

# THE HEART OF OREGON

In the U.S. today, there are roughly 6.7 million disadvantaged, disconnected or at-risk young people aged 16 to 24 who are neither working nor in college.

In one year, a single “lost youth” will cost all taxpayers nearly \$14,000. These youths earn less later in life and may rely on government support. The lost generation will cost taxpayers \$437 billion over the next five years.

In 2013, the Heart of Oregon Corps will have served 270 young people.

Over the past five years, the Corps' young people have:

- Contributed more than 317,000 hours of community service;
- Protected more than 3,000 acres from forest fires;
- Rehabbed or built 12 homes;
- Provided affordable housing for 45 families;
- Built, improved or maintained more than 1,000 acres of recreation trails; and
- Recycled tons of tires and 715 appliances.

The program contributes to economic development by paying wages and stipends to program participants. In the last five years, that amounts to more than \$4.6 million. In that same time period, the Corps has awarded \$665,000 in scholarships.

The Heart of Oregon Corps' 2011-12 budget of \$1,409,000 came from foundation grants, donations, thrift store operations and the federal government's AmeriCorps program.

To learn more about the Heart of Oregon Corps, its mission and its people, visit [www.heartoforegon.org](http://www.heartoforegon.org), email [info@heartoforegon.org](mailto:info@heartoforegon.org), or call them at 541-633-7834.



## A HELPING HAND

# Inspiring Hope and Effecting Change IN YOUNG PEOPLE

Heart of Oregon Corps helps youths make changes for the positive.

by Kathy Oxborrow, for *The Bulletin Special Projects* | Photos Courtesy of Heart of Oregon Corps

The Heart of Oregon Corps aims to make to make a big difference in the lives of young people by inspiring hope and empowering positive change through jobs, education and stewardship.

While recent economic news has been a bit rosier with an upswing in new jobs nationwide, Oregon's unemployment rate remains high at 8.2 percent. Only 12 other states have higher unemployment rates than Oregon. According to the Heart of Oregon Corps, the youth unemployment rate is double that of the unemployment rate for all Americans.

Laura Handy, the organization's executive director said they use a “work, earn, learn model” in their programs to engage young people ages 16 to 27 to make positive changes in their lives.

“They might build houses, they might do weatherization, they might work on public lands and build trails, they



might do fire fuels reduction or they might build fences to protect watersheds,” said Handy.

The guiding force behind “work, earn, learn” was Denny Maloney, a long-time leader in juvenile justice issues both locally and nationally. Together with Dan Saraceno, a school counselor in Sisters and David Holmes, a probation officer who became the Corp's first executive director, they founded the organization in 2000.

Maloney was the director of the Deschutes County Department of Community Justice for 16 years and the building housing that pro-

gram was renamed the Dennis Maloney Community Justice Center following his untimely death in 2007 at age 55.

The three men saw a need for youths who were on probation and those at risk of entering the juvenile justice system to have a positive way of becoming involved in the community.

“They wanted young people to have a way of developing a work ethic, to have real boots-on-the-ground job skills training so they would be ready for the workforce,” said Handy.

Offering alternative ways for young people to continue their education was also a priority. Program participants can work

on their GED or college classes while in the program.

"We'll help them select a class that really helps them dip their toe into the college environment while they're still with us in a supportive environment so they can successfully launch after the program," said Handy.

Amy Mentuck, the director of development at Heart of Oregon Corps, pointed out that giving back to the community is another element of the program.

"Young people also get something back," she said. "They get a sense of pride for the community that they reside in."

The Corps has numerous partnerships with government, businesses and other nonprofits. Robin Cooper, community outreach manager at the Bend

Area Habitat for Humanity, has been working with the Corp's program participants for several years. The youth work on home repairs and weatherization projects.

Cooper said the work experience builds skills but it also "gives youth an opportunity to be better than they were yesterday" by serving their community.

The backgrounds of the young people in the program vary widely. Sarah Laroucq, 30, said she got into trouble with the law in her late teens and early 20s and her probation officer introduced her to the program. At the time she had a one-month-old daughter whom accompanied her to the Corps' interview.

During the program La-



roucq obtained her GED through Central Oregon Community College. Next month she will mark her five-year anniversary at BendBroadband where she is a senior representative for customer care in billing.

Laroucq said she touts the program to young people who aren't sure what they want to

do. "It creates so many opportunities if you have the drive to want to do it."

Current Corps member, Joe Overland, 25, has a much different story than Laroucq. His has college degree in construction management but had no work experience when he saw and an ad in The Source for the Corps' program.

As the crew leader working with Habitat, Overland is responsible for making sure his team is at the right place at the right time. He says he's learned a lot and now has a successful work history that he can put on his resume.

Overland's advice to anyone considering the program is to "make sure you're ready to work and get your hands dirty."

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