

## New Gardening Program at Strickland

The Strickland Youth Center began the "Grow Up" Gardening Program this Spring. The program was designed to provide therapeutic healing activities through gardening. Research has shown the act of growing things greatly impacts positive mental health and wellbeing in youth.

One of our own detention officers, Desavre Paige, who is also community gardening enthusiast taught residents how to grow from seeds a variety of plants. Officer Paige worked with our residents to teach them the importance of agriculture, benefits of fresh foods, and plentiful possibilities of growing and maintaining a healthy productive garden.

With the help of other detention officers residents constructed six raised bed gardens and six plots of soil for planting. Dozens of residents participated in the program growing corn, tomatoes, pole beans, peas, squash, okra, peppers, cucumbers, sun flowers, and a variety of other plants. The harvest from the garden program was donated to local churches, food kitchens and used in meals at the Youth Center. Residents who participated in the program were excited to taste food they grew themselves.

Officer Paige will continue the Youth Center's mission to cultivate the growth of our residents through gardening with a year-round gardening program. The fall garden will double in size and provide residents with new opportunities to learn positive life skills and mentoring from various Master Gardeners in Mobile County.