291**

A copy of the complete board approved 2025 Independent Financial Review conducted by Connie Christiansen, CPA, CFE is available upon request.

Contributors

Soulful Seeds sincerely thanks our 2025 contributors for their generosity and dedication. Your support has helped cultivate connection, resilience, and lasting impact throughout Washoe County.

$20,000+
Anonymous Donor
Ed and Martha Reese
Nevada Department of Agriculture
Peek Family Foundation
USDA, Division of Forestry

$15,000- $19,999
Jack and Bonnie Grellman
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Conagra Brands Foundation

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SOULFUL SEEDS

TOGETHER WE GROW

Mailing Address
316 California Ave #700
Reno, NV 89509

soulfulseedsnevada.org

@soulfulseedsnv

Soulful Seeds NV

soulful-seeds

Phone
775-230-7069

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