

Getting Teens Outdoors, Building a Green Jobs Movement

Three years ago, Anchorage Parks and Recreation established the Youth Employment in Parks (YEP) program. Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA) works in partnership with the Municipality of Anchorage to create a program that introduces a more diverse population of youth to outdoor recreation and green jobs. Now, it has become much more than that: the program offers teenagers an extraordinary first-job experience, informative and relevant environmental education, and the opportunity to make lasting friendships. The participants in this program end their summer with the knowledge of how and the inspiration to care for the environment, as well as a unique professional experience. Over the course of the summer, they build and maintain trails, take part in urban forestry, and reinforce creek beds and watersheds; all the while, they learn about why it is important to stay active in the environmental community.

AYEA works with the Municipality throughout the year to plan YEP program components and recruit diverse youth for employment. AYEА also partners with the YEP program to add one more crucial component: civic engagement. AYEА facilitates workshops with the YEP teenagers once a week to teach them about ways to be civically involved in their community. Anchorage Parks and Recreation equips the participants with the outdoor skills and environmental education needed to recognize environmental issues, and AYEА gives them the tools required for action. Over the course of the summer, we cover themes like social capital, media and messaging, letters to the editor, voting, community and city councils, public speaking, and protests. AYEА's goal is to compliment the YEP program and give the teens not only the confidence to act on environmental issues, but the desire to do so.

At the end of the summer, AYEА also plans a week solely dedicated to green jobs. At AYEА, we feel it is important to get youth involved in the green economy early. Not only does the schedule include a resume workshop, cover letter help, and interview tips, but it also highlights a myriad of careers in the green economy. The opportunities range from working at an electronics recycling center to becoming a LEED certified architect. By incorporating jobs that are not traditionally seen as green jobs, we portray the broader opportunities and encourage teens to look for environmentally-aware businesses when they are in the market for a job. By the end of the week, each teen has officially defined 'green job,' spent one day with someone who has a green job, and talked with a variety of green job representatives at a job fair. After we're through, they are up to their ears in Alaskan green jobs! In seriousness, we hope that they end their summer with the confidence and willingness to take action on environmental issues affecting their community, and that their career choices in the future will reflect environmental awareness. These teenagers are indeed tomorrow's advocates, and we are fortunate to be the first to tell them so.

Sam Hoeffler, Green Jobs Intern

More information:

<http://ayea.org/WordPress/jobs-opportunities/yep>
www.anchorageparkfoundation.org/projects/YEP.htm