

YouthBuild



Building the Individual and the Community

Oleyns Rivera credits YouthBuild Boston with keeping him off the streets and giving him the opportunity to succeed in a career he would not have otherwise been able to excel in.

“Instead of being stuck doing nowhere things in the streets like my friends and former classmates, I am making money and doing work that utilizes all my skills. I have pride in myself and hope for a better future.”

Rivera graduated from Madison Park Vocational Technical High School in 2005 and was fortunate to end up in the pre-apprenticeship program at YouthBuild Boston, with Jonah DeCola, Local 40 member and Construction Manager for YouthBuild Boston, as his sponsor.

During his time in the program, Rivera worked on a job in Cambridge alongside union contractor Marani Construction Corp. The owner, Donald L’Homme, saw Rivera’s skill and work ethic and hired him immediately upon his graduation from YouthBuild. L’Homme notes “It is easy to train [Rivera], he is interested in learning... it has really worked out with him.”

DeCola points out that stories like Rivera’s are not out of the ordinary. YouthBuild helps inner city youth build a solid foundation for success.

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“Essentially, YouthBuild teaches them Craft Pride. They learn it’s not just about being a skilled tradesperson, but it’s about being an all around individual.”

**— Jonah DeCola,
Local 40 member and
Construction Manager for
YouthBuild Boston**

“They have no experience with carpentry and don’t come to the table with enough skills to perform the work. On top of craft training, YouthBuild teaches students academics, discipline, attitude, assertiveness, life skills, timeliness, and develops their self esteem. Essentially, YouthBuild teaches them Craft Pride. They learn it’s not just about being a skilled tradesperson, but it’s about being an all around individual.”

Jonah DeCola became involved in YouthBuild Boston two years ago after recognizing what he saw as a flaw in the Boston Residents Jobs Policy. This policy aims to increase employment opportunities for Boston residents, minorities, and women on City of Boston funded construction projects. DeCola feels that most of those who are eligible are at a distinct disadvantage, because they lack the necessary skills to succeed.

YouthBuild Boston’s multidisciplinary Construction Training Program focuses

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Photo top: Union apprentices work alongside YouthBuild Boston students at Zeigler Street.

on academic and vocational training as well as developing life skills and providing counseling, to assist in goal setting.

The Carpenters union is involved in YouthBuild programs throughout New England and across the nation. Members work as full time instructors for the program across the country, and upon graduation many students become apprentices in the Carpenters union.

Students who enroll in the Construction Training Program rotate biweekly between work site and in class training. The ten month program includes 1,800 hours of work site training. Typically, students renovate abandoned buildings into affordable and low-income housing units. The program hopes to demonstrate to students the importance of taking responsibility for themselves as individuals, but also the importance of taking responsibility for their community.

YouthBuild Boston usually serves as the General Contractor on its projects. This creates job opportunities that also provide union hours for subcontractors. “Not only are we creating union hours, but we are able to give our students a first hand look at the expectations, in terms of work ethic, skill, and attitude, of journey level workers in the union.”

Frantz Clarke, another of DeCola’s students, recently graduated from YouthBuild and joined Local 40 as an apprentice. Clarke is currently working for T.J. McCartney. Dennis Sawyer, the drywall foreman on his current job, has high accolades for Clarke. “In 25 years, Clarke is one of a handful of 1a apprentices that I have met that you can tell right from the start is going to work out. The Carpenters union needs guys like him and so does T.J. McCartney.”

The carpenter steward on Clarke’s job, Daniel Mariano, also a Local 40 member, has similar praise. “He is one of the best first year apprentices I’ve seen in a long time...one day he will probably run work here at the job, he picks things up quick. This kid is on the mark.”



New England Carpenters Training Center Instructor Frank Petkiewich talks with Brian Burrill, Local 218 apprentice, at the Zeigler Street site.

It is apparent that the formula works. By setting students up for success and showing them what is expected of them in the field, they are able to excel when they begin their apprenticeship program.

YouthBuild Boston, in conjunction with the Carpenters union, is also involved in an interesting project at 131



James Hendrix, Local 67 apprentice

Zeigler Street. At this site, seven units of permanent housing for disabled homeless are being built for the Pine Street Inn. YouthBuild Boston is the General Contractor on the project. Along with YouthBuild Boston students, apprentices from the New England Carpenters Training Center are self performing all of the carpentry on the job.

Through the support of instructors from both Millbury and the Boston Carpenters Apprenticeship program, YouthBuild Boston has been able to successfully complete the work to professional standards.

Another unique component of this project involved the installation of James Hardie siding products. The Carpenters union is currently developing curriculum for this product. “We were able to find ways of installing the product safely, giving the apprentices a leading edge over the whole industry,” notes DeCola.

Suspecting misinformation in the siding products MSDS sheets, DeCola requested a site visit from the Mass. Division of Occupational Safety for air monitoring of silica exposure. In addition to confirming his suspicions, the onsite consultation program member and Industrial Hygiene Supervisor Marvin Lewiton sent DeCola a letter of appreciation praising the YouthBuild Boston jobsite as “perhaps the most hazard-free construction site [he has] ever seen.” He went on to commend the onsite personnel for having “little hesitation in raising health and safety concerns to supervisory personnel.”

Students like Rivera and Clarke, along with letters like the one from Division of Occupational Safety On-site Consultation Program are just a few of the examples of the great things YouthBuild is doing for the community. Not only is the program empowering disadvantaged youth to excel in the construction industry, but it is also helping to rebuild the community and is raising industry standards through the focus on training and safety on the job. ■