A typical busy spring at the Youth Garden Project includes groups of school children, garden workers, community members and volunteers. This year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, things are looking a little different.

“With the closing of school, we canceled our spring break camp, our garden classroom field trips and our after-school clubs,” said Kaitlin Thomas, YGP’s executive director. The popular “Weed ‘N Feed” events are also on hold.

“We’re really missing the hundreds of children, families, and community members that pass through the site each spring,” said Thomas, “but the staff and interns are finding ways to support the community and continue connecting people with food from seed to table.”
Continuing youth programming online and beyond

The garden’s Youth Programs Crew has created lessons for at-home garden-based education, which are being shared with parents and children online (and in this very paper’s Young Suns youth section).

Since the fall of 2018, YGP has taught a trimester-long class at the Grand County High School. As the school’s classes were transferred online due to COVID-19 pandemic, this spring’s course, Agriculture in Your Area, has followed.

YGP VISTA Kate Glynn is teaching the course and finding creative ways to keep students engaged and adapting class work that would usually take place at the garden to work at the student’s homes. Last week, students picked up plant starts from YGP to work on gardening experiments at their own homes.

“Staff is also working on a Garden Pen Pals initiative,” said Thomas. Students are encouraged to write letters about their outdoor garden spring activities, which are then sent to elders at the Canyonlands Care Center. Families who would like to get involved as pen pals can contact Youth Programs Director Julie Zender at julie@youthgardenproject.org.

“We hope to provide some connection for the residents who are in lockdown,” said Thomas.

Zender is currently working to support teachers in the Grand County School District and Moab Charter School, creating mini-videos that can take the place of yearly Garden Classroom field trips.

“Videos for second and fifth grades have already been debuted and Kindergarten is being filmed now,” said Thomas.

Supporting the community through food

“A central part of the Youth Garden Project’s mission is food,” said Thomas, who pointed out that in the past weeks YGP has worked to provide free lunches for youth during spring break as well as working with the Moab Valley Multicultural Center’s food distribution program.

Staff are portioning out MVMC’s food donations and storing perishables in the commercial fridge at YGP on a weekly basis.

YGP staff leads a food security group within Grand County’s COVID-19 Taskforce, working with local farmers and food system professionals to consider the area’s food security and supply chain.

“We’re also involved with the childcare task force,” said Thomas.

“We’re really missing having people interacting and participating in hands-on learning in the garden,” said Thomas, “but we’re still keeping on with valuable work to support the overall community, including its present and emerging needs.”
Thomas reported that the garden still plans to host summer camp and other community programs, with necessary adaptations, this coming June. She is hopeful that events in the garden will resume as scheduled in the fall.

The community is clearly supportive of the group’s work, as the nonprofit’s annual spring plant sale had record-breaking sales.

“We're so excited that many people are getting involved with local food by starting in their own backyards,” said Thomas.

Staff leads online classrooms and collaboration with other groups

View Youth Garden Project lessons and videos online at www.youthgardenproject.org/garden-inspire-activities