

We Believe

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The fall season brings not only the changing color of leaves, but it is also a time where the growing season here at Cultivate slows down, making for more cross-program opportunities. This month, our team and the youth food justice interns had the pleasure of hosting the wonderful ladies of “I Believe In Me Girls ” at our CATEC garden. “I Believe In Me” (IBIM) is an organization in Baltimore, Maryland that supports the physical, mental, social, emotional, and financial success of young Black and brown girls. With young ladies from 8 to 18 years-old thoughtfully led by Founder and CEO Cortney Robertson aka “Farmer Cortney”, IBIM focuses on mentorship, engaging community, growing/sharing food, and working to dismantle systemic issues much like what we do here at Cultivate.

Farmer Cortney shared that her passion behind starting the organization came from her grandfather who had a small urban garden when she was young. “I would work with my cousins and friends in the garden,” says Cortney. She spoke about her grandfather’s garden feeding her family and teaching her about establishing independence at a young age which she hopes to instill in her girls.

We began this beautiful Sunday afternoon with a grounding exercise sharing about which fruits and vegetables we most relate to while passing around a ball of yarn. At the end of the exercise, a large web was formed connecting everyone together. Interns Rosy and Markasia showed amazing leadership with a presentation to the group about the Summer Intern Program and what being a youth food justice Intern means to them.



→ At their urban garden in Baltimore, IBIM grows collards, cabbage, herbs, and other produce much like what we grow in our gardens. Farmer Cortney's vision is for her girls to see the food system through a different lens and learn that what we eat comes from places other than just grocery stores, restaurants, and takeout.

Being able to see the full process of food from garden to table not only grounds the young ladies in community & sharing by working together, but it also instills health and self-sufficiency. "My favorite part is getting to taste the stuff we grow," said one IBIM member.

One of the ongoing challenges IBIM has experienced with their garden was the need for an adequate water source, currently they are having to carry water by hand which is not always easy. Although our CATEC garden has a sufficient water source, Cultivate shares the same irrigation challenge at our West Street and 6th Street gardens. Together we shared in taste testing, talked about healing plants, and even spotted a huge squash growing in the garden.

As the afternoon ended, our guests were sent home with Cultivate tote bags, stickers, and yummy samples from our garden. The day was filled with laughter, conversations about our love for food, and of course SELFIES! We would like to thank Farmer Cortney and the ladies of I Believe in Me for spending the day with the us sharing and connecting in community and sisterhood. We can't wait to welcome them back to Charlottesville and our gardens!