



## SCA Final Report to the City of Pittsburgh Leadership in the Environment Advancement Program (LEAP) September 2011 – June 2012

### Program Highlights

- 93% of the members successfully completed the program;
- Our 2 senior crew members were both selected for Heinz Endowment Summer Youth Philanthropic Internships;
- 8 members earned positions on a national SCA crew in Allegheny National Forest;
- 6 members earned summer internship positions with WorkReady;
- 3600 feet of trail was built, maintained, cleared and/or brushed;
- Removed 150 bags of invasive plants and 200 bags of trash;
- Constructed a rain garden;
- Collected native seeds to be planted in Pittsburgh parks;
- Planted and/or assisted Tree Pittsburgh to plant over 250 trees;
- 23 members secured certifications in CPR & First Aid;
- A “Healthy MOVEment” Community Action Project was planned and organized by 2<sup>nd</sup> year members;
- Crew members provided support for the SCA Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Day;
- 2000 hours of Environmental education were completed;
- 1000 hours of conservation work hours completed;
- 6100 total work hours completed by members;
- \$44,000 hours of wages paid to crew members;
- All members completed job interviews, applications, resumes and career pathway plans;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year members were selected to present at the Philadelphia Green Jobs Good Jobs regional conference;

SCA is grateful to the City of Pittsburgh for its support of SCA’s LEAP initiative for disadvantaged youths in Pittsburgh. As shown in this report, the LEAP program has provided significant and measurable benefits for its participants. The responsiveness of participants to the experiences and activities offered by the program, the opportunities for leadership roles – especially for second-year members, and the mentoring and support from SCA staff, all contributed to the LEAP program’s success.

### Program Overview

The program admitted 30 participants in September 2011; eight were alumni of the 2010 - 2011 LEAP program and 22 were new to SCA. All participants came from low-income, TANF-eligible families (federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families). Aside from joint activities one or two days per week, LEAP was run at two levels – one for new members (LEAP 1) and one for alumni members (LEAP 2). Six trained SCA leaders supervised the program, along with SCA Pittsburgh program staff. The high ratio of participants to staff meant that each member received an intensive level of care and support. One LEAP 2 member resigned in November and one was dismissed in April, leaving six alumni members

along with 22 LEAP 1 members. Demonstrating its success, the program retained 93% of the participants who began the program.

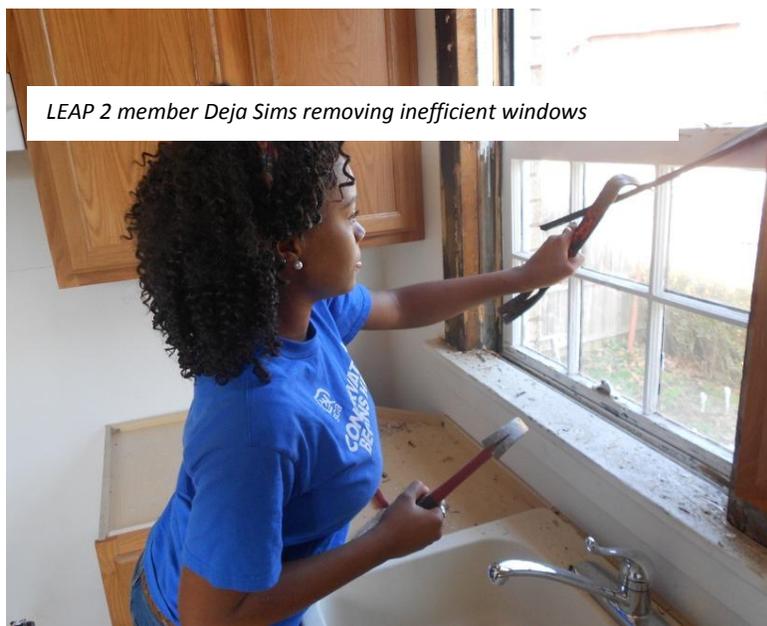
**LEAP 1** consisted of two crews, with curriculum and activities focused on the lessons in SCA's *Green Job Readiness Curriculum*, stressing basic conservation concepts, issues, and practices. Topics covered included renewable energy, renewable and non-renewable resources, environmental justice and its effects on communities, air quality, waste management, and personal behaviors which affect the environment. The program's strong emphasis on job readiness included lessons and activities which educated members about job applications, etiquette, and workplace communication; as well as teamwork, leadership, and information about employment in the field of green jobs. Hands-on activities connected conservation science with the physical work of conservation. One example was research into biodiversity, followed by fieldwork to learn the differences between native and non-native plants, and concluding with the removal of non-native invasive plants in selected areas. Another activity resulted in building a model wind turbine. Members also engaged in urban planning for a model city and the challenges of creating a sustainable transportation infrastructure.

**LEAP 2** program activities gave members leadership roles in public outreach and in planning and carrying out a Community Action Project (CAP) designed to educate the community in Pittsburgh's North Side about the benefits of outdoor exercise and walking as an alternative to other forms of transportation. This project – called "A Healthy MOVEMENT" – took many weeks of preparation, beginning with the selection of the best proposal among many submitted by members.

They discussed their ideas for the event with members of Leadership Pittsburgh Inc, a mentoring process which taught them about the importance of planning and networking. Leadership Pittsburgh challenges the young people it works with to learn more about themselves; to network professionally and personally, and to acquire leadership skills; to develop a systemic view of their communities; to understand the issues affecting the future of southwestern Pennsylvania; and to make civic engagement part of their lives.

The LEAP 2 team then chose a neighborhood for the CAP, created a budget and solicited financial support from local businesses, publicized the event ahead of time, and held a very successful event on the big day.

Members attended two conferences, one in Pittsburgh, and one in Philadelphia – where they gave a panel presentation on engaging youth in the opportunities available in the green jobs economic sector. They also practiced conflict resolution, gardened, built and maintained trails in local parks, planted trees, and gave the city 200 hours of community service at a Martin Luther King Junior Day celebration in Schenley Park.



## Outcomes

- Engage 33 in-school youth from TANF-eligible households in meaningful educational and workforce development training for up to 180 hours during the program.

- Enhance the delivery of SCA’s unique *Green Jobs Readiness Curriculum* to provide teens from underserved neighborhoods and populations with the opportunity to develop skills needed for success in life and for employment in the green jobs sector.
- Complete community conservation service projects for partnering municipal agencies and local non-profit organizations.
- Encourage environmental citizenship by delivering an experiential learning program that connects participants to their natural world. In addition to the learning that will happen during the students’ service, program goals include projects and field trips dedicated to environmental education.

The 2011 – 2012 LEAP program achieved goals set in all areas, aside from fielding a total of three fewer members than proposed. The members each received an average of over 200 hours of environmental education and workforce training during the program.

Much of the program was spent outdoors, where members assisted local nonprofit organizations in the work of beautifying the landscapes in Pittsburgh parks and neighborhoods. In the process they learned the benefits of healthy outdoor exercise and many lessons in teamwork while completing large landscaping projects. They also learned valuable lessons about how large improvements to neighborhoods can result from the work of small groups of volunteers. The LEAP members conservation fieldwork accomplishments included:

- 3,600 feet of park trails built, maintained, or cleared of brush
- Over 200 large trash bags full of trash and debris removed during clean-ups of vacant lots
- Thousands of invasive plants removed
- Construction of a rain garden
- Partnership with Tree Pittsburgh to help plant over 250 trees
- 410 hours of work contributed to the Frick Environmental Center, the Pittsburgh Botanical Garden, Tree Pittsburgh, and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy
- 23 members received First Aid/CPR certification;
- All members had opportunities to enjoy outdoor recreation activities, including skiing, hiking, camping, and ice skating

An evaluation of the LEAP members’ work by the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy’s Education program Coordinator gives a clear picture of their value in improving the parks and green spaces, as well as their positive impact on other park volunteers:

*The SCA LEAP Crews have been a great partner and a consistent presence at Parks Conservancy volunteer and Urban EcoSteward Training events over the past year, lending their hands and experience on projects. The students are knowledgeable, have a genuine interest for environmental conservation, a good work ethic (with guidance from their crew leaders), and a willingness to get dirty. They're young adults, but because of the training, leadership and supervision of the crew leaders, I'm always confident that SCA crews will perform tasks completely and to a high standard. The background training they receive from the SCA also allows them to ask great questions, which gives our other volunteers a better*

*understanding of the issues behind our ecological restoration work. There are a lot of barriers to getting urban youth out into nature, especially to do heavy outdoor manual labor, but it's truly a unique opportunity for both the SCA participants and other Parks Conservancy volunteers to work alongside someone from a different neighborhood, age, race or culture to complete a project and make a real positive impact on our city.*

Mr. Taiji Nelson, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, Education Program Coordinator

The members also gained hands-on retail experience at Construction Junction and the ReStore (operated by Habitat for Humanity), two locations which sell recycled building materials. The LEAP members served customers at these green businesses, and they built, painted, and stocked shelving. The program also gave them a chance to work directly with green building materials when they helped renovate a house on the North Side which was undergoing an insulation retrofit during the course of remodeling.

As intended, the SCA LEAP program

*Annunaki Withrow Davis using spray foam to insulate around a window*



provided members with intensive job training, starting with personal behaviors which can influence attitudes and success. Participants received training in financial literacy from the staff at the PNC Bank located at Fifth Avenue and Wood Street. As part of their preparations for job seeking and employment, members talked about and researched green careers they were interested in, and learned about the necessary educational requirements and credentials. They were led through the critical steps in applying for a job: each member wrote a personal résumé and a cover letter, developed a 20-second “elevator pitch” describing their qualities and accomplishments, and experienced a mock job interview with a professional from one of their fields of interest. They also learned about communication, professionalism, and etiquette in the workplace.

*The conduct of your crew leaders and members was excellent during our experience with them at the ReStore this year. They were always respectful and proved themselves to be very helpful in our mission to provide a location for families to find the household items and materials they need to make their homes decent, safe places to live. The crews from SCA helped us to clean new donations as they came into the ReStore, ensure that they were priced clearly and accurately, and organize them into displays on the store floor. The crews also helped us to keep the store clean for the customers, and helped us to recycle material that was broken or unusable so that we were not throwing anything away that could somehow be used again.*

Mr. Derek Morris, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Pittsburgh, Volunteer Coordinator

## Conferences

Several LEAP members attended the *Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) Conference* in Pittsburgh, October 9 – 12. They heard presentations by Bill McKibben and other speakers, attended workshop presentations by college students, practiced their note-taking skills by recording what they heard that seemed most important, and practiced introducing and presenting themselves to strangers at a networking workshop.

By the end of the program, LEAP 2 crew members were ready to present their own expertise to the public. Five of them attended the *Good Jobs, Green Jobs regional conference* in Philadelphia on April 3, along with their program supervisor. The members prepared for and served on a panel discussion on the topic of how best to involve youth in green jobs education. The goals they established for themselves prior to their participation were that members of the public attending their panel would learn and take away the following information:

- General trends in youth participation in the green jobs economy on a local and global level.
- Implications of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro for youth involvement in green jobs.
- Knowledge of local and global strategies to increase youth participation in the green job economy and ways of including youth in green jobs policy and education.
- LEAP as an example of diverse youth engagement in green jobs education initiatives.
- Presentations by LEAP crew members about what brought them to the program and what it has taught them.
- Answers by crew members to questions from the audience.

Their performance during their presentation and the Q & A period showed how much confidence they had gained during the program.

## Weekend Trips

On the weekend of March 31 — April 1, fifteen crew members spent a weekend at the Family Retreat Center in Cranberry, PA. The event was an **Advanced Skills Training**, combined with a total of 95 member-hours of conservation service removing non-native invasive plant species and clearing brush at the Center. Member training activities focused on wild plants and animals, and included the following:

- A plant identification walk – native and invasive species, edible and poisonous plants
- A night hike – learning about the role of darkness, stars, and nocturnal animals in Nature
- Wilderness survival techniques – warmth, water, food, shelter, and seeking help
- A hike to search for animal tracks and traces
- Leave No Trace training (for members who hadn't yet received it)

On May 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 11 crew members went hiking and boulder-climbing at McConnell's Mill State Park, before spending the night at the Family Retreat Center. The next day they continued their invasive plant eradication and trail work by removing 10 large bags of garlic mustard and over 30 Japanese Barberry bushes, before clearing approximately 500 feet of trail of fallen debris and overgrowth.

## Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Event

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration and activities are key events for members of the LEAP program. The event provides them with a chance to put into practice their trainings in community event planning, conservation, education, leadership, and civic participation. This year's event was held at the Schenley Park Ice Rink on Monday, January 16, from 1 – 4 pm. Nearly 800 adults and children came out to have fun and to honor Dr. King and his legacy. A partnership with Venture Outdoors allowed SCA to effectively reach out to the city's communities and to offer a wide range of activities to the public at no cost. With the help of SCA staff and Crew Leaders, and the staff of Venture Outdoors, much of the extensive planning, publicity, and organizing for the event was done by SCA members.



Invitations were sent to more than 75 organizations and community groups; announcements were posted in several neighborhoods; and the event was advertised on Pittsburgh radio station WAMO. The LEAP members registered visitors and helped to run activities and events smoothly. The activities offered to adults, families, and children included ice skating, art activities with MLK Day themes, making ‘smores, refreshments, and a dance contest with a DJ.

## “A Healthy MOVEment”

The capstone of the program year for the LEAP 2 crew was their **Community Action Project (CAP)**, which they designed to deepen the connections between communities and the environment in Pittsburgh, and to raise awareness of the benefits of exercise in daily life. Planning and research for the project began in the fall. After seeking and receiving advice from a number of outside groups (including Leadership Pittsburgh and GASP – Group Against Smog and Pollution), the members narrowed their focus to the North Side community, the effects of air quality on health, and an event which would get people outdoors and moving on foot through the neighborhood.

After considering and debating several possibilities, the crew members settled on a public scavenger hunt through the North Side neighborhood, in which participants would follow clues from point to point, and at each stop they would learn facts about health, exercise, air quality, and alternative transportation. During the weeks leading up to the event, the crew members wrote formal letters to raise money from neighborhood businesses, created posters and arranged for publicity, planned logistics, applied for a permit from the city.



The “Healthy MOVEMENT” event took place on May 5 and was run by the LEAP 2 crew, with assistance from members of LEAP 1. Attendance was good and the event was very well received by participants, who followed a map to points of interest in the neighborhood. At each point they learned new facts about the importance of environmental and personal health, and how they are maintained. There was a raffle drawing with prizes related to exercise, and participants were informed how many pounds of carbon they had saved by walking the route rather than by driving.

Designing, planning and carrying out all phases of the event gave members important experiences and lessons related to teamwork, public outreach, environmental education, civic engagement, and a sense of personal accomplishment.

### Job Readiness Activities

All LEAP participants completed the following Job readiness activities and lessons.

- Job application
- Professional resume
- Mock job interview
- Personal career pathway plan
- Personal Elevator Pitch
- Minimum of one College tour
- Green Careers Day

The chart below shows the amount of time devoted to each component of the curriculum.

TIME/hours	LESSON	SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES
4	Basic Job Etiquette	Good vs. Bad Recommendations; work behavior
2	Green Spaces and Related Careers	Benefits of Green Spaces, Where Would You Go To..., Design A Park, Related Careers
3	Careers Related to Ecosystems and Nature	Intro, Explore Careers, Share
4	Career Options and Interests	Intro, My Adaptations, Career Clusters and Interests

		Continuum, Interests Survey, Journal – Green Job, Letter to Self
1.5	Food Systems and Related Careers	Trophic Levels, Trace an Ingredient, Types of Food Systems (industrial, local, organic), Related Careers
2	Urban Planning and Related Careers	Giant Map Planning, Local – eg, URA, Allegheny Riverfront Plan, Good and Poor Design, Careers
3	Careers Skills and Experience Survey	Complete and present skills survey
3	Conflict Resolution	Center for Victims of Violent Crime workshop
6	Job Applications	Complete Job Applications
8	Resumes	What Do Employers Look For?
3	Watersheds and Related Careers	Water Cycle Simon Says, Model Watershed, Water Tests, Macro Search
3	Waste Management and Related Careers	Garbage Dissection (and Recycling Relay), Careers
4	Match Skills and Interests to Possible Careers	Skill & interest survey done
6	Understanding Paychecks, Deductions, and Banking options	
4	Productive Work Habits, What Employers Want	
5	Personal Elevator Pitch	Create & deliver personal elevator pitch
4	Introduction to Training and Career Pathways	
5	Practice Interviews	
3	Outdoor Recreation and Related Careers	
4	Sponsor Letters/ Application Essay/ Profile	

## LEAP Program Partners

SCA invests considerable effort in building sustainable webs of support for its urban programs, in Pittsburgh and in many other cities. Philanthropic and workforce development partnerships provide critical funding from foundations, the City of Pittsburgh, individuals, workforce training agencies, nonprofit organizations, and corporations. The diversity of funding sources has helped sustain SCA programming during challenging economic conditions, and SCA is very grateful for the financial support it receives from each of its funding partners.

To provide rich and diverse experiences for LEAP members, SCA program staff build relationships with a wide variety of partners. Some of the organizations listed below presented instructional workshops for participants; others were visited on field trips; still others helped participants better understand the natural and human environments around them. In each case, these partners provided challenging and informative elements of program content, and SCA greatly appreciates their assistance.

PNC Foundation  
Alcoa Foundation  
Allegheny County Department of Parks  
Animal Rescue League, Wildlife Rehabilitation Ctr.  
Bidwell Training Center  
Brighton Heights Citizens Federation  
Buhl Foundation  
Center for Victims of Violent Crimes  
Conservation Consultants Inc.  
Construction Junction  
East Liberty Development Inc.  
East Liberty Farmers Market  
East Liberty Rain Garden

Family Resources Inc., Family Retreat Center  
Fred Underwood/Underwood Solar  
Frick Environmental Center  
GASP (Group Against Smog and Pollution)  
Grable Foundation  
SCA Green Cities Fellows  
Habitat for Humanity  
Habitat ReStore  
Leadership Pittsburgh  
Manchester Citizens Corp & House Tour  
Mexican War Streets Society, Redd Up Pittsburgh  
Michelle Jones

Northside Leadership Conference  
Oakland Planning Development Corporation  
Pittsburgh Botanical Gardens  
Pittsburgh Foundation  
Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation  
Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy  
Pittsburgh Public Schools  
PNC Bank  
Project 53 Musician's Resource Center  
Redd Up Pittsburgh  
Richard King Mellon Foundation  
Susan Rahuba, As the Beat Goes On

Sustainable Pittsburgh  
Sylvania Natives  
The Climbing Wall  
Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board  
Tree Pittsburgh  
Tree Pittsburgh/East Liberty  
TRACO  
Urban Gardner  
Venture Outdoors  
Wampum North Country Trail Chapter  
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
YERT (Your Environmental Road Trip)

## **Conclusion**

SCA is very grateful to the City of Pittsburgh for its investment in SCA's LEAP program and its participants. As a result of the program, 29 young citizens of Pittsburgh have received environmental education, work skills training, and a chance to have a positive impact on their city. They are now aware of the importance of conserving biodiversity, of the employment opportunities available to them in the fields of green jobs and conservation, and of the importance of exercise and healthful communities to their personal and civic quality of life.