

**Testimony of George Russell,
Chair of Board of Trustees
Vermont Youth Conservations Corps (VYCC)
to Committee on Commerce and Economic Development**

As a 7th generation Vermonter and as the Chair of Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, I appreciate the opportunity to present the opportunities for future generations of my family, and other Vermonters, to find meaningful jobs here. VYCC teaches young Vermonters to learn to work while they are being paid to work. The meaningful work they do building trails and growing food helps Corps members to find meaningful work, hopefully in Vermont.

Personally, I learned the value of work and fulfillment while working for my father on his farm in Shoreham and our family farm New Haven. Since graduating from Otter Valley and then college, I have worked in the farm and construction machinery industry all over North America, and for eight years in Europe. I now work as a management consultant to equipment dealers where I see first hand the challenges of employers who seek talent with the attitude and values that are compatible with their companies and with their customers. Because of the challenges of finding qualified people in rural areas, I coach my clients “To hire for attitude and train for skill.”

I also coach them to seek potential employees who are looking for their second job. I do that because Millennials and now Gen Z are highly skilled at collaboration and technology. However, they are not so good at structuring their work and often learn that on their first job.

One of the values of VYCC is that youth and employers get a two-fer. Corps members learn how to work, how to be a good team members, the importance of getting to work on time, of supporting the mission of the organization while they are getting paid for doing meaningful work. Employers find VYCC alum who have both a great attitude and know how to structure their work.

My involvement with VYCC began because of my connections in the farm equipment industry. In 2012, VYCC’s nationally award winning Health Care Shares program needed a proper tractor to help supply the increasing amount food being prescribed by medical professionals. That program continues to expand and a couple years ago, our family gave VYCC one of my father’s old tractors as well. It’s over 60 years old but it still works well.

VYCC is best known as the premier trail builder in Vermont and the Northeast. And the Farm program also provides meaningful outside work. Let me give an example. Last year, our Board visited a farm crew at a farm in Shrewsbury, southeast of Rutland. Three of the Corps members were Otters, like me, and when asked about their experiences, a couple of them replied that not only did they like the farming activity, they also like delivering food directly to those with needs under the Health Care Shares program. They made the connection between the production of food and the people with needs.

Two final points for your information.

1 - Investing to Increase Capacity

VYCC is investing heavily in increasing our capacity especially to be able to serve young Vermonters throughout the state. We value the \$100,000 per year that we receive from the State and we seek other partners who will pay for work to be done by our Corps. In the attachment, you'll see a long list of our partners as well as our 2109 recruitment efforts as we broaden our program in numbers and breadth.

The use of State and other funding helped us create a new position Recruitment and Member Services Manager. This position is focused on recruiting those who deserve it most. As well it helps alumni access VYCC services after their time on a crew. This helps includes tapping into the VYCC alumni network, preparing resumes and interviews, and fostering connections to local employers.

We have all benefited from strong networks. Many of our Corps Members lack these networks, so VYCC plays a critical role here. The more VYCC graduates, the more motivated employers for Vermont employers. We help the graduates find their second job.

2 - Active Board from throughout the State

Our Board is active, engaged and is expanding to provide perspectives from all over our state. Our newest Board member is Julius Rosenwald from Pownal, south next to the Massachusetts border. Attached is a list of the other Board members from all over the state. You'll note that an Ex

Officio Trustee is Mike Snyder, Commission of Forest, Parks and Recreation.

On behalf of the VYCC, it's Board and Staff, we thank you for your support and seek to know how we might be able to support your mission and interests. As an example, you may be considering incentives for youth for their first job - perhaps in the form of certification and training. VYCC and other workforce development programs would be able to implement that. That's what we do - and we do it well.

Thank you.

2018 VYCC Project Partners

AmeriCorps	Lexington School and Center for the Deaf	U.S. Forest Service
Appalachian Trail Conservancy	Marsh Billings Rockefeller National Historical Park	UVM Medical Center
Army Corps of Engineers	Mount Mansfield Union High School	Vermont Agency of Transportation
Barre Granite Museum	National Park Service	Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Bennington County Conservation District	NOFA-VT	Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation
Catamount Trail Association	North Country Hospital	Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife
Central Vermont Medical Center	Northwoods Stewardship Center	Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation
Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition	ReSOURCE	Vermont Department of Labor
City of Burlington	Salvation Farms	Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
City of South Burlington	SerVermont	Vermont Farmers Food Center
Coastal Land Trust	Smokey House	Vermont Farm to Plate Network
Conservation Trust for North Carolina	Southwestern Vermont Medical Center	Vermont Foodbank
Friends of Bolton Valley Nordic and Backcountry	The Corps Network	Vermont Gleaning Collective
Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests	The Nature Conservancy, Vermont Chapter Town of Barre	Vermont Land Trust
Green Mountain Club	Town of Bethel	Vermont Tech
Green Mountain Farm Direct	Town of Dorset	White River Partnership
Green Mountain Power	Town of Grand Isle	Winooski High School
Hunger Free Vermont	Town of Jay	Winooski Valley Park District
Jericho Settlers Farm	Town of Moretown	Yestermorrow
Lake Iroquois Recreation District	St. Albans	
	Town of Williston	
	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	



2019 Board of Directors

George Russell, 2016 - Chair

Founder, Machinery Advisors Consortium
Burlington, Vermont

Anne Adler, 2017 - Vice Chair

Attorney; Former Board Chair Keewaydin Foundation
Stowe, Vermont

Jim Feinson, 2013 - Treasurer

President, Gardener's Supply
Richmond, Vermont

Benjamin Eastman, 2017 - Secretary

Former Assistant Professor of Anthropology, UVM
Huntington, Vermont

Linda McGinnis, 2011 - Past Chair

Program Director, Energy Action Network
South Burlington, Vermont

Joe Fusco, 2015

Vice President, Casella Waste Systems
Rutland, Vermont

Scott Weaver, 2015

Former Senior Vice President for Government Relations, Student Conservation Association
Springfield, Vermont

Frances Foster, 2018

Former President / Current Trustee, Charlotte Land Trust
Charlotte, Vermont

Kim Hayden, 2018

Director, Energy + Environment at Paul, Frank + Collins
Burlington, Vermont

Julius Rosenwald, 2019

Pownal, Vermont

Michael Snyder, 2016 - *Ex Officio*

Commissioner of Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation
Waterbury, Vermont



2019 Recruitment Overview (to date 3/13/19)

Young people change the world and we help them do it by employing over 250 young people (ages 15-26) each year. Working on crews of 6-8 people, youth and young adults tackle pressing statewide issues by addressing water quality, building and restoring public trails and infrastructure, and growing organic food for Vermonters.

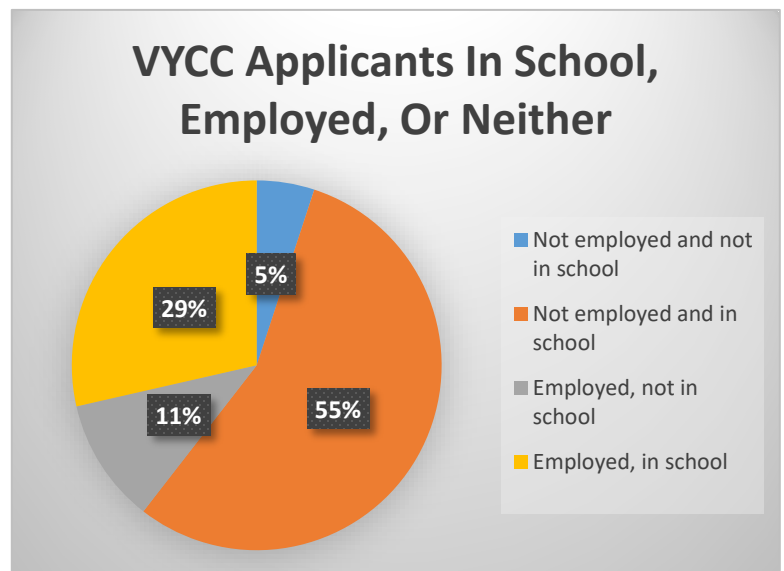
Not only do we put young Vermonters to work, we attract young talent from out of state too! With almost 35 years under our belts, we are proud to inspire and prepare the next generation of leaders while keeping our mountains green and Vermonters fed.

To date, we have already received 203 applications for 282 available positions for our 2019 season. These applicants are:

- Primarily Vermonters (51%), representing all 14 counties, 17% from New England, and 32% from further afield;
- Socially diverse in their identities (21% people of color, 27% LGBTQ, 38% women, 54% men, and 8% transgender or non-binary)
- A mix of youth (15-18 years old: 53%) and young adult (18-26 years old: 47%)

Our #1 recruiting tool is people like you!

70% of VYCC Corps Members are referred to us by people they know, who believe they can and will do great things. Be that spark for a young person in your life and encourage them to apply at VYCC.org/Join.



More information at VYCC.org. Contact Llu Mulvaney-Stanak, llu@vycc.org with questions.



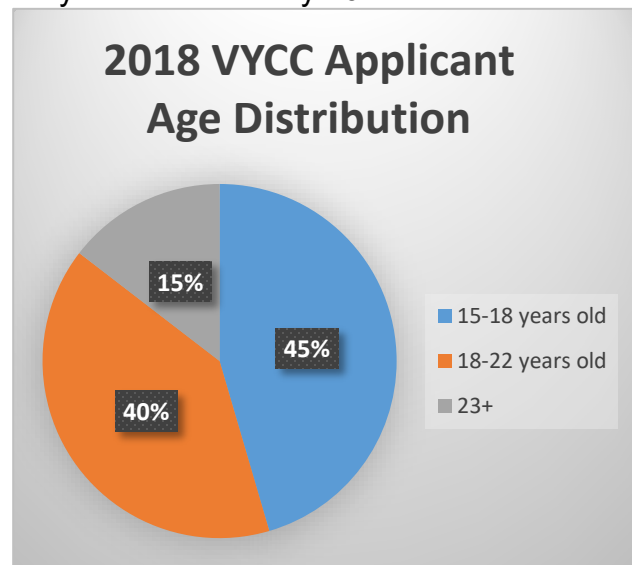
Who Were Our 2018 Corps Members?



In 2018, VYCC fielded 26 crews across our Conservation and Food & Farm programs, working primarily in Vermont, but also in upstate New York, New Hampshire, and with a special partnership in North Carolina.

In 2018, we had 731 total applicants and hired 280. We were only able to hire 38% of the eager young people who wanted the VYCC experience due to our current capacity. We are working toward doubling the number of youth we serve by 2022.

- 74% of the young people (194 total) we hired were Vermonters. The remaining 69 Corps Members were recruited from out of state.
- 1% of our applicants were non-binary or transgender, 44% were women, and 55% men.
- Overall our applicants were 51% from Vermont (from all 14 counties), 11% from New England, and 38% from beyond. 45% were 15-18 years old and 55% were 18-26 years old. Sixty-seven percent were new to VYCC while 33% were returners.



More information at VYCC.org. Contact Llu Mulvaney-Stanak, llu@vycc.org with questions.



VERMONT YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS

VYCC fields two dynamic programs: Conservation and Food & Farm. Together, they have profound and enduring impact on the lives of young people across Vermont. **In 2018, we hired 286 young people: 239 Crew Members and 47 Crew Leaders.** The contributions of all of these VYCC Corps Members benefit all of Vermont in communities, on our working landscape, and in the wild spaces we all cherish. Here is a quick snapshot from last year.

In 2018, VYCC's **Conservation Program employed 233 youth and young adults** on high-priority projects that increase recreation access, reduce pollution in Vermont's waterways, enhance backcountry infrastructure, and improve wildlife habitat. Last year **20 Conservation crews:**

- Built/improved 41 miles of trail
- Built 38 staircases (that's 508 stairs!)
- Constructed 179 puncheon
- Built/maintained 776 drainage structures
- Planted 4,294 trees and plants
- Removed 47 acres of invasive species

In 2018, **53 Corps Members across 6 Farm crews grew organic vegetables for our Health Care Share.**

- 4,759 Health Care Share boxes of food distributed statewide
- 1,032 individuals enrolled in the Health Care Share program
- 74,045 lbs. of organic produce distributed
- 2,250 lbs. of chicken distributed



Together, in 2019 our programs are embracing a #OneCorpsAllCorps motto as we expand on 35 years of connecting young people to the land, community, and one another. We are working to align our education curriculum with Vermont high schools and colleges to provide pathways for young Vermonters to reach their education and career goals. A purposeful education curriculum will allow Crew Members to fully realize the impact that they and fellow VYCC Crew Members have on Vermont.

In 2019, the Food and Farm Program will:

- **Focus on food and nutrition education.** We will enhance education curriculum centered around food and nutrition that not only teaches essential life skills, but helps Crew Members develop habits around health and wellness.
- **Incorporate personal finance education.** Broadening personal finance curriculum such that Crew Members gain the skills to manage their paychecks; being on a VYCC crew is often a first job!
- **Create St. Johnsbury partnership.** Expand the reach of VYCC's Health Care Share into more of the Northeast Kingdom. The Health Care Share, made up of fresh vegetables and poultry, is provided to patients identified as food insecure or having a diet-related illness.
- **Reduce environmental impacts.** Create farm systems that reduce waste material (i.e. plastic) associated with organic farming practices.
- **Partner with The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).** Provide an additional source of fresh and healthy food staples for Health Care Share participants, including milk, bread, and cheese.



In 2019, the Conservation Program will:

- **Enhance the quantity and depth of Crew Leader training.** New workshops include topics on mental health, equity, and career development strategies.
- **Build on our Watershed projects.** Work with the Department of Environmental Conservation, Regional Planning Commissions, and Watershed Groups to increase our capacity to help Vermont reach its clean water goals.
- **Develop workforce and career readiness skills.** Partner with Vermont colleges and employers to provide Crew Members skills that align with career goals.
- **Connect specialty trade training with workforce needs.** Our partnership with the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) will be nearly 40% of our conservation work, with up to 64 weeks of work with various ANR departments and others. The work will be technically challenging carpentry projects that build skills and jobsite experience for future careers in the trades.
- **Attract and retain young people in Vermont.** VYCC's Programs instill a sense of ownership, responsibility, and connection with their communities. Native Vermonters take pride in where they grew up. At the same time, we import talent to the state, hiring leaders and members who contribute to the economy and settle in the Green Mountains.

