

2019 Was Life-Changing for Yonkers Youth!



by **Brigitte Griswold**
Executive Director

Fundamental to all of our work is our commitment to nurturing the next generation of environmental leaders. We had another astonishing year with Groundwork's Green Team, which provides first-time paid jobs for Yonkers youth to lead conservation projects in their own neighborhoods, as well as at city, county, state and national parks. This year, our youth leaders built a community garden, removed thousands of pounds of trash from the Saw Mill River and eradicated invasive vines from the South County Trail and the Old Croton Aqueduct.

The team built new trails at the Lisha Kill Preserve with the Nature Conservancy, and planted willow trees on the banks of the Saw Mill River to help maintain erosion and flooding with the National Fish and Wildlife Service. Our young leaders also had the opportunity to visit Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming for the first time and experience the iconic wonders of one of our nation's most unique natural areas.

Jalen Sermon, one of our Green Team youth, shared his reflections at this year's gala in September:



"Green Team was the first time out of my clique. I was surrounded by complete strangers that I had to work with, eat with and camp with but from day one my teammates were so welcoming. They were kind, funny, respectful and caring. I didn't know that a complete group of strangers would become some of my best friends. Because of them and the Groundwork Hudson Valley staff, I learned how to become a leader and a team player. On one of our camping trips to Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge, we went on a hike.

The view was amazing, the air was fresher and crisper, the sky was clearer, the grass was greener. I was totally shocked and amazed to find out that these types of areas are in my local community and within arm's reach.

One of my biggest challenges was leading a presentation at my school with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about our work to establish an erosion and flood control system using plants to create habitat and prevent flooding along the Saw Mill River parkway. As I stood in front of my classmates, I had a flashback to 2018 when I was sitting in my science class listening to the Groundwork Youth Program Manager speak about joining the Green Team. Now a year later, I was presenting in front of the class!"

Thanks to Jalen for pushing himself out of his comfort zone into new adventures with Groundwork's Green Team! Because of leaders like him, we can all look forward to a brighter, greener future!

Every dollar of support helps us change places and lives in Westchester County. As 2019 comes to a close, please support us in our work to help young people lead the way in making our communities more vibrant places with a tax deductible donation today. By making a year-end, personal donation, you're helping us to exponentially increase our impact.