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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Saint Luke’s Foundation Awards Veggie U \$12,000 to Create a Veggie U Classroom Garden Program for Early Childhood

The Saint Luke’s Foundation is dedicated to improving and transforming social and physical conditions in our neighborhood and improving the health and well-being of individuals and families in Greater Cleveland. The Foundation’s three major areas of focus are: Healthy People; A Strong Neighborhood; and Resilient Families.

With a vision that positions the Foundation as a philanthropic innovator and catalyst that supports programs that significantly advance its mission and have the potential to be locally, regionally and nationally recognized and replicated, Saint Luke’s Foundation has awarded Veggie U a \$12,000 grant to underwrite a portion of the cost to create and pilot a Classroom Garden Program for Early Childhood.

Growing Healthy Children through Education in our Classrooms

Today, Veggie U, a 501 (c) 3, provides two evidenced-based, innovative, indoor Classroom Garden programs that transform how children learn about where the food they eat comes from and the impact it has on them. The original program, Veggie U Primary, targets the traditional 2nd, 3rd or 4th grade classroom while Veggie U A+ targets students with special needs. Both Veggie U courses give students the rewarding learning experience of growing and eating vegetables and provide opportunities to learn and practice healthy eating behaviors.

However, evidence today shows that a strategic focus on early childhood learning is essential to insure optimal benefit for future growth and learning potential. Children of this age are curious, eager learners and their willingness to try new foods can be encouraged. Also, early education programs can improve both the health and the academic achievement of children, which translate into long term improvements in health during adulthood. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “High quality early education and child care for young children improves their health and promotes their development and learning.” Children who are healthy are more likely to be ready for school and ready to learn. Additionally, within the past year, and without any prompting, Veggie U received a large number of requests from preschool teachers for a Veggie U program. For all of these reasons and more, Veggie U has made a strategic decision to create, pilot and launch a program for Early Childhood.

“We are excited and encouraged to continue our partnership with The Saint Luke’s Foundation,” said Nadia Clifford, Veggie U Executive Director. “The Foundation has been supportive of our efforts in the past by funding a portion of

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the Classroom Gardens for students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District in 2015-2016. Today, we are so grateful that the Foundation recognizes the opportunity for enhanced learning with the Veggie U program within the Early Childhood community. We are hopeful that our partnership will continue for many more years.”

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About The Saint Luke’s Foundation: Saint Luke’s Foundation is dedicated to improving and transforming social and physical conditions in our neighborhood and improving the health and well-being of individuals and families in Greater Cleveland. Our program strategy framework positions us to build sustainable solutions to key issues that impact our community.

About Veggie U : Veggie U is dedicated to increasing children’s awareness of healthy food options, and teaching them how real food reaches their plate. We believe children who are exposed to growing their own food are more likely to include vegetables in their diet. Our national non-profit organization supplies Classroom Gardens and a standards based, five-week science program to teachers of elementary and special needs students. For more information, visit VeggieU.org