



# GROUNDWORK Hudson Valley

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For Immediate Release

## As Unemployment Soars Among Teens, Groundwork Expands Green Team Award-Winning Program Responds to Local Needs During Pandemic

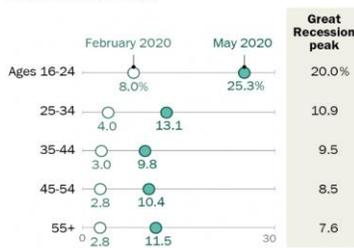


**July 9th, 2020** – As teen unemployment rates soar due to the pandemic, Groundwork Hudson Valley is stepping up with the help of its funders to increase how many young people get a paycheck this summer through its award-winning youth program, the Green Team. In a typical year, between 12-15 youth would be hired and the program would include a transformative service trip to Yellowstone National Park after

local projects are completed. This year 20 youth have been hired and the Yellowstone excursion is not happening. “Our youth are truly the life blood of the organization,” says Executive Director Brigitte Griswold, a long-time champion of positive youth development. “And while it is a transformative experience for them,” she says, “the paycheck is also a huge help at home and even more so this year with so many local jobs lost and families in our community turning to food banks and social services.”

### About one-in-four young adult workers are unemployed in COVID-19 downturn

Unemployment rate (%)



Note: The unemployment rate is the share of workers in the labor force actively looking for work. Estimates refer to workers ages 16 and older, nonseasonally adjusted. Estimates for the Great Recession refer to the highest unemployment rate recorded for each group around that downturn; the earliest peak was in January 2010 for workers ages 45-54 and the latest June 2010 for workers ages 16-24.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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With additional funding from The City of Yonkers, The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, The Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation, The St. Faiths Foundation, The Environmental Protection Agency, The Westchester County Youth Bureau, and The Fish and Wildlife Service, the organization has been able to both sustain existing youth jobs and open up 5-7 additional positions. The unemployment rate nationally due to the pandemic is highest among young people, the Pew Research Center

reported in May using U.S. Labor Department statistics. And among all demographics, Latino and Black workers are the most affected. Nearly all of the participants in the program are drawn from Southwest Yonkers, which has a high concentration of Black and Latino families.

While the organization feels fortunate, its ability to carry out community projects at this time is complicated due to Covid-19 restrictions. The staff and youth are adapting, however. The number of youth in the field at any one time is being limited and masks and social distancing are being practiced rigorously. The usual meetings in the

downtown Yonkers office to go over projects and engage in a dialogue about environmental issues have moved on-line. Typically, they conduct community outreach, use tools they have never seen before, camp at wildlife refuges hundreds of miles away from home, and address conservation issues for wolves, bears and bison at one of America's greatest National Parks. "This is one of the biggest downsides this year," says Victor Medina, the Youth Program Manager at Groundwork, "but personal and community resiliency has been an underlying theme of the program for many years and this is a teachable moment."

The work being carried out in a Covid-safe way this summer includes developing the Yonkers Greenway near the border with Van Cortlandt Park in New York City, promoting local biodiversity by removing acres of invasive plants, and restoring habitat along the Saw Mill River, one of the region's most significant tributaries to the Hudson River. In addition, the Green Team will help grow more produce on the Science Barge, a sustainable farm on the Hudson River, for distribution to local shelters during the pandemic and will help identify heat islands in the community as part of Groundwork's Climate Safe Neighborhoods program. Heat hazards affect many of the same high-risk populations as Covid-19, such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.



"The most important thing," says Ms. Griswold, "is that we continue to provide opportunities for these talented young people so they can get jobs that contribute to the local community." She adds, "Our ability to pull this off this year points to the strength of the program, the flexibility of our participants, and the donors who stepped up in a time of crisis. Yellowstone, unfortunately, will have to wait till next year for all of us."

**About Groundwork Hudson Valley:** Groundwork Hudson Valley creates sustainable environmental change in urban neighborhoods through community-based partnerships that promote equity, youth leadership and economic opportunity. For twenty years, Groundwork has made neighborhoods more livable and sustainable through an array of on-the-ground environmental projects that directly involve local residents. We restore rivers and build trails, parks, and playgrounds. We engage community members in all of our work – with a particular focus on educating and employing young people.