



Groundwork Profiles

Cindy Leija

GWUSA worked with Superintendent Dave Vela and Megan Kohli at Grand Teton National Park 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 Grand Tetons with NPS' historic preservationists and plant specialists on a variety of projects. This helps the youth connect their environmental restoration work at home to broader conservation efforts across America.

Instead of spending her last weeks of summer indoors, Cindy Leija has been working with Groundwork Trusts across the country to blaze trails, build bridges, and hike mountains at Grand Teton National Park. All of this is possible because of Cindy's devotion to environmental stewardship—a commitment she picked up in her five years at Groundwork Dallas.

While the rest of her classmates in Dallas started school this week, Cindy and Groundwork Green Team members from across the country have been working in the backcountry of Wyoming at Grand Teton National Park learning about themselves, their environment, and how to keep wildlife pristine and accessible.

Cindy started her work with Groundwork Dallas and learned about sacrifice and commitment when she was just thirteen. She is most proud of helping build a trail along the Trinity River in Dallas. She and her team-mates would come to the site by the river straight after school and work on the trail until dusk, even putting in time on Saturdays.

Her commitment to Groundwork extends into her academic interests as well. When asked what she enjoys most about school, she put Green Team at the top of the list, followed by science, math and chemistry.

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Even though she is missing school, Cindy is excited to go back as a junior and apply all she has learned at Grand Tetons, and to continue to get outside as a part of her studies and her Groundwork education. "We saw some beautiful places and worked on all these projects and it gave me ideas for the Trinity River," she said. For instance, she recently learned how to build a bridge. "I was so fascinated. I feel like I can bring that back to Groundwork Dallas."

At Grand Tetons, Cindy hiked up a mountain for the first time ever. "It was ten miles and very hard," she said, but she pushed herself to complete the climb even though she was not prepared and did not bring enough water. But completing the climb gave her a great sense of accomplishment, and she was thrilled to be able to experience the bears, elk, fox and coyotes she saw at the mountain top.

Cindy also learned a lot about her strengths and weaknesses. "I am really creative, good at building trails and communicating, but I am bad at

hammering!" she smiles. The team was supposed to build the bridge one way, but after talking it over and thinking outside the box, they decided to incorporate one of Cindy's ideas.

Another big lesson that she learned working at Grand Tetons was patience. "I would get stressed out working in the hot sunshine. But patience is a benefit to me and my team, and it's worth it."

Coming away with so many life lessons as well as completed projects at only sixteen years is another tremendous accomplishment that Cindy attributes to Groundwork Dallas.

"If I didn't know about Groundwork, I wouldn't have helped build trails in Dallas. I wouldn't care as much about the Trinity River," Cindy explains. "Groundwork Dallas helped me care about the environment. If anyone has any interest in getting close to nature, go to your school and start a program. Even if you feel like you aren't making an impact, you are. If anyone wants to change places or change lives, Groundwork is where you want to be."

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.

