



Portland YouthBuilders: Building houses, building character, building success

Educators dream of turning a student's life around by providing motivation, helping them develop skills and finding success in their lives. Portland YouthBuilders (PYB) is an organization that offers students opportunities to achieve success. Focusing on low-income, at-risk young people ages 17 – 24, PYB was founded in 1993 to provide a comprehensive program including educational, vocational and leadership training. Through the Congregation's Alternative Investment Fund, the Adrian Dominican Sisters have partnered with PYB to support young men and women who are committed to changing their lives.

PYB was recognized for its educational program that meets the exceptional needs of at-risk students. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's National Schools Initiative designated PYB as a "leader site" for its \$31 million Alternative High Schools Initiative, the most significant investment in alternative education in the country's history.

The strong educational base is achieved through PYB's outreach, recruitment and selection activities. Since at least 75 percent of the students are low-income high school dropouts, the challenge to ensure continuous enrollment of 50 participants can be daunting. The success of this phase of the program depends on careful selection of participants who are ready to successfully meet the program standards.

In a geographic area of Oregon that had a student dropout rate of 55.6 percent during 2001-02, (10.7 percent was the dropout rate nationally), PYB is able to recruit students because of its ability to pay a small stipend for their two-week monthly vocational rotation. Studying during the other two week period is rewarded with a GED or high school diploma. Beyond the classroom scene, counseling, life skills training and post-

graduate support follow the student throughout the program and beyond.

All participants work on five projects during the 12-month program to construct six units of affordable housing. During the year's program, participants are expected to learn 100 percent of basic construction skills ranging from safety and accident prevention, to insulation and energy conservation, to concrete and masonry. On May 17, 2005, PYB celebrated the completion of the Killingsworth House, a single-family, three-bedroom home located in northeast Portland. The Killingsworth House is the second project undertaken between PYB and the Portland Community Land Trust.



The WomenBuilders Program was initiated in 2004 in an effort to become a more inclusive program by giving young women the opportunity to explore careers in the construction trades. With on-site vocational training, all participants can understand the connection between education and future career success.

Central to the PYB mission is its leadership development component. Helping young people become self-sufficient, contributing members of their community is a goal for every school system. For PYB, the challenge is to involve the students in community service activities and show how such involvement makes a difference. Participants contribute over 30,000 community service hours each year. Instructor Eric Scott says, "We want students to become self-aware as agents of positive change in their personal situations, in their community and in society as a whole."

To stay informed of PYB's current activities visit their web site at www.pybpd.org.

– Barbara Matteson, OP
PAB Board Member

"We live right relationships with Earth Community."

– General Chapter '04