



Yard Corps in its 4th Year Empowering Youth with Outdoor Skills and Teamwork *(Pilot project began summer 2019)*

Shanti Community Farm's outdoor work crew division with trained youth participating in urban farm sites include the North Hill high tunnel and high school garden, Walnut St/St Vincent Church garden, and the new Hewa Bora farm next to the Akron Zoo on Edgewood Avenue in the West Hill Sherbondy neighborhood. Youth work crews perform mowing, weeding and clean-up of public and private lots; operate weekly youth-run farmer's market table at Summit Lake and catered Golden Time picnics. There's now a new division for youth dance and musical performance including the Black Beanz (African dance) and Hot Pepperz (Nepali dance) troupes. More than 35 youth participated in 2023 growing season with more than 20 clients.

Typical work crew teams consist of a mentor/coach/elder and two to four students. Every effort is made to provide transportation to/from work sites. For most enrolled students in the Yard Corps program, orientation, ongoing training and Ohio learning Standards study time with professional tutors will be offered. Students are paid hourly.

Yard Corps Mission

Yard Corps is designed to educate and train both immigrant and neighborhood youth 12-17 in landscape maintenance. Projects include mowing, weeding, bush/tree trimming, planting of vacant (city/county-owned) and private lots. Garden prep, fences, planters and pergola building are also

Shanti Community Farms Mission

Empowering new immigrants--young and old-- to capitalize on their agricultural heritage by learning entrepreneurial skills and contributing to the local economy. A fixture of the North Hill community, Shanti strives to promote continuity with the traditions of the past by providing stakeholders with a tangible economic future right here in Akron. Key goals and objectives include: Vocational training on life-long agricultural skill development, Amplification of English language tutoring services Providing educational demonstration garden

plots Bringing various generations and races together to support a common goal and impart shared wisdom. We get youth outdoors, experiencing nature, adding to their health and sports fitness. We work with youth after school in the off season and summer days in the growing season during summer break. We touch all areas of youth enrichment through work skills training, tutoring, and entrepreneurial building.

Rationale:

- Students in their formative years have too much unproductive, idle time outside of school.
- This project also diffuses racial tensions between American born minority and immigrant student groups in North Hill.
- This program contains critical components outlined in the Akron Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan.
- Landscape work crews provide mentors, recreational time, productive after school and summer hours, community involvement, career and on the job training and supplemental income

Goals:

- Ensure youth crew team members and mentors/elders/coaches maximize learning and development by structuring key job placement and monitoring progress after school and over the summer
- Strengthen positive relationships between the newer American immigrant student community and the longer-term established American-born student community by establishing work crews where they achieve similar goals side by side.
- Ensure that the agricultural heritage of the new immigrants does not die out with the older generation, but is passed on and enhanced to the youth generation
- Provide positive outcomes that will include easing racial tensions through strengthening of fellow student's working relationships, financial empowerment, and productive time after school and during the summer, gaining career and work skills prior to high school graduation.

Outcomes:

Similar youth programs like Yard Corps have shown nothing but positive outcomes for student participants, including:

- 74% obtained their high school equivalency credentials, high school diplomas, and/or industry-recognized credentials
- 54% went on to postsecondary education or jobs
- 73% of those placed retained their placement for at least six months
- Recidivism rates within one year of enrollment for all court-involved students averaged 11%
- Proponents of urban agriculture contend that it holds the potential

to improve community health and food security while reducing the negative environmental impacts of industrial agriculture, and also providing economic opportunities (*Apollo Alliance and Urban Habitat 2017; Barthel and Isendahl 2013; Brown and Bailey 2012*).