



Seattle
Parks & Recreation

Seattle Conservation Corps

Healthy Environment Stories



“The Seattle Conservation Corps changed my life,” said Kané Bernert, a former gymnast, who battled heroin addiction and homelessness. Since beginning her year with the SCC in January of 2018, she has accomplished goals that recently seemed unattainable: securing stable housing, steady employment, and her driver’s license.

The SCC is a unique Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) program that combines counseling and training in life skills with real world work that brings benefits to Seattle residents and to the environment. It provides homeless adults with the opportunity to gain proficiencies needed to be successful in the world and the dignity of paid work.

Kevin Tran says the Corps has helped him a lot. Once addicted and living on the streets, he is four months into his one-year commitment to SCC and living in transitional housing. With the goal of regaining custody of his son, he puts his recovery first and is determined to succeed. The encouragement of fellow Corps members and staff is vital.

SCC’s 2018 budget is \$4.8 million, of which 80 percent is recovered from grants and work performed by SCC crews, primarily for other public agencies and SPR’s Community Development Block Grant-funded Park Upgrade Program.

SCC manager Ruth Blaw talks about the program with compassion and pride. “Many members are trying to accomplish things such as going through rehabilitation to recover from drug and alcohol addictions, getting custody of children, and finding housing.” Even so, the Corps’ reputation for great work keeps the requests coming in.

Recent jobs include work at the Beacon Food Forest and work on the Longfellow Creek Path and the Bitter Lake Path. The SCC also operates a successful program selling rain barrels and compost bins to the public.

Once potential members have completed rehabilitation, undergone a physical examination, and completed their paperwork, the real work starts. Members participate in counseling and receive training in nutrition, money management, physical fitness, and other topics needed to maintain employment and housing stability.

SCC crews work five days a week, 40 hours a week. They earn certificates in forklift operation, CPR, flagging, handling hazardous materials, and get hands-on experience doing work such as landscaping, as well as concrete pouring and finishing. Many of their jobs are environmental in nature, such as maintaining turf and paths, and removing invasive plants and litter. SCC crews also maintain the Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) for Seattle Public Utilities, which can lead to a certificate in stormwater management.

What does the future hold for SCC members who successfully complete the program? Bernert hopes to qualify for an apprenticeship at Seattle Public Utilities. Tran dreams of a job and a future with his son. In 2017, 146 received social-support services, 52 completed the program, 79 found long-term jobs and 79 found stable housing.

Learn more

www.seattle.gov/parks/about-us/special-initiatives-and-programs/seattle-conservation-corps