

Youth Conservation Corps Builds up Lake County's Young People

Everyone deserves a chance to succeed, and that's exactly what Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) – the recipient of the Pleasant Prairie, Wisc. Distribution Center's [Meijer Team Gives](#) donation – is helping to create for young people every year in Lake County, Ill. just across the state line. Based in Waukegan, YCC is a nonprofit organization committed to providing Lake County's youth with education, certification programs and career development to build skills for life.

YCC mainly serves youth from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, ages 16-24, who've dropped out of high school or face other challenges, including those experiencing homelessness or lack of income. Through hands-on job skills training, GED course prep and other career-readiness work, YCC empowers these young people to get back on track, gain self-worth and develop lifelong skills to achieve their goals.

"We're helping those who need an opportunity, not a handout," said Irvin Jerry, YCC Development Manager.

YCC's core program is YouthBuild, a 6-month program that helps young people, ages 16-24, get back on track and become self-reliant. Most in this program have left high school without a diploma and are unemployed. YCC provides a pathway to continue their education and learn construction skills, as well as career and life skills necessary for accomplishing their goals.

In 2021, our Pleasant Prairie Distribution Center was lucky enough to have a recent YouthBuild graduate named Prentice Hills join the team. Shortly before Prentice celebrated his 1-year anniversary at the distribution center, he suggested adding YCC to the voting pool for the facility's Meijer Team Gives donation. During Meijer Team Gives, each store and distribution facility is given \$10,000 to donate to one nonprofit or split between two in the community. Team members at each location work together to identify the local nonprofits meaningful to them and the communities they serve. Prentice's connection and success with the program resonated with his teammates, and after the votes were cast, YCC was the clear winner of the full \$10,000 donation.

"Much of our work depends on grants and donations, and about 94 percent of the young people in our program are from low-income families," Irvin said. "Meijer's donation allowed us to not only reach but exceed our end of year campaign goal, and we're so thankful because we wouldn't have been able to get there without it."

Several members of the team got to visit YCC shortly after that for a tour of the facility and to meet some youth in the program, who gifted them with handmade birdhouses they had built.

"It was really impactful to meet people in the program who were so excited about what they were learning, and about all the advantages this program will give them in life," said Amy Pearson, Pleasant Prairie Complex Administrative Assistant. "It was evident that the volunteers and staff have so much love and compassion for their members, and just how hard they are working every day to make a difference."

Looking ahead, Amy and her team hope to continue to work with YCC by helping run mock interviews for its youth who are finishing the program and preparing for their careers.

"Everyone just needs a chance," continued Amy. "We're honored to have this connection with YCC and the amazing work they're doing to give that chance to so many young people."

Additional assets available online: [Photos](#) ⁽¹⁾

<https://meijercommunity.com/Youth-Conservation-Corps-Builds-up-Lake-Countys-Young-People>