



## The Woodburn Independent: OYA's green programs help youths connect to community



*COURTESY OREGON YOUTH AUTHORITY - Scott (left) and Dylan, residents at MaLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn, work in the garden there. The garden produces about 3,000 pounds of fresh produce every year, which equals about \$8,000 worth of the youths' consumption.*

By Fariborz Pakseresht  
Oregon Youth Authority  
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Gardens overflowing with 3,000 pounds of produce annually. Fishermen putting salmon and halibut by catch to good use by donating it to provide youth with fresh, healthful dinners. Solar-powered greenhouses growing seedlings and saplings to beautify Oregon's highway medians. Silverspot butterflies coming back to Oregon to roost on newly-planted native violets in hopes of removing them from the threatened species list.

If these sound like typical conservation activities in Oregon, they are. But what makes these activities atypical, especially when compared to other states, is that they are taking place in Oregon's 10 close-custody juvenile facilities every day. And youth are learning not only what it means to be green, they're also learning from the ground up how to care for their communities, and in some cases how to make sustainability a vocation after they leave the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA).

Oregon leads the nation in the number of vocational educational programs it offers to at-risk youth, and as part of that educational

approach, we're also leading the way in introducing them to sustainability in action. In fact, OYA's sustainability aims align well with an ambitious new culture the agency is creating called Positive Human Development (PHD).

PHD is an agency-wide culture that strives to provide low stress environments for both staff and youth with freedom to make reasonable choices, and opportunities for engagement and caring and supportive relationships. The culture of PHD is rooted in a five-level pyramid that shows a progression beginning with a foundation of safety and security, working up to community connection at the top of the pyramid. Sustainability, and the sense of belonging to a culturally responsible community, fits within the community connection level of the pyramid.

Creating a connection between the community and youths can benefit both parties.

For example, the Institute for Applied Ecology in Corvallis has helped introduce nature into the lives of at-risk girls at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility in Albany. Girls planted and nurtured native seeds, such as Riverbank lupine and Nelson's checkermallow, in the facility's greenhouse. The plants then were used by middle school students at restoration sites at Jackson-Frazier Wetland and Evergreen Creek area.

One youth at MaLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn was so passionate about the garden there that he enrolled in the Master Gardener certification program and volunteered to take over all garden operations. He wrote a budget forecast for garden maintenance, proving fiscally why the garden is important and discovered that it grew an impressive \$8,000 worth of produce for youth consumption last year.

Youths at MaLaren cultivate almost 3,000 pounds of fresh produce per year. Participants in the gardening program are seeking grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to fund further growth and have designed several plans for a new location, including a pole building to replace older sheds.

While each of OYA's 10 close-custody facilities teaches sustainability practices, from bicycle repair to refurbishing computers, MaLaren offers the widest range of vocational

programs. Youth may learn everything from welding and woodworking to training rescue dogs for Project POOCH and constructing dog houses and fences for Fences for Fido.

A focus on sustainability extends throughout all agency operations. For example, OYA recently reduced its energy consumption by 30 percent between 2008 and 2014. The government mandate was 20 percent, but we set the bar even higher.

*This article appeared in several Oregon newspapers, co-authored by Fariborz Pakseresht and area OYA superintendents.*

*Dan Berger, Woodburn Independent  
Denessa Martin, Tillamook Headlight Herald  
Mike Riggan, Albany Democrat-Herald  
Greg Westbrook, The La Grande Observer*

As we celebrate Earth Day, OYA is proud to embrace green practices for the benefit of at-risk youth. Sustainability means thinking five, 10 and even 100 years ahead, and many of our youths haven't had the luxury to consider their futures in those terms. Helping them care for the earth reframes how they think of success. As a result, our communities will be safer and Oregon will be a greener place.

*Fariborz Pakseresht is the director of the Oregon Youth Authority*