



JOB CORPS
60 YEARS **STRONG**. FOREVER **YOUNG**

WINNERS

NATIONAL JOB CORPS ASSOCIATION (NJCA)

Student Essay Contest

“How Job Corps Impacted My Life”

A 2024 compilation of essays from current Job Corps students in celebration of the 60th anniversary of Job Corps

We recognize all who reflected on the depth and breadth of what the Job Corps experience has done to make a positive difference in their lives.

NJCA JOB CORPS 60TH ANNIVERSARY

Student Essay Contest

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BRUNSWICK JOB CORPS CENTER

Atlanta Region Winner



Wana Gerome

Job Corps Reshaped My Journey

As an immigrant child, my life has been shaped by a series of challenges, most notably the catastrophic earthquake that left my homeland in disarray and claimed thousands of lives. The earthquake, with its destructive force, not only shook the ground beneath our feet but also shattered the stability of my beloved birthplace. The aftermath left us in a state of darkness, grappling with the harsh realities of rebuilding our lives. Yet, amidst the ruins, the opportunity to start anew in a foreign land presented itself as a beacon of

hope. My family and I, like many others, seized this chance for a fresh start in the United States of America, a land of possibilities.

As time unfolded, so did my personal journey. I completed high school and embarked on the challenging path of college life. However, this newfound independence brought with it a sense of isolation and the weight of making crucial decisions, from financial matters to familial responsibilities. The burden became overwhelming, leading me to make the difficult decision to drop out

of college. In the face of disappointment and regret for my future, the shadows of darkness once again loomed over my life.

It was during this tumultuous period that Job Corps emerged as a guiding light. Offering a lifeline of opportunities, Job Corps became a crucial stepping stone towards achieving my ultimate goals. The program provided a myriad of certifications and career paths for free, allowing me to explore and develop skills that aligned with my aspirations.

One of the most significant impacts of Job Corps on my life has been the sense of empowerment it instilled in me. The program recognized the potential within each participant and provided the necessary tools and resources to harness that potential. Through hands-on training, workshops, and mentorship, Job Corps not only equipped me with practical skills but also cultivated a sense of self-confidence and resilience.

Moreover, Job Corps played a vital role in reshaping my educational trajectory. The program offered a structured and supportive environment, enabling me to pursue certifications and acquire specialized knowledge in my chosen field. This hands-on approach to learning not only deepened my understanding of the subject matter but also allowed me to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios.

Beyond the academic and vocational aspects, Job Corps became a community where I found camaraderie and support. Surrounded by like-minded individuals who shared similar struggles and aspirations, I discovered a sense

of belonging that had been absent in my college experience. The friendships forged during my time in Job Corps became a source of motivation and encouragement, helping me navigate the challenges that lay ahead.

In addition to the skills and knowledge gained, Job Corps also fostered a sense of responsibility and accountability. The structured environment encouraged a disciplined approach to my personal and professional life. This newfound discipline, coupled with the support of mentors and peers, became instrumental in overcoming obstacles and setbacks.

As I reflect on my journey, I recognize the transformative impact that Job Corps has had on my life. From a state of uncertainty and despair, the program propelled me towards a future filled with possibilities. The certifications and skills acquired will not only open doors to diverse career paths but also pave the way for my personal growth and development.

To conclude, Job Corps has been a beacon of light in my life, guiding me through the darkest moments and empowering me to rise above adversity. The program's emphasis on education, vocational training, and community support has not only shaped my professional trajectory but has also enriched my personal journey. As I continually build upon the foundation laid by Job Corps, I carry with me a profound sense of gratitude for the opportunities it has provided and the transformative impact it has had on my life.

ONEONTA JOB CORPS CENTER

Boston Region Winner

Nicholas Pergola

How Job Corps Impacted My Life

Job Corps has greatly impacted my life for the better. A few months before joining, I had to suddenly move to upstate New York and I live with my uncle when I'm not in Job Corps. I hadn't seen him in over four years, and now I live with him. I could've never imagined my life as it is now, and everything worked out better than I could have predicted. Bad had to happen before I reached the good.

Living downstate, I had a rough relationship with my mom, and I felt if my own mom doesn't like me, there must be something wrong with me. She would say, "I love you, but I don't like you." In better environments, I came to learn that those statements were not normal.

This is the first time in my life that I truly feel wanted. Thank you, family and Job Corps.

I moved to the middle of nowhere because my mom kicked me out. No driver's license, car, school, job, or understanding of what's next. I was told that I'm not smart enough to pass my college classes, even though I did really well. I even graduated high school early. I learned that I have to be proud of myself and I don't need some pat on the back from people who do not actually respect me. I've learned that you can't force someone to respect you, and that was hard for me to gradually take in after trying so hard. My uncle said to me that when you're spending time with someone, ask yourself if you feel good around them, and if not, why be around them? I felt like I was stuck, and I had to be with those people. But he took me in, and I was trying to find a job but it was really difficult. I was severely depressed, and I was researching trade schools near me but got nothing. I felt worthless. Oneonta Job Corps kept coming up, and I didn't realize it was a trade school, so I kept ignoring it. Still finding nothing, I decided to click on it. I was confused. Free everything?? I immediately asked myself, "What's the catch?"; I can't believe I felt a solution all of a sudden.

Not too long ago, I was isolated without a plan for the future. I needed a license, but first I needed a job to save up for driver's lessons, and then I'd have to save thousands for a car. I figured I'd be working a dead-end job before I could get my life started. Then I saw that Job

Corps has free driver lessons, and you can get your license for free. Then I saw they paid you.

Yes, instead of me paying, they pay me. I won't even have a dollar of debt. That anxiety and confusion about what to do next were gone. I needed a trade certificate of some sort, and they offer it. Wow. I was so thrilled but also nervous. I felt it was too good to be true. I'd say the only "catch" is that what you get out of Job Corps is what you make from it. It can't guarantee your success, but it will give you more opportunities than anywhere else.

I'm in the tile-setting trade, and I've already learned how to use certain tools and achieved certifications that approve my use of them. I enjoy learning more skills to help me in the real world. If I ever need tile work done, well, I won't have to pay anyone else to do the work I can do myself! In trade or other aspects of my life, when I mess up, I feel like maybe my mom was right about me. That I won't get far in life. But the Job Corps community has assured me that we all start somewhere and everyone makes mistakes. I've decided that not only will I prove her wrong, but I will also continue to learn to love myself. The support that has been given to me by students and staff has been unimaginable. I don't know what I would have done without Job Corps. I am so happy to be here. The past me was so anxious about the future, but now with Job Corps, I feel better than ever, and I wish I could tell that kid that everything will work out and it will all be okay. Thank you, Job Corps!

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY JOB CORPS CENTER

Chicago Region Winner



Aaliyah McClenton

How Job Corps Impacted My Life

This program saved me. I am thankful everyday for this opportunity to better my life. I would recommend this program to anyone who wants to change their life. Job Corps showed me that I could better my future with some dedication and motivation. Without Job Corps I know it would be harder to do certain things like getting a diploma, working on a trade, getting my permit and license, working to better my

resume, and even helping with a place to stay after we depart from the program.

Back in 2020, I had my first apartment. I was struggling financially, and I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. I had goals in life and things I wanted to do, but I couldn't find how to start the process of living my dreams and achieving my goals. My auntie and uncle used to be students here at Humphrey. After about a year I decided to ask them for help, and they gave me a website to go to. I filled

out an application and they got back to me very quickly. Within a couple of weeks or so, I met Ginny. I was given a Chromebook and I had to attend virtual classes for the first three weeks before we came to the center. I was nervous about coming to school and meeting new people; I knew it was going to be a hassle trying to take care of my apartment while going to school. So, I decided to give away my apartment because I knew it was time for a change.

When I came here, it was 2021. COVID was a big deal and if you weren't vaccinated then you had to be isolated for two weeks. I missed my family and I felt like I was back again doing something that I didn't want to do because of being trapped in a room. So as soon as I got the chance to leave, I didn't come back, and because of that, I was back again doing the same things that I was doing before I came here. I knew I made a huge mistake and messed up my future ONCE AGAIN, I went into a depressed state and started drinking again every day. That led me into being in an abusive relationship. At that point, I'd REALLY lost hope because I didn't even know what to do anymore. I was struggling even worse than I was before I came to school. After so many black eyes, pulled-out hair, arguments, and back-to-back drinking, I got tired of being tired and decided to move back in with my dad.

After being with my dad for about 5 months I got a good job. He pushed me to do better for myself and helped me to be more confident in myself. He let me practice cooking meals in the kitchen because I knew I had a gift

for cooking. Putting in hard work with the help of my dad made me so happy and just because of the little blessings that came my way every day made me motivated to go back to school. So, I filled out another application.

Coming back to the center was familiar, but I noticed there had been some changes, which were good for me because I could go and see my family every weekend. This time around I've never been more motivated. I am almost graduated with my diploma and without this program I never knew how I could've even gotten this close! I'm so proud of the work that I do every day and I am now the second generation to come to Job Corps. When I have kids, I will most definitely be sending my kids here!

The advice I would give anyone who decides to come to this program, or for those who are already here, coming from my experience and my past, what I can say is to never give up on yourself or your future. Give yourself that chance to be the better you. Don't worry about how long it's going to take you to get out. Just take it one day at a time and pace yourself. Give yourself that push and don't be afraid to open new doors. I want to thank Job Corps for accepting me to be the one of the students here because without this program I don't know where I would be at this point. THANK YOU, JOB CORPS!!!!!!!!!!!!

CLEARFIELD JOB CORPS CENTER

Dallas Region Winner



Pine Bruce

Finding Strength at Job Corps

In the face of challenges, my time at Job Corps reflects the wisdom of Jim Rohn's words: "If you really want to do something, you'll find a way." From personal growth to overcoming obstacles, my journey here shows how determination can lead to success.

Upon joining Job Corps, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery. Uncertain of my path, I found solace in the supportive environment it provided. The staff's

commitment to student success became evident as they guided me through the process of exploring various career options. With their encouragement, I developed a concrete plan to pursue higher education and start my business.

Equipped with a carefully prepared business plan, complete with budgets and

blueprints, I now stand poised to turn my aspirations into reality.

In my first month at Job Corps, I struggled with my mental health. The abrupt separation from my family and friends was challenging, and I struggled to cope with the new environment. It was during this grueling time that I frequented the art room for respite, where I could channel my emotions into creative expression. Among the shelves of art supplies, I stumbled upon a simple yet profound sign that read “Persistence,” embellished with a train and a sun. It felt as though this sign from the universe was intentional, urging me to endure the challenges and uncertainties ahead. With newfound determination, I colored the sign and hung it on my closet door, where it serves as a daily reminder that difficult times are evanescent and perseverance is fundamental.

My involvement with the Student Government Association (SGA) further solidified my sense of belonging and purpose at Job Corps. Through organizing engaging activities and cultivating a sense of community fellowship, the SGA became a platform for personal and leadership development. It was through these experiences that I got an invaluable understanding of effective leadership: qualities such as empathy, integrity, and accountability that transcend titles and positions.

As a transgender individual, the concept of navigating social interactions outside the LGBT community was intimidating. Job

Corps, however, catalyzed personal growth and empowerment.

Through exposure to diverse perspectives and continuous support from staff and peers, I found the confidence to engage with individuals beyond my immediate circle. While social anxiety remains a challenge, Job Corps has equipped me with the tools to assert myself respectfully and confront intolerance with grace and composure. I have learned to embrace my identity unapologetically, knowing that I am valued and accepted for who I am.

Furthermore, my time at Job Corps emphasized the importance of advocating for inclusivity and social equity. While instances of injustice and intolerance persist, I remain committed to fostering a culture of acceptance and understanding. By leading by example and embracing diversity, I aspire to create a more inclusive and just society where individuals are appreciated for their unique contributions and perspectives.

In conclusion, my journey at Job Corps has been characterized by resilience, community, and personal growth. From navigating career uncertainties to embracing my identity with confidence, Job Corps has provided me with the tools and support to thrive in the face of adversity. As I prepare to embark on the next chapter of my life, I carry with me the lessons learned, and the relationships forged at Job Corps, forever grateful for the transformative impact it has had on my journey of self-discovery and empowerment.

GREAT ONYX JOB CORPS CENTER

Philadelphia Region Winner



Simon Kilpatrick

Sixty Years of Helping Hands

Since 1964, Job Corps has provided young people the chance to break generational poverty by helping them to obtain an education, while also teaching them the skills needed to start their career. For me, Job Corps has revealed a path towards independence that I did not think existed.

Being physically disabled with a possible learning disability, working on my feet everyday just was not in the cards for me, nor

was attending a college or university (both of which I have already tried). Discovering this program has given me a new outlook on life by showing me that I *can* be successful and that I *can* be a productive member of society. These epiphanies came to me through my trade, mentoring others, in the dorms, and just generally helping others in whatever ways I can.

During my almost five months at Job Corps, I have earned six certifications, become

the President of my dorm, and mentored new students twice with a third mentoring opportunity on the horizon. While doing so, I also continuously reached out to both students and staff alike to aid in anything and everything. Including, but not limited to, teaching new students the rules and expectations, decorating areas for the holidays, organizing files, and cleaning workspaces.

Of the things I mentioned above, my favorite thing about being a Job Corps student must be interacting with everyone. As stated previously, I have mentored two groups of new students and have a third opportunity to mentor soon. Being able to introduce newcomers to the program and giving them the helping hand they need in the beginning is an amazing experience that not many people are able to do or enjoy. Mentoring also gives me the chance to show others that they are not alone here and that there is always someone who will listen to them when they need it most. Whether it be me, another student, or someone on staff, there is always someone there to talk to, crack a joke with, or even be a shoulder to cry on – something I have been more times than I can count!

Thanks to my hard work, plus the help and encouragement from staff, I was given the opportunity to apply for an internship with the United States Forest Service, which could take me to places I could have only dreamed of seeing before. If I am chosen for this position, it will all be thanks to Job Corps and the incredible staff I have by my side here. The same goes for my future career!

Job Corps is a family. Things will always be tough, but with the help of staff and the friends you make, you can achieve anything you set your mind to. Thank you, Job Corps, for giving people like me a chance to make something of themselves for sixty years and counting!

TREASURE ISLAND JOB CORPS CENTER

San Francisco Region Winner



Qione Bell-Owens

Bottoms Up.

Have you ever heard the term “RockBottom”? It’s the idea of a place so low in one’s life that to even find them would require leaving no stone unturned. For some it is just a phrase, or a joke, or a creative name for a wrestling move. For me it was a taste, a scent, a sound, and a cruel reality. I had become so accustomed to it that if “rockbottom” were to be in a crowd I can point it out like an old friend at the subway all before I was even able

to have a drink. That is where I was when I found Job Corps.

I was 17 years old when the world crumbled to a virus we still seem to know nothing about. I was a college student with a job in my field of study, Psychology with a direct internship connection to the university I was going to transfer to upon graduation. With the outbreak of Covid 19 campuses all over the world were closing their doors and sending people home. As simple as it sounds, the study

of human behavior requires humans around to behave. With the closing of my campus I lost not only my employment and opportunities to grow, I lost the quality of my education as a whole. My instructors weren't fully prepared or accustomed to the style of teaching online, and the college itself made mistake after mistake with sending class codes and homework. Amongst the confusion I decided to drop out and take a break believing this plague would subside in a month or so. Little did I know the next three years would be the worst three of my life. Being out of school I decided to get a job as the money began to roll in my family decided to have me pay for a portion of the rent in a two bedroom apartment where my grandmother has one room and my mother has the other. \$200 for a couch seemed like a ridiculous request so I filled out my paperwork and moved to an apartment on the other side of town. This decision left me in a cycle of working to live and living to work, no education, no growth, just survival. I struggled from job to job with little experience in anything specific, just knew how to show up and work hard like my grandmother taught me. After warehouse to department store to side gig to just plain unemployed I found myself depressed and went drinking with money I made from donating plasma every night I could. I realized my life was completely being wasted and I had no hope for a better future but I believe in the power of the true living God and I was still determined to make something of myself. I went on a spree of applications trying to get a Job I could Walk to because my car had just blown its engine and I had to sell it for parts because I had no

money and the repairs went from 100 to 200 to 2000 in a matter of weeks. I finally got a call back and I clung to the job as a last hope. It was a therapy job where I could work with kids like my sister who had autism. I made it through all the training but unfortunately after finding my car situation less than ideal I was forced to resign. I tried to scratch by on the money from donating plasma but I was diagnosed with a heart murmur and that put a pause on the donations for health reasons. I found myself completely broke homeless single carless depressed and like I said before rock bottom. With the news of the new job, my aunt was eager to have me save up and set a date on my leaving her couch. She was very supportive but a few weeks turned into a year and housing a depressed alcoholic isn't ideal for anyone for that long. However in her case things were especially tricky. I was an illegal stowaway which was a breach of her lease and put her housing in jeopardy. Also during that time my aunt was fighting for custody of my little sisters that had been put into foster care after a drug related incident with my mother, so having me there made the whole thing too much. Being an inconvenience or a burden crushed me and I felt the energy of it for a year as I scrolled Instagram, played video games, watched anime, and became addicted to online pornography. This all to say I became a loser. A legitimate loser of life. I became quite pitiful and tried ending my life on a few occasions.

After a night of complete uselessness I found myself scrolling Instagram and found an ad for the California conservation Corps. I tried the orientation and halfway through the call I left and knew it was the worst thing

for me. As we all know our phones listen and read our Actions and so I was presented an ad for Job Corps. All I knew was I needed to get away from my aunts couch and become something greater for the sake of those who invested in me. My recruiter was friendly and laid out the situation for me and I just knew that whatever I had to do I would. The day came for my tour and interview and put on my best clothes and went head first not knowing it would completely change the course of my life. I wasn't sure which trade I would take up until Mr. Luis made it to the bottom of his list and said culinary. My eyes lit up and I had flashbacks of the little boy I knew watching food network with his grandmother saying he would be a chef. Little did I know this would become my reality. I took my tour and met my chef and I knew that from that moment life was new.

I joined the kitchen after my long and ridiculous time in cpp and fell completely into the life of a food service worker. I understood mise en plas, and hand washing, and punctuality, I grew in teamwork, and management, and responsibility. My chef, who I now call father, gave me a home and a purpose and a life in that kitchen. I didn't live for me anymore. I existed only to serve the best food I could and to improve his life anyway I could. My father grew older and sick and I became his right hand. We were so perfectly in sync that our jobs became one in the same.

I took orders, made schedules, laid out lesson plans, taught modules, did meetings and even taught demos. I changed that kitchen in so many ways, but most importantly it changed me. I went from a pathetic lover who knew the life of being at the bottom, to a man with a purpose and a bed and a family and a dream and skills and memories you can never pay for or find anywhere else. So if you ask why Job Corps and what has it done for me? I say see it in my walk, hear it in my tone, smell it off my hands, and taste it off your plate.



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