



# New Jersey Youth Corps is Helping Residents to Help Themselves



**R**ESIDENTS OF Camden and Newark, New Jersey, were recently given the opportunity to be trained in a new career and to use that career to revitalize their communities. These opportunities were made possible by a Brownfields Job Training Pilot awarded to the State of New Jersey, Department of Human Services' New Jersey Youth Corps program that, in conjunction with the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and community organizations in Camden and Newark, completed two job training cycles in the field of environmental technology. Of the 25 graduates so far, 12 have either secured professional jobs (with an hourly wage up to \$10.50) or are pursuing additional education; several others are working with the New Jersey Youth Corps' career placement center to obtain employment. The New Jersey Youth Corps Job Training Pilot has been so successful in Camden and Newark that EPA has awarded them a second Pilot grant to conduct training in two additional communities—Phillipsburg and Middlesex County.

To date, EPA has awarded 37 Job Training and Development Demonstration Pilots across the country. The purpose of these Pilots is to provide job training in the handling and removal of hazardous substances, including innovative and alternative technologies. The goal is to increase employment opportunities for residents of brownfields-impacted areas. The New Jersey Youth Corps (Camden and Newark) was selected as a Job Training Pilot in 1998 and received a \$200,000, two-year grant.

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## JUST THE FACTS:

- Graduated 25 disadvantaged residents of Camden and Newark.
- Helped 8 graduates pursue additional education and 4 to secure professional jobs with an hourly wage up to \$10.50.
- Provided 150 hours of technical training along with career counseling and job placement assistance.

*"The type of training...received from the NJIT is training for high-caliber positions."  
—A prospective employer*

**EPA's** Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative is designed to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. A brownfield is a site, or portion thereof, that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. EPA is funding: assessment demonstration pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to assess brownfields sites and to test cleanup and redevelopment models; job training pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to provide training for residents of communities affected by brownfields to facilitate cleanup of brownfields sites and prepare trainees for future employment in the environmental field; and, cleanup revolving loan fund programs (each funded up to \$500,000 over five years) to capitalize loan funds to make loans for the environmental cleanup of brownfields. These pilot programs are intended to provide EPA, states, tribes, municipalities, and communities with useful information and strategies as they continue to seek new methods to promote a unified approach to site assessment, environmental cleanup, and redevelopment.

With high school dropout rates as high as 70 percent, it is not surprising that the Pilot's targeted areas cover some of the most disadvantaged communities in the state. Located within a federally designated Enterprise Community and Empowerment Zone, as well as a state Enterprise Zone, Camden and Newark have unemployment rates of 16 percent and poverty rates reaching 40 percent. A steady decline in industrial activity in both cities resulted in an overwhelming number of abandoned and underused brownfield sites. With more than 700 acres of potentially contaminated brownfields in Newark alone, these cities are in need of trained environmental technicians to return these sites to productive use.

The Job Training Pilot recruited low-income and otherwise disadvantaged residents, specifically those who had already completed the New Jersey Youth Corps Program—a program designed to help young adults earn their General Educational Development (GED) degree and learn employment and life skills. After successful completion of the New Jersey Youth Corps job readiness program, 100 hours of crew-based service projects related to brownfields, and hazardous materials management training, trainees began the Pilot-implemented brownfields environmental technician training. Designed and implemented by NJIT, the Pilot's environmental technician training curriculum consists of 150 hours of technical training, including 40 hours of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training for hazardous waste workers, and training in environmental sampling, remediation techniques, and monitoring, including the use of innovative technologies.

Through its partners (NJIT, the International Youth Organization of Newark, and the Work Group of Camden), New Jersey Youth Corps provides trainees the support necessary to access and retain employment. With transportation being one of the biggest obstacles to retaining students, the Pilot provided shuttle service to and from training. When needed, students were also enrolled in driver education classes to make them more employable after graduation. Once students graduated from the environmental training, they were provided career counseling and job placement assistance and the opportunity to participate in an eight-week internship during which they received approximately \$5.50 per hour. Students who took advantage of this opportunity completed internships with entities such as EPA, ASA Group, Clean Venture, and New Jersey Public Interest Research Group (NJPIRG). A prospective employer commented that "the type of training... received from the New Jersey Institute of Technology is training for high-caliber positions. This type of training can produce an individual that is just as prepared for work as a degreed individual from a college or university."

The New Jersey Youth Corps Brownfields Job Training Pilot achieved its objective by completing two training courses, one in Camden and the other in Newark. The Pilot graduated 25 of its 29 trainees in Spring 2000, five of whom were recruited from the Welfare-to-Work program. To date, four graduates have secured professional jobs, and eight others chose to take additional training or pursue advanced degrees. Several other graduates are working with the New Jersey Youth Corps' career placement center. In the words of a now-employed graduate, "I wasn't sure about brownfields in the beginning, but I can now see how many job opportunities are available. The job is what I want and need to make it in the world." For more information on the New Jersey Youth Corps Job Training Pilot, contact EPA Region 2 at (212) 637-4314.

## **CONTACTS:**

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Visit the EPA Brownfields web site at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>