

GROUNDWORK Hudson Valley

Youth Development & Leadership Programs

by Sara Brody and Felipe Ramirez

For almost twenty years, Groundwork Hudson Valley has been a dynamic force for change in communities in the lower Hudson Valley. Groundwork Hudson Valley creates sustainable environmental change in urban neighborhoods through community-based partnerships that promote equity, economic opportunity, and youth leadership. Groundwork HV's youth employment program has been recognized by President Obama and the United States Department of the Interior and has been the standard-bearer for youth conservation programs within the Groundwork USA national network.

Over the past ten years, our Youth Development and Leadership programs have worked with Yonkers youth over the course of their high school years to provide a much needed continuum of support throughout their critical developmental years. Through intensive mentorship by youth and educational leaders, opportunities to gain work experience in conservation, and one-of-a-kind experiences in Westchester County and throughout the nation, our Youth Development and Leadership Program transforms young people into urban conservation leaders. The youth involved in these programs work to restore the environment in their own neighborhoods through participating in ambitious projects such as the identifying and removing invasive plants, becoming a docent on the Science Barge, restoring native habitats, and



performing scientific research with the Billion Oyster Project. As a result of working on these projects, many of the youth go on to major in STEM fields in college. Youth also carry out service projects in some of the most incredible public park areas, including Yellowstone National Park, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Gateway National Park, and Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge.

There are two programs for youth to get involved. They can volunteer to work on weekends at the Science Barge (a sustainable urban farm that operates as an environmental education center powered completely by wind and solar power with a hydroponic greenhouse that is irrigated solely by collected rainwater and is effectively "off the grid") from April through early November. Alternatively, youth can apply to be a part of a year round youth program called Green Team.

The Green Team program hires local teenagers enrolled in the Yonkers Public School system for summer environmental jobs – for many, their first job. The program focuses on leadership, group dynamics, and a variety of conservation and construction skills. This hard work is tempered with amazing adventures, like hiking, camping, and swimming.



Both of the youth development opportunities engage students to become more self assured, confident, and knowledgeable about green careers. Whether a student pursues a college education or trade school, the programs empower youth to pursue what makes them happy while introducing them to green jobs. These programs create powerful and visible changes not only in the areas that they are physically working in but within the youth themselves. The programs foster and demonstrate the pride the youth have in their own personal growth as well as demonstrates ways in which community based projects can change places and change lives.

For more information about Groundwork Hudson Valley Youth programs, contact Sara Brody via email, sarab@groundworkhv.org or by phone 914-375-2151

