



GWUSA worked with Judy Knuth Folts and Bob Fuhrmann at Yellowstone National Park to create an opportunity for 53 Groundwork youth to work at the Park for two weeks. 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.

Groundwork Profiles

Jairo Hernandez

Jairo Hernandez, 16, was first introduced to environmentalism through his biology teacher, Rebecca Veilleux. Jairo took the urban ecology class simply because he needed another credit, and the class seemed interesting. Jairo soon discovered that Ms. Veilleux had a lot of experience working on urban ecology projects as she was also a Green Team Youth Leader for Groundwork Lawrence. The class gradually piqued his interest and he thoroughly enjoyed the field studies, especially to Nantucket Island. His teacher appreciated Jairo's enthusiasm and encouraged him to apply to work with the Groundwork Green Team as she knew he would like the type of work the Trust was doing.

Jairo's interests were more than academic. "Lawrence doesn't have the best reputation," he said, "and Groundwork Lawrence was making a deep impact in my community. I wanted to get involved and be a part of that." Jairo then talked about how much Groundwork shaped his thinking and how Groundwork had become a "stepping stone" to his eventual goal of pursuing an environmental career. "The coolest thing about working for Groundwork was getting to educate other youth about environmental issues. It felt good providing organic food for our farmers' market and helping to bring fresh food to Lawrence," says Jairo.

The other project Jairo enjoys is the annual

"YELLOWSTONE IS AMAZING", JAIRO EXCLAIMED, "THE MOST UNIQUE PLACE IN THE WORLD. SUCH AMAZING WILDLIFE, THE GEYSERS...IT WAS SO SMART OF THE PEOPLE BACK THEN TO THINK TO PRESERVE ALL THIS. IF I EVER HAVE CHILDREN, I WILL DEFINITELY BRING THEM TO VISIT YELLOWSTONE."

Spicket River cleanup. Groundwork Lawrence organizes the annual event as part of its effort to create a Spicket River Greenway and brings out scores of volunteers to help restore the troubled river. "I've always been fascinated by this river as it runs through my hometown and being a part of that clean up made me feel good."

Jairo was asked how more youth could be attracted to environmental work. "Locating environmental organizations like Groundwork in urban areas was a great idea. These organizations can give opportunities to youth who might not otherwise have the chance to see nature as I have. We need to expose more youth to natural wonders. For example," he added, "seeing Yellowstone makes me want to preserve it for a very long time...for centuries. Exposing other youth to nature will also instill in them a sense of wonder and care." Jairo paused to look at Old

Faithful geyser smoldering in the background. "It did for me at least."

"I can tell you that the youth with me on this trip feel the same way I do. They're also glad that people a long time ago decided to preserve all of this. Our environment today is being chipped away by over industrialization, and only we humans can protect it, only we can come up with the creative solutions to coexist with nature." Jairo paused to look at the throng of tourists walking away from Old Faithful. "We all need to take a greater interest in environmentalism. Let's put our heads together and make a place where humans and the natural world can co-exist."

What does Jairo hope to do in the future? "I want to work as an urban environmentalist, or an urban engineer. Who knows, maybe I'll end up working for the National Park Service. That seems pretty cool."

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.

