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# OEC NEWSLETTER

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Official publication of the Onondaga Earth Corps

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## Community Rallies for Youth Employment During COVID Summer

This summer OEC saw the community come together for our youth and young adults in a big way! Threatened with state and local government funding cuts, restrictions on in-person-gathering and the overall uncertainties caused by the pandemic, it was unclear what summer programs, if any, could be run.

In these challenging times, our partners stepped up to the plate to make sure OEC and other programs had what was needed to provide constructive opportunities for young people. The Allyn Foundation, the City of Syracuse Office of the Mayor, City Parks Department, CNY Works, GreenPrint, Circle K, City of Syracuse School District, and many youth advocates worked tirelessly to make sure funds were available for youth salaries, to process applications, to interview youth and to meet the paperwork requirements for employment.

OEC staff developed COVID policies and a plan to distribute youth across the city to work in small groups at multiple locations. This summer's program turned out to be one of our biggest yet with 51 members served. Please continue reading to hear our youths' and staffs' voices about what they got out of the program (see next page).

Thank you to our staff, as well as all the individuals, organizations and agencies that made this summer possible!



Greg Michel  
Executive Director

### *Past Events:*

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#### **McKinley Park Centennial Celebration**

Sept 9, 2020 at 11:30AM - 12:30PM



### *Upcoming Events:*

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#### **Trivia Night for Onondaga Earth Corps- Hosted by Syracuse Trivia Co.**

Oct 3, 2020 at 7PM - 8PM EST  
Online Event

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/116632636355>



#### **Earth Corps Encore**

Nov. 7, 2020 at 7PM - 8PM EST  
Online Event

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/115809351889>



# Summer 2020

**BY HALEY O'BRIEN**

Our crews were broken into groups at four main locations this summer: Burnet Park, Schiller Park, Kirk Park, and the Onondaga Creekwalk. Each crew focused on unique projects specific to their work area. Burnet Park focused on clearing trails and removing invasive species around the park. Schiller Park continued the European buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) removal project that OEC began last summer along the park's roundtop. Kirk Park's main focus was maintaining young trees in the park and around the adjacent section of the Creekwalk. Our Creekwalk crew removed large volumes of invasive and undesirable species in the section II phase inside the fence along the creek, clearing the way for Young Adult crews to plant in that area this fall.

As part of our ongoing effort to maintain social distancing at OEC, this was the first time our youth were not all starting and ending their day in the same place. To keep our crews connected, we facilitated several opportunities for them to come together as a group throughout the season. Each week, we all participated in #Fresh, our continuous orientation hosted by Nati Cabrera and Walter Walker of Mercy Works. This program engaged our youth in both virtual and in-person discussions about a wide range of topics, including mental and physical health, financial wellness, entrepreneurship, time management, and achieving personal and professional goals. This was a great opportunity for our youth to learn with and from each other about moving through early adulthood. At the end of the season, all of our youth spent a day at the Creekwalk and shared their summer projects with each other. They were also given the opportunity to take a bike ride down the Creekwalk, traveling all the way from Kirk Park to Onondaga Lake. On our last day together, we hosted a virtual banquet for friends, family, and partners to hear from crew members about their experiences with OEC.

This event was recorded and is available for viewing on our [Youtube page](#). We hope you check it out and head to our parks to see how we spent our summer!



Before and after photos of one of many trails maintained by the Burnet Park crew.



Buckthorn education presented by the Schiller Park crew.



Kirk Park crew members training in preparation for watering young trees.



Crew members enjoying a bike ride along the creekwalk.



# Creekwalk Kayaking Adventure

BY AMANDA CRUTY

For many OEC crewmembers, exploring the Creekwalk by way of kayak was a completely new experience for them. Here are some photos of their experience.



Amanda Cruty (crew leader) paddling the creek.



Carveion Wright (young adult crew) taking the word, "Zen," to heart along the Creek.



Cam'ron Thomas (youth crew) paddling the creek.



"Bon Voyage, OEC!"



# Summer Voices

As summer came to an end, participants of the program took the time to reflect on their experiences. The following quotes express some of those experiences and were shared during our summer virtual banquet. (Read more quotes on pages 6 and 7)

"I can accomplish whatever goals I try to reach and OEC taught me how to be successful in life."

**-BAPTISTA, DREQUAN**

Youth crewmember

"My main reason to come and work here was to get out of my comfort zone and let just say that this job certainly did kick me out of my comfort zone. I've learned valuable skills on being a good employee, on engineering my life to achieve what I want from it."

**-ALI, HUDA**

Youth crewmember

"I really enjoyed weeding this park which is close to home for me."

**-CHATAS, DAMON**

Young Adult crewmember

"I was part of the beautiful process of removing all of the invasive species alongside the creekwalk and I learned how to identify those species. I found my mission to restore the creekwalk."

**-ROCKET, LARELL**

Youth crewmember



Creekwalk crew pausing for a photo after clearing invasive species along the fence.

# Our Upcoming Fundraisers are Going Virtual!

There are two virtual event fundraisers for Onondaga Earth Corps this Fall.

**On October 3rd, at 7 PM, Syracuse Trivia will be hosting Trivia Night for Onondaga Earth Corps.** This is a fun game for the whole family to play while you support a great organization that is dedicated to empowering the youth in our community! This virtual Trivia Night is a general knowledge quiz on a wide variety of subjects for all abilities and takes about an hour to play. Teams compete against each other for points and pride. The game is broadcast live online and teams submit their answers through a dedicated website. To register your team visit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/116632636355>



**Join us November 7th, at 7 PM for Earth Corps Encore 2020.** A free event celebrating the youth and young adults of Onondaga Earth Corps and the work they have accomplished in 2020! Donations are encouraged. To register visit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/115809351889>



2019 Earth Corps Encore Event of the Advanced Young Adult crew with Senator Rachel May who delivered a proclamation honoring the Onondaga Earth Corps.

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# Youth Voices Facing Tough Topics

**BY JESSICA ALIGHIERI**

It goes without saying that 2020 has been a year that has brought many unexpected challenges to all of our doorsteps. Yet, it has also given us all a great opportunity to see the world through a different lens, to open ourselves up and reach out, and share to combat the forced physical distance we must maintain for our shared health. It has also forced many of us to critically look at the race relations and other human rights abuses in our own country and communities.

For all of us here at OEC we have decided to use this year as an opportunity to engage and check-in with each other. How are we handling things? What are our feelings about COVID-19? What are our feelings on Black Lives Matter? These opportunities to listen to each other's feelings are opportunities to step outside our immediate and respective communities, to help build trust and support for each other, and hopefully in the process help build a better world. Continue reading to learn more about a few of our crew members, their evolving feelings, and some of the motivational thoughts they use to help keep their spirits up.

Thank you and as always, stay safe and healthy. Here are comments from some of our check-ins with crew members. We hope to see you out and about soon!



Summer crewmembers discussing personal and professional development topics.

"I guess I feel just a little frustrated that it's (human rights abuses from police). Syracuse has a lot of problems with drug dealers and bullies, and poverty levels are higher here. So it (the city) is in a pretty dire situation right now, but that doesn't mean it can't be saved. I mean, nothings going to stop me from becoming an officer, but now I have to watch my emotions double time because I don't want to start something that I don't want to finish. I want to be the kind of cop that really isn't anything special, I just want to be a cop that wants to help people and who gets to go home afterwards."

**-WRIGHT, CARVEION**

Young Adult crewmember

"The George Floyd protest is a current event that I have connected with because I have experienced corrupt cops a few times in my life. For example, I had an encounter with an officer who tried to tell me if I don't stop talking he would beat me up. That's just one of many encounters with the Police that was negative and it shouldn't have been because I didn't do anything wrong."

**-PURDUE, SUPREEM**

Young Adult crewmember

"For me, the way I feel 'bout what's been going on in the community and around the world is I feel the pain and I feel angry with some people. I feel like 2020 is the year of mistakes, animosity, and anger. I feel, since COVID-19 happened, people lost jobs, (such as myself) and more. Which made them angry. This forced people & cops to act out. We have cops killing black people, black people killing black people, everyone yelling "Black Lives Matter" but not knowing the meaning. I hate what 2020 brings to the world and our community. But I hope we can get back to the right path. This world is like a domino effect, the same way one mistake can knock you down, one good thing can lift someone up."

**-HOLMES-PORCH, JAH'KELLA**

Advanced Young Adult crewmember

## Summer Voices

(continued from page 4)



#FRESH mentor Walter Walker (Center) with the Burnet Park and Schiller Park Youth Crew,

"My name is Neela Goodwin, I'm 15 years old and I go to Henninger High School. It was my first summer with OEC. I learned what green infrastructure is. It solves climate change. I also learned how to do erosion control. What that does is prevents wind or water erosion in agriculture. I learned about financial aid and about where I want to be and what I want to be in the future. This experience taught me to care about the outside and what not to put into the air, to keep my environment clean and to motivate others especially my peers and co-workers.

Shout out to Mr. Maurice (OEC Crew Leader), he told me "work for what you want" and to "never give up." Those motivational words helped me to strive and helped me to keep pushing, to get the work done no matter the condition of the weather.

My overall experience working at Onondaga Earth Corps was fun for a first job. I would love to come back to learn more. This job taught me how to use power tools and I met new people. I can't leave our Mr. Walter (#Fresh mentor) and Mrs. Reagan (OEC Crew Leader) and Mr. Meqdad (OEC Program Coordinator)."

**-GOODWIN, NEELA**

Youth crewmember

# Americorps Journal

BY SAMANTHA LUCA

Prior to July, I can admit my impression of Onondaga Earth Corps was that it was made up of enthusiastic, local environmental stewards easily identified in the streets by their deep blue shirts. I had no idea that an Americorps service position existed through Onondaga Earth Corps, let alone that I would be halfway through my own service term by the start of September. While the age of COVID-19 has taken away many things from every person across the globe- loved ones, adventures, experiences, it has also opened a new set of opportunities for many, myself included. This summer, I was slated to be living in Newcomb, New York, the heart of the Adirondack Mountains, working as an Interpretive Naturalist with the Adirondack Interpretive Center. It was initially a big upset that I was forced to participate remotely from home for the entirety of my position. However, as I began to find more time to channel positivity and take care of myself physically, spiritually, and mentally, I realized how many great things I would not have had the space to participate in if circumstances were as expected. Stumbling upon the information session for positions opening up with Onondaga Earth Corps this summer and finding out more about the mission of the organization made me realize I fully wanted to be part of the change they were making. Working with the Summer Youth in Kirk Park to restore and maintain the public space not only felt good to do, but was creating lasting change in the lives of both residents and the future generation. We can all acknowledge there is overwhelming loss and sadness surrounding the global pandemic, yet still I pose the question- what opportunities did the COVID-19 outbreak give you?





## Summer Voices (continued from page 6)

"My favorite thing to do was pick up the trash and keep the community clear. I feel like we should all come together as a community and make sure these streets stay clean and our air and water is not polluted."

**-WALKER, HARMANI**

Youth crewmember

"I really like weeding because it teaches me a lot about patience and responsibility."

**MOO, EHTINA**

Young Adult crewmember

"The think I like about Earth Corps is that it gives me a chance to go outside and create some positive change in the environment in a time when we all need something positive."

**-VALDES, TERRANCE**

Young Adult crewmember

"I feel like OEC showed me direction where I can go and how to start and put everything together. It's a really good for teens."

**-MALAOU, ERNESTINE**

Youth crewmember

"I learned how to work in a group and communicate and how to finish a big project like we did."


**-GURGOL, BEATRICE**

Youth crewmember





Photos featuring youth crewmembers doing different summer activities and tasks.

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# NYS Urban Forestry Council Highlights Nafisa's Onondaga Earth Corps Chronicles.

**BY YVONNE CHU**

Nafisa Tabassum completed her term of service with Earth Corps as an Americorps member this summer and is now considered an OEC Alum. During her time with us, she has chronicled her experience in the OEC program through the New York State Urban Forestry Council (NYSUFC) Website which you can find here:

<https://nysufc.org/?s=Onondaga+Earth+Corps+Chronicles>

In the blog she touches on topics such as the green infrastructure crew, working with partners such as Jubilee Farm, adjusting to COVID-19 policies and concerns, her Americorps Leadership project, and her experience leading other OEC crewmembers.

Read her four part chronicles on the NYSUFC website and get to know more about what it is like to serve an Americorps term with OEC.



Nafissa Tabassum donning OEC uniform

## ***Donate:***

For more information on the donation options listed below, please visit:

[www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/donate](http://www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/donate)

### **Amazon Smile**

Use smile.amazon.com when making amazon purchases, and select Onondaga Earth Corps as your current charity.

### **Fund-A-Truck**

Donate towards our fleet vehicles. Fund-A-Truck goal: \$50,000

### **Bottle Bonanza!**

Redeem your returnable bottles and cans to one of our new redemption center partners: F-M Returnables, Express Bottle Return, Bottle and Can Retrieval, Papa Cans and Bottle Return. Ask them to deposit the \$ to the Onondaga Earth Corps Account.

## ***Contact Us***



[www.onondagaeearthcorps.org](http://www.onondagaeearthcorps.org)

(315) 565- 3797

onondagaeearthcorps@gmail.com

SUNY EOC Building  
100 New St. Room 239  
Syracuse, NY 13202

## **ABOUT THE ONONDAGA EARTH CORPS**

When the Eli MacDonald Green Team was restructured in 2005 as the Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) for local communities, OEC was formed to:

- Help youth understand the relationship between people and the urban ecosystem
- Engage youth in hands-on community and environmental service learning projects
- Train youth for future jobs and careers in environmental fields
- Empower youth by developing their leadership abilities that help them analyze situations, solve problems and implement strategies to improve their communities