



### Groundwork Profiles

## Adrian Avila

*GWUSA worked with Judy Knuth Folts and Bob Fuhrmann at Yellowstone National Park (YNP) to create an opportunity for Groundwork youth to work at the Park. In addition to the extensive amount of work the youth do back in their hometowns, they get to spend a week working at YNP with Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) staff. This helps the youth connect their efforts at home to broader conservation efforts across America.*

Adrian Avila, 21, has been working with Groundwork Doña Ana County, New Mexico, for four years. He started when Groundwork came to his school looking for a part time student to assist with various projects. Adrian's guidance counselor knew of his passion for his community and encouraged him to apply.

Adrian was excited about the prospect of working on a renewal project for Vado, his hometown. Before the project began, Adrian felt that "nothing happens there...no community gatherings" and he wanted to "get something done in my community." Adrian said his initial motivation was not wanting the stigma of being from a community that was "uninteresting" and he wanted to clean the town and turn it into an attraction. Groundwork's first project was to revitalize an empty lot, beautify the property, and create a trail. The project was a success and according to Adrian, the trail and pocket park are both popular and he feels proud of the work he did.

Adrian reports that his most exciting Groundwork project was collaborating with an archeologist from a local university doing an archeological inventory. "Near Las Cruces is the 'Desert Peaks' and we went to survey them for artifacts to show that they deserved to be preserved as a National Monument." He went on to say that their work in the mountains showed that there was a lot of history there and a "silent culture that

**"COMING TO YELLOWSTONE, AND MY WORK AT GROUNDWORK, HAS TAUGHT ME TO GET OUTSIDE OF MY BOX AND BE COMFORTABLE DOING THINGS I NORMALLY WOULD HAVE FOUND UNCOMFORTABLE. THIS WORK HAS GIVEN ME A NEW MINDSET AND HAS ALLOWED ME TO TRAVEL AND MEET PEOPLE AND EXPAND MY NETWORK."**

deserved to be protected rather than industrialized." During the inventory he got to see a cliff covered by at least a dozen petroglyphs. "That's what made it real for me," he said, "it showed that lots of people once lived there, they had their families and social gatherings, and that they used these drawings to communicate with one another."

Adrian beamed when talking about the day that Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell, came to his hometown to designate the Desert Peaks as a new National Monument. Secretary Jewell spoke to the youth and personally thanked them for their effort in helping to preserve this unique place. She also thanked them for being an inspiration for others hoping to do similar work. "After her presentation, she came down and shook my hand." Adrian struggled to find words to describe the experience. "It was more than just a handshake...it was an exchange of gratitude between us," he added.

Since starting with Groundwork, Adrian feels a broader connection with the environment outside his hometown. "I look at the beauty

of the landscape and I can no longer take it for granted. I have more pride about my work and hold my chin up higher knowing our planet is being taken care of because of people like me." Adrian went on to say that his actions have even influenced his own family. "I knew my family cared about the land, but because of me, I think they go a little further now. We even recycle more at home." He added, "My dad always wants to hear about my next project. In his dad sort of a way, I know what he is really saying is how proud he is that I am making a difference."

When not working with Groundwork, Adrian goes to New Mexico State University at Las Cruces where he is double majoring in computer science and mathematics with a minor in philosophy. He proudly reports that he was Vice President of the Honor Society in the Honors College and hopes to graduate having only completed honors classes.

When asked how others could learn from his experience Adrian offers the following. "You got to show youth that there is a reward for their work. People do notice the work they are doing and the youth like the recognition, especially when you help them see the impact they are having." Apparently Adrian is a living example of that good advice.

**DEDICATED TO CHANGING PLACES AND CHANGING LIVES, GROUNDWORK USA, DEVELOPED WITH NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SUPPORT, IS A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION WITH LOCAL ROOTS, WORKING TO REVITALIZE NEIGHBORHOODS AND TRANSFORM COMMUNITY LIABILITIES INTO ASSETS.**

