

CORPS: JOBS TODAY, A LIFETIME OF EMPLOYMENT TOMORROW



**The
CorpsNetwork**

Strengthening America through
service and conservation

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Established in 1985, The Corps Network is the voice of the nation's 143 Service and Conservation Corps. Currently operating in 44 states and the District of Columbia, Corps enroll more than 29,000 young men and women in service every year. Corps mobilize approximately 227,000 community volunteers who in conjunction with Corpsmembers generate 21.3 million hours of service every year.

A Solution for Young People Who Are Out-of-School and Out of Work

Shanice Long did not appear to have much of a future: no job, no money, no education. 16 years old, a homeless 11th grade dropout with 9th grade credits and no mom or dad, she walked into Oakland's Civicorps with just the clothes on her back. There, she says, "my life changed 100 percent."

At Civicorps, she found not only a job, but work that enabled her to learn and earn. Part of a team, a heavy trail maintenance crew, Shanice was trained in how to use a chainsaw and post-hole digger. Most importantly, she learned how to work with others. Although the transition into working life was rocky, Shanice persevered—and, encouraged and coached by her Crewleader, went straight to class after every day of service until she won her diploma.

Through service, Shanice's gifts emerged and she moved into a different job, as her ability to help others, to think through problems, and her rapid mastery of a range of software qualified her for a position at Civicorps' Learning Center. Today she is a quiet young woman who leads by example, advising Corpsmembers on how to master the requirements for the high school diploma at the Learning Center and representing others in second chance appeal processes. To move ahead in her career, she is in her second semester of community college, focusing on paralegal studies, and plans to enroll in, and graduate from, four-year college.

Shanice went from unemployment to employment—and gained skills and experience that will make her eminently employable in the future. "The Corps taught me how to be responsible and to come to work every day on time," she says. "The program helped me to achieve and reach my goals and prove wrong all those people who turned their backs on me and said I wouldn't make it. The Corps has made me into something I never thought I would become, rather than an inner-city statistic."

Jobs Today, A Lifetime of Employment Tomorrow

Serving in the Corps gave Shanice Long a job and helped her get the skills and education she needed to find a good job—and to be ready to succeed.

"The Corps has made me into something I never thought I would become..."

**Shanice Long,
Corpsmember**

For the young people who currently make up one-third of the jobless in America, many of them, like Shanice, out of work and out of school, Corps can, first of all, provide jobs—and, in addition, the abilities that are firm foundations for lifetimes of employment.

Service and Conservation Corps use a “work-first” model that provides paid work experience through service to almost 30,000 young people annually. Corps flexibly meet the needs of communities, no matter what those needs may be. In Corps, thousands of Corpsmembers serve on public lands, planting trees, building trails, and combating invasive species. Thousands of others retrofit low-income homes, educate residents about energy savings, or go into jobs in healthcare or construction, among a substantial range of real-life service assignments.

Regardless of the type of service, Corps provide opportunities to:

- Do real work—and get paid,
- Gain hard skills—applicable to future employment,
- Work in crews—developing 21st Century workforce readiness skills like teamwork, collaboration, and taking responsibility,
- Take initiative—growing as leaders and accountable, responsible colleagues,
- Through individual development plans, set goals, reach them, plan for new goals—and realistically imagine the future,
- Trust reliable mentors and willingly reach for the standards they set,
- Grow in self-efficacy through pride in creating visible and valued improvements to community and environment,
- Attain academic achievement by learning through doing—relating classroom studies to experience in the field (and for those that need to, gain educationally by making progress toward a high school diploma or GED), and
- Earn credentials—entering pathways to careers and more education, not just dead-end jobs.

Corps offer both a short term answer to extraordinarily high levels of youth unemployment and a long term solution to ensure that every American has the tools needed to succeed in the workplace. In addition, while Corps build work-ready young people across demographics, they have proven to be particularly effective in helping disconnected young men and women—who presently have extraordinarily high levels of unemployment—make the transition to employment and education.

Unemployment in the Great Recession

The Corps model is needed now more than ever. Youth began feeling the effects of the downturn in the economy well before adult unemployment rates began to rise. In 2007, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that the youth employment rates were the lowest in more than 60 years. At the close of 2008, young adults under the age of 25 constituted fully one-third of the unemployed in the nation. The precipitous rise in adult unemployment further exacerbated the problem for youth as college students, adults, and older workers began taking jobs that had traditionally been filled by low income and unskilled youth and young adults.

Unemployment for young adults has repercussions. Careers stalled early can result in unemployment for a decade or more, and lower wages over their lifetimes once workers are finally hired. Disconnected youth may permanently lose already shaky attachments to the labor market.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 3.9 million people under the age of 25 are considered “officially” unemployed.¹ This number does not include the hundreds of thousands of youth who have simply given up looking for jobs. Joblessness for young people, ages 16 - 24 rose to 21 percent in November 2009, while unemployment for young black men in that age category topped 35 percent. Even more daunting, youth in high poverty communities, those with disabilities and black teens—whose “official” unemployment rate rose eight points in the month between October and November 2009, up to 49.4 percent²—have been hit especially hard. This generation—and young black workers in particular—need employment today.

Service and Conservation Corps: A Solution That Works

Service and Conservation Corps, descended from the Roosevelt-era Civilian Conservation Corps, constitute one of the nation’s largest youth development systems. Operating in 44 states and the District of Columbia, the nation’s 143 Corps enroll nearly 30,000 young people a year and provide them with the education, life skills, and job training they need to succeed in today’s economy. More than half the young people enrolling in Corps come from families with incomes below \$20,000. All stay to serve, to develop a strong work and service ethic, to enter the “second home” that is the Corps, to join the team and make a difference.

In the Corps model, adult leaders, who serve as mentors and technical trainers, guide crews of up to 8-12 Corpsmembers in a wide range of service and conservation projects. In return for their efforts, Corpsmembers receive a living allowance, and, if needed, classroom training to improve academic competencies and secure a high school diploma or GED and a wide range of supportive services. They receive generic and technical skills training, are taught leadership skills, and are encouraged to become civically engaged. Many receive an AmeriCorps post-service educational award.

Corps provide the early work experience that teaches critical thinking and problem solving skills, teamwork, and accountability that are essential to the development of a work ethic and success in the workplace. A three-year study from UCLA funded by Atlantic Philanthropies confirmed the added cognitive and affective benefits to students of combining academic study with service to community.³ Corps do this through service-learning, an experiential pedagogy fusing action and reflection which increases personal engagement in learning and nurtures sustained, intentional engagement with community.

1 United States DOL, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved December 14, 2009. <http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/servlet/SurveyOutputServlet.jsessionid=a230783fd41a5c9647f>

2 United States DOL, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved December 14, 2009. <http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/servlet/SurveyOutputServlet.jsessionid=a23086f863963c562766>

3 Astin, Alexander W., Lori J. Vogelgesang, Elaine K. Ikeda, and Jennifer A. Lee, “How Service-Learning Affects Students.” Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA: 2000

While the Corps model is consistent with regard to the elements it includes and the services it provides to Corpsmembers, individual Corps programs vary depending on the needs of the Corpsmembers and the communities in which they serve, preparing Corpsmembers for a wide range of career and technical opportunities. Some Corps help “green” their neighborhoods, some build urban gardens and playgrounds, while others train Corpsmembers for careers as managers of public lands. Still others tutor young students or do health education outreach. This flexibility enables Corps to engage young people in service that is needed by their communities, and provide them with skills training desirable to local employers. Moreover, by working on projects within their own communities, Corpsmembers develop a sense of ownership over their accomplishments and form ties to local employers – becoming contributing members of the same society that once looked upon them as dependent children or even as burdens and liabilities.

Strong Outcomes for Disconnected Youth

Corps offer especially effective education and training for disconnected youth. Nationally, 66% of Corpsmember families have incomes under the Federal poverty level; 72% have no college, and of those, 45% lack the high school diploma. 43% are Caucasian, 30% African-American, 17% Latino, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander. Corps have delivered strong education, workforce readiness, civic engagement, and responsible behaviors outcomes to more than 600,000 youth over several decades. Further, The Corps Network has long experience in working with Corps to help those youth who, because of their lack of education or other issues, are the hardest to serve.

In 2003, The Corps Network completed a four-year \$3.8 million national Welfare to Work project funded by the Department of Labor. The project engaged eight Corps programs in four states and moved nearly 500 young adults from welfare roles and lives of dependence through a Corps experience and toward employment and independent lives. Participants realized significant gains in post-Corps job placement, employment retention and earnings during the course of the project. The Welfare to Work project built on The Corps Network’s involvement with the five-year foundation-funded Corps to Career Initiative that involved 26 corps in 10 states. The purpose of the initiative was to build upon the experience that young people gained from the Corps and use it to catapult them into the primary labor market, obtain living-wage jobs, and advance educationally.⁴ The program included employer engagement in all program phases, monetary and other incentives, academic remediation and hands-on technical training, education about culture of work, Individual Development Plans, wrap-around supports coordinated with other youth serving systems like child welfare and juvenile justice, somatic and mental health care, transportation, transitional housing, consistent post-program follow-up, trusting relationships with staff—all integral components of the Corps model.

These experiences informed the creation of Civic Justice Corps in 2007, which added to the Corps model formal partnerships with justice agencies, employers, and educators, affirmatively recruiting formerly incarcerated and court-involved young people. CJC reduced recidivism

⁴ More about these successes can be found in a comprehensive evaluation of NASCC’s Welfare to Work project and Corps to Career methodology, entitled, “Promising Practices for Helping Low-Income Youth Obtain and Retain Jobs” published by Abt Associates in September 2003.

substantially and successfully placed graduates into further education—and sustained employment, emphasizing green jobs.

A 1997 rigorous multi-site control group evaluation conducted by Abt Associates/ Brandeis University documented significant employment and earnings gains accruing to young people who join Corps, with positive outcomes especially striking for young African-American men. Initial findings from the second generation of that study, a random assignment evaluation funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service including over 2,000 participants in the largest-ever random assignment study of national service, are anticipated in 2010.

Many Pathways to Careers through Corps

Corps meet a wide range of community needs that provide a solid, stipended training ground for several career and technical futures:

Weatherization: At WSOS Quilter Civilian Conservation Corps, in northwest Ohio, Corpsmembers under the guidance of Community Action Agency weatherization professionals master the processes of weatherization and benefit from trainings including technical skills, many awarding related credentials (blower door training, tool and procedure safety trainings) to personal asset-building (financial literacy, career paths), to specific topics in life skills and work readiness. Many Corpsmembers continue as members of regional weatherization crews.

Public Lands Management and Environmental Restoration: Corpsmembers at the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, based in Taos, New Mexico and the Western Colorado Conservation Corps, based in Grand Junction, Colorado, serve on public lands to build trails, restore streams, eradicate invasive species, both plants and animals, and repopulate with local species.

Environmental Restoration and Water Conservation: At the Los Angeles Conservation Corps and at Conservation Corps North Bay in northern California, Corpsmembers plant trees, manage grasslands, maintain trails, restore ecosystems, and landscape on public lands, installing irrigation and drip systems to conserve water, creating rain gardens.

Healthcare: In Civic Works' Healthcare Careers Alliance, a partnership with five of Baltimore's most prestigious non-profit hospitals, Corpsmembers receive paid training, technical skills, life skills and on-the-job training in the health care field. The Healthcare Careers Alliance has trained hundreds of young people each year to serve the health needs of the city of Baltimore.

Energy and Water Audits and Retrofits: Mile High Youth Corps in Denver engages Corpsmembers in in-home audits for low-income residents, installation of CFL light bulbs, water heater and furnace wrapping, water aerators, programmable thermostats, high-efficiency toilets and showerheads, and education of residents on the financial and environmental benefits of using less energy.

Green Building: Casa Verde Builders at American YouthWorks, Austin, TX, and Operation Fresh Start, in Madison, WI engage Corpsmembers in low-income home construction meeting Energy Star standards, as part of YouthBuild, a national Corps program building the leadership, skills, and work readiness of disconnected young people.

Education: City Year Corpsmembers provide academic assistance through tutoring, support for a positive school climate, community service projects, and after-school program support as part of the national Whole School, Whole Child initiative.

Youth Work and Human Services: Corpsmembers also can find vocational direction in the Corps' mission of service. Some are inspired by the dedication of Corps staff to become youth workers themselves, or impressed by the needs they encounter when doing energy or health care outreach to enter the field of human services. Many of the skills that Corpsmembers bring to work in the helping professions will be ones they acquired in the crew: taking responsibility, being accountable, solving problems collaboratively, and being proud of a job well done.

Lowering Unemployment Today, Creating the Workforce of Tomorrow

Investing in Corps will lower local unemployment while Corpsmembers meet needs that will help states and localities that are straining under diminished budgets to deliver projects that are valued by the community.

Through service to community and the environment, young people are motivated to exceed their expectations of themselves: they are part of a team whose achievements serve a greater, more urgent purpose. Their pride in service, and the support and encouragement of the team, motivates Corpsmembers to learn, to strive, and to succeed. In these ways, they prepare for a life of professional achievement.

The concept of the Corps has resonated with Americans ever since FDR created the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933. Perhaps no one has summed up the reasons why better than President Roosevelt himself when he spoke to the CCC'ers at Warm Springs, Georgia in December 1935. He told them, "You are rendering a real service. . . . It is permanent work; it is work that is going to be useful for a good many generations to come. That is why, one reason why, the people of this country as a whole believe in the Civilian Conservation Corps."

For decades, young men and women have been transformed by their experiences in the Corps, making the transition from dependence to independence, from idler to leader, from receiver of services to creator of valued and visible public work. The experience—and the assets—stay with them throughout a lifetime, as Corpsmembers become lifelong learners, earners, workers, and leaders.



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