

# New Jobs Program Employs and Educates High School Dropouts While Building Affordable San Diego Homes

By Terri Steele

There's a ray of hope on the horizon for 16 to 24-year-olds looking for jobs, an education and a better future. It springs from a \$1.3 million U.S. Department of Labor grant recently awarded to the not-for-profit Heartland Coalition.

The hope is with a program called YouthBuild. Heartland YouthBuild provides immediate part-time job opportunities for disaffected youth in low-income areas of San Diego while helping them earn their high school diplomas and receive hands-on field training in construction and green building. This includes an introduction to one of California's fastest-growing industries – solar.

"We're here to uplift young people for whom traditional school hasn't worked – to hone their trade and leadership skills while instilling in them an enthusiasm for what's to come," said Heartland Coalition President, CEO Mark Hanson, PhD. **Heartland YouthBuild: Rebuilding Lives and Communities**

Heartland YouthBuild is a free, accredited San Diego-based 501C3 charter school. Rooted in principles of leadership, social justice and community service, YouthBuild helps unemployed, out-of-school young people reclaim their lives and get a quality education, while building the skills they need to become productive members of society.

"YouthBuild students work alongside licensed professionals (and fellow non-profits like Grid Alternatives) to build affordable housing, trending tiny houses and container homes to create a solid sense of community – and a more sustainable quality of life – for folks in economically-depressed neighborhoods," said YouthBuild Green Building Construction Trainer Ray Silva-Reyes. "It's education with a true sense of accomplishment."

Silva-Reyes – who holds a Master's degree in Construction Management and green/environmental certifications in PMP, OSHA and LEED – says getting the core education that

comes from a high school diploma is important, but with cuts in traditional industrial arts programs, it doesn't guarantee meaningful employment after graduation.

YouthBuild is filling that void by offering students the construction training content of the National Association of Home Builders' Home Builders Institute (HBI). This year's inaugural session leads to a pre-apprentice certificate in carpentry.

Important classroom instruction includes Sketchup 3D Virtual Building Modeling applied to actual YouthBuild projects. Following the design phase, students enjoy field-based building projects where basics in cross-cutting trades like electrical, plumbing, green building and solar are addressed.

"We are immersing students in real-world construction environments while connecting them with licensed professionals who can teach them marketable skills and open doors to new employment opportunities. And all the while they're serving the community by building affordable homes right here in San Diego," added Silva-Reyes.

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Young people in economically disadvantaged communities can feel forced to choose work over school in order to make ends meet. With that in mind, YouthBuild offers all new students immediate part-time jobs starting at \$13 an hour – above even San Diego's minimum wage.

**Registration is now open for YouthBuild's 2017 curriculum.**

"Now, more than ever, it's important for youth to understand their available options in choosing and pursuing their academic and career goals," Hanson said. "We want these young people to know that a good education and high wage careers are attainable no matter what their financial background."

Need your high school diploma or know someone who does? Call **619-546-9259**, text **YouthBuild** to **31996** or visit [heartlandyouthbuild.org](http://heartlandyouthbuild.org) and build a better future today!

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