

Youth Employment in Parks



Anchorage Park Foundation

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What is YEP?

The Youth Employment in Parks (YEP) program is a program of the Anchorage Parks & Recreation Department, the Anchorage Park Foundation and Alaska Youth for Environmental Action, a program of the National Wildlife Federation.



The goal of the YEP program is to positively engage a new generation of diverse youth leaders with the environment and the Anchorage community through meaningful training, employment, and outdoor recreation.

Each summer YEP hires teens to provide recreation programming and complete park improvement projects in Anchorage parks. Beginning in 2007, the YEP program has expanded its scope and impact each season, while developing more partnerships in the community each year.



Crews participate in civic engagement training led by Alaska Youth for Environmental Action. Teens study local government, attend community council and assembly meetings and participate in job shadowing and career planning activities.

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Funding

With major funding each year from the Municipality of Anchorage, the Anchorage Park Foundation, the Rasmuson Foundation, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Department of Labor, YEP hires teens and gathers community support to implement program goals.

YEP Themes

Each week of YEP work is focused on education and project work based on one of the following themes:

- **WATERWAYS**
- **TRAILS**
- **FORESTS**

Program Goals:

- 1) Create a meaningful “first job” experience and career pathway for diverse youth to work in the outdoors and natural resources fields.
- 2) Expose youth to the outdoors and connect them with nature to support healthy lifestyles.
- 3) Provide youth with community action skills and character development so they may become effective citizens.
- 4) Build community through enhanced recreation opportunities, parks and public spaces.



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Recreation Crews

Rec crews build stronger communities and promote healthy activity by providing free or low-cost recreation programming in park and school sites throughout the community, serving hundreds of Anchorage families. Known as the "Park & Play" program, YEP rec crews encourage Anchorage kids to get outdoors, get active and get to know their environment and public lands.



Parks Crews

Parks crews take better care of parks and promote stewardship of natural resources by restoring stream banks, building and repairing trails, completing forestry projects, restoring landscapes and more, all while learning about their neighborhoods, their environment and their community. Parks crews beautify and improve parks, restore habitats and healthy forests and improve community access to natural areas by building and repairing trails.



Program Evaluation

In order to more effectively implement the YEP program, YEP partners implement a rigorous evaluation of program during each season. In order to foster a feeling of ownership of program success, YEP staff actively implement participant suggestions throughout the season. Measurement tools include: qualitative program-specific evaluations, the Search Institute's Developmental Assets Profile tool and the Program & Activity Assessment Tool (for young adults and children) developed by the Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence.



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Program Summary

Each year, the YEP program includes several common components:

- Civic engagement training led by Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA), including:
 - Attend an Anchorage Assembly Meeting
 - Learn about the community council process
 - Learn how to advocate about issues they care about
 - Participate in resume-writing workshops
 - Attend mock interviews for internships and jobs
 - Attend a Career Fair including many job opportunities for youth
 - Choose a professional or organization to job shadow and shadow that person for a day



"Civic engagement is an opportunity to address the problems in our communities."

— 2008 Crew Member

- Introduction to the theory and philosophy of the parks & recreation profession; the Anchorage Parks & Recreation Department's history and impact on community
- Introduction to the science and theory behind the basic themes of YEP:

waterways, trails & forests

- Introduction to healthy outdoor recreation activities
- Safety training, including how to use tools needed for projects and basic CPR & first aid
- Team building and leadership development exercises
- Introduction to basic on-the-job conduct and expectations
- Community service opportunities
- In 2009, YEP staff added peer mediation component to training to assist crew members in solving disputes and conflicts effectively
- Drug awareness and financial literacy training



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FORESTS

TRAILS

WATERWAYS

2007 Highlights

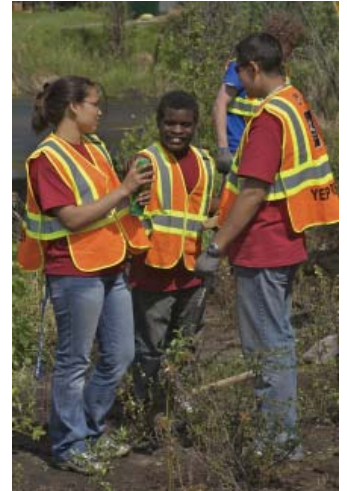
In 2007, YEP crews comprised 25 crew members and 7 leadership staff members, with additional supervision from Parks & Recreation staff.

Taking Better Care of What We Have

- Studied park design and maintenance and worked to improve sight lines, enhance visibility and increase trail safety along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and in parks.
- Supplemented department park maintenance efforts by cleaning, weeding and improving landscapes in 37 parks, including Centennial Campground, Kincaid Park, the Delaney Park Strip and McPhee Community Gardens.

Stewarding Natural Resources

- Practiced urban fire prevention techniques with the Anchorage Fire Department and studied urban **forestry** practices with foresters from the Department of Natural Resources
- Learned to identify invasive species and completed invasive weed cleanups in parks throughout Anchorage.
- Improved the sustainability and safety of the **trails** at University Lake by revegetating social trails, repairing uneven trail treads and restoring steep slopes.
- Studied the water cycle & common water pollutants; studied methods to preserve, protect, and restore Anchorage **waterways**.
- Learned about promoting healthy salmon habitats in Anchorage and worked with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and other partners to complete streambank restoration projects.



Building a Stronger, Healthier Community

- Conducted public park user surveys to assess park use for future improvements at Taku Lake Park, Delaney Park, Goose Lake Park and Margaret Eagan Sullivan Park.
- Recreation crew members offered a neighborhood play program guided by full-time Recreation Division employees. This program was organized in partnership with Anchorage Faith & Action Congregations Together (FACT) and St. Anthony's Catholic Church in order to provide healthy play opportunities to children. YEP Recreation Crew Members learned important lessons about how to structure quality and safe recreation programs through organization, planning, teamwork and leadership.



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FORESTS

2008 Highlights

In 2008, YEP crews comprised 48 crew members and 7 leadership staff members with additional supervision from Parks & Recreation staff.

Taking Better Care of What We Have

- Parks Crews learned about Anchorage community gardens and maintained landscapes and worked with horticulture and maintenance to restore flowerbeds and plant wildflowers. Crews also tended the community gardens and constructed compost bins at each of the garden sites.

Stewarding Natural Resources

- Parks Crews studied **water** cycles and enhanced aquatic ecosystems by restoring and stabilizing eroded streambanks in partnership with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Crews also participated in constructing the rain garden at Taku Lake, studied invasive fish species in Cheney Lake Park and completed invasive weed pulls throughout the city.
- Parks Crews learned and implemented urban **forestry** skills in Muldoon Park and University Lake Park by clearing and pruning dead standing trees and thinning brush to help maintain a healthy forest ecosystem. Matt Weaver and Steve Nickels from the Alaska Division of Forestry offered hands-on lessons about local tree identification and the beetles and diseases damaging local forests.
- Parks Crews partnered with Alaska Trails to help create 8.5 miles of new soft-surface single track **trails** in Far North Bicentennial Park. Crews learned basic "Leave No Trace" principles, studied forest mycology and trail construction techniques, including site assessment, trail construction and tool maintenance.

Building a Stronger, Healthier Community

- Throughout the summer, Recreation Crews provided the neighborhood "Park & Play" program in parks and schools throughout the city. Park & Play gives Anchorage children the opportunity to participate in structured, healthy and positive recreation all summer long.



Youth Employment in Parks



FORESTS

2009 Highlights

In 2009, YEP crews expanded to comprise 56 crew members and 26 leadership staff members.

Taking Better Care of What We Have

- Crews completed clean-ups in Taku Lake Park, Campbell Park, Fish Creek Estuary, Wilson Park and Ray E. Storck Homestead Park including trash removal, weeding, pruning and mulching natural areas to beautify parks and promote park safety.



Stewarding Natural Resources

- Parks crews completed **waterways** projects along the Campbell Creek Greenbelt, including repairing fishing platforms, repairing streambanks, and landscaping eroded areas in partnership with experts from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, and Municipal watershed management.
- Thanks to generous support from the Alaska Railroad, parks crews visited the Alaska Sealife Center to learn about aquatic habitats and invasive species on Alaska's shores from Conservation Director Howard Ferren.
- Parks crews built new **trails** and repaired existing trails in University Lake Park, Far North Bicentennial Park, Helen Louise McDowell Sanctuary and Alderwood Park. Crews worked with Alaska Trails to build sustainable, safe and accessible soft-surface trails, learning valuable trail-building skills in the process.
- Crews implemented a **forest** health protection project in Far North Bicentennial Park, preventing the spread of spruce bark beetle by selectively thinning trees and chipping downed spruce trees to reduce beetle habitat, consequently reducing wildfire danger in FNNP.

Building a Stronger, Healthier Community

- Recreation crews offered Park & Play recreation programming in 8 park and school sites all summer long. For the first time, recreation crews implemented fun and educational activities for kids based on the Sajai Foundation's Wise Kids curriculum, promoting children's ecological awareness.
- The Art in the Parks crew teamed up with a different local artist each week to offer art activities based on the three YEP themes: waterways, trails and forests.



TRAILS

WATERWAYS

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YEP Reflects A Diverse Community

High Schools Represented

East High School: 8
West High School: 9
AVAIL High School: 1
Family Partnership Charter School: 1
Dimond High School: 7
Family Partnership Charter School: 1
South High School: 5
Highland Tech High School: 1
Bartlett High School: 5
Polaris K-12: 3
Grace Christian School: 1
Chugiak High School: 1
Nine Star High School: 1
Palmer High School: 1
I.D.E.A. Home School: 1

Age Distribution

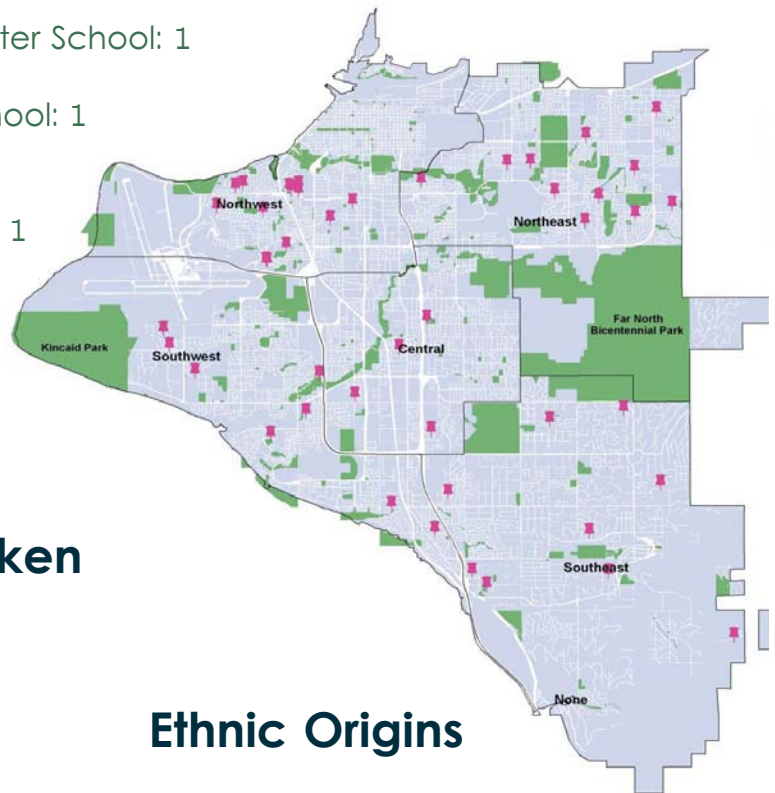
16 years old: 11
17 years old: 23
18 years old: 14
19 years old: 3
No Response: 3

Languages Spoken

Spanish: 13
French: 8
Arabic: 3
Japanese: 3
German: 2
Thai: 1
Samoan: 1
Laotian: 1
Russian: 1
Korean: 1
Filipino: 1
Sign Language: 1

Ethnic Origins

African American: 6
Asian/Pacific Islander: 6
Alaska Native/American Indian: 4
White: 28
Multiracial/Other: 9
No Response: 1



In 2009, YEP was a first job experience for 12 of the participants!

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2007–2009 Funders & Partners

Program Funders

- **BP**
- **ConocoPhillips**
- **Rasmuson Foundation**
- **Alaska Youth for Environmental Action**
- **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**
- **Single Track Advocates**
- **U.S. Forest Service**
- **Anchorage Municipal Assembly**
- **Great Land Trust**

Program Partners

Alaska Center for the Environment
Alaska Community Action on Toxics
Alaska Community Development Corporation
Alaska Conservation Alliance
Alaska Conservation Foundation
Alaska Conservation Solutions
Alaska Democratic Party
Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Alaska F.I.E.L.D. School
Alaska Geographic
Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
Alaska Native History Association
Alaska Pacific University

Alaska Process Industry Careers
Alaska Railroad
Alaska Rose Society
Alaska State Parks
Alaska Teen Media Institute
Alaska Trails
Alaskans for Litter Prevention and Recycling
Alaskans for Responsible Mining
AmeriCorps
Anchorage Botanical Garden
Anchorage Construction Academy
Anchorage Disc Golfing Association
Anchorage Faith & Action
Congregations Together
Anchorage Fire Department
Anchorage Recycling Facility
Anchorage Regional Compost Facility
Anchorage Regional Landfill
Anchorage School District
Anchorage Urban League of Young Professionals
Anchorage Waterways Council
Bill Stokes
Bob Robertson
British Universities North America Club
Bureau of Land Management
Campfire
Channel 2 News, KTUU
Chris Aquino
Chris Frenier
Chugach Adventure Guides
Congregation Beth Shalom
Covenant House
Dar'Shon Tucker
Darrell Hess
Department of Labor
Anchorage Job Center
Earth Watch Institute
Girdwood Ski & Cyclery
Government Hill Community Council
Governor Bill Sheffield
Graphic Works

Great Harvest Bread Company
Green Star
Happy Trails
Holland America
Job Corps
John Gregoire
Johnson Controls
Jonathan Teeters
Kids' Kitchen
Kikkan Randall
KPB Architects
Land Design North
Ma'o Tosi
Moore's Landscaping
Moose's Tooth
National Park Service
National Wildlife Federation
Native Movement
Ninestar
Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage
Pablo's Bicycle Rental
Paddleboat Cafe
Pizza Olympia
Play It Again Sports
Princess Tours
ReStore
RurALCAP
Ryan Zinn
SAGA
Sourdough Mining Company
St. Anthony's Church
Stellar Designs
Teamsters
Total Reclaim Inc.
Trail Watch
TREErific
UAF Cooperative Extension
U.S. Postal Service
United Way
University of Alaska
Van Waggoner
Vasati Jeremiah
Vernon Wilson
Youth Conservation Corps

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Outcomes

- YEP participants become community leaders at a young age, strengthened by their understanding of their neighborhoods, parks and public lands
- YEP alumni report increased self-confidence, public speaking and leadership abilities
- The community as a whole benefits from improved parks with healthier ecosystems
- Recreation crews make healthy, positive recreation programs accessible to the more than 800 Anchorage children who participate in citywide Park & Play programming
- Each municipal dollar invested in YEP secures a 6:1 match in external funding, bringing new investment to Anchorage parks and recreation programming



YEP Participants Develop a Stronger Sense of Community

“My community is where the residents care for their neighbors and for their environment. Where there is an underlying feeling of good will and a spirit of caring. We may not always see it through the gloom of financial problems and crime. But just as there is good and hope in every soul, there is hope in our community. We have the chance to stand a little taller, be a bit more grateful and to be involved a little bit more.”

– 2009 Parks Crew Member



Don't take our word for it.

Listen to what YEP crews have to say.

“During my first few weeks within the YEP program I became much more aware with the environment and how it and mankind coexist. If one becomes off balance then so does the other. It not only satisfies the needs of us humans but also for plants, animals such as fish and frogs as well as bugs and other microscopic beings in this class.”



“Why my job is important: If you saw a child, poor and with few to no toys of their own, with eyes lit up to receive their very own toy, whether a handmade kite or a pet rock they painted themselves, you would know. If you saw a child bubbling with excited chatter talking with their mom about their day, you would know. If you saw children show up at 8am just to wait for us, because playing with us is so much preferable to being at home, you would know. If you saw me pay my college tuition partly with money earned from here, you would know. I know!”

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www.AnchorageParkFoundation.org