



ROOTS OF SUCCESS
ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY &
JOB TRAINING PROGRAM

"Roots of Success: Preparing Youth for Environmental Literacy and Careers in Schools, Job Training, and Carceral Settings"



Promising Practices Profile of the Roots of Success Program will be included in *Call to Action: Educating for a Green Economy*, a forthcoming report produced by The Green Career Innovation Hub of the California Environmental Literacy Initiative in order to support a statewide call to action to develop a strategic plan to secure equitable access for TK–16 students to the high-growth, high-quality green careers essential to a sustainable future.

I Introduction

“Roots of Success” (RoS) is an empowering environmental literacy and job training program that prepares youth and adults to access jobs and career pathways in environmental fields, and to improve environmental conditions in their communities. The program is centered around a federal and California state registered Department of Labor Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship and a 10-module course.

The program is offered in a wide range of settings that include: high schools, youth programs, adult schools, job training programs, reentry programs, prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities. Since 2009, the program has been offered in over 600 schools and organizations throughout the United States; over 26,000 youth and adults have gone through the program, more than 12,000 took the course while incarcerated. In California over 680 Bay Area youth, ages 16-24, have gone through the Roots of Success program; over 200 youth took the course while incarcerated. The program is currently being used in diverse settings throughout Northern California.

The 10-module Pre-Apprenticeship course is taught by instructors who are trained and certified to teach a curriculum that deepens student’s understanding of environmental problems and solutions, strengthens their academic, professional, financial, social entrepreneurship, and advocacy skills, ensures they acquire the vocabulary crucial for working in environmental fields, inspires them to explore environmental careers, and prepares them to access jobs and career pathways in the water, waste, transportation, energy, building, food, open space, and advocacy sectors. Leadership development is a key aspect of the program, providing students with the knowledge and skills they need to identify problems, actively participate in discussions about environmental issues, explore innovative and entrepreneurial solutions to environmental challenges, and address environmental problems and injustices in their communities.



Students who complete the Pre-Apprenticeship earn an “Environmental Specialist” credential. In California, high school students who complete the course can also receive 6 units of college credit in the CSU system. All graduates of the Pre-Apprenticeship program are eligible to enroll in the Roots of Success Apprenticeship, which is the first and only federal and California state registered DOL Apprenticeship that trains and mentors instructors to earn a “CTE Environmental Literacy Instructor” credential.

Roots of Success graduates are working in a wide range of environmental fields and are addressing environmental challenges and injustices in their communities. A study conducted with high schools and community-based programs that offered Roots of Success for at least two years found that 100% of program directors surveyed observed positive behavioral changes in participants and that in a sample of 1,200 graduates 98% felt they were better prepared for job interviews, 75% found employment within 3 months, 70% remained employed 6 months later, and among those who were employed, 80% were working in environmental fields.

II Equity Focus

The Roots of Success program is designed to meet the needs of students from communities heavily affected by poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and environmental injustice. Many of these individuals have been failed or poorly served by the education system and face barriers to accessing stable, family-supporting jobs. To meet the needs of this population, the program design is trauma-informed, culturally competent, and adaptable for both community and carceral settings. The pedagogical approach encourages students to use their lived experience as the foundation upon which to build further knowledge and skills, often has students working in small groups, and supports active participation in the learning process.

Internal and external evaluations consistently show that the Roots of Success program leads to significant improvements in student’s material conditions, overall well-being, and access to living wage jobs and career pathways in environmental fields; and that the program inspires and empowers students to become activists and advocates who are addressing social and environmental injustices within their communities. The program’s commitment to equity is demonstrated at every level to ensure that the curriculum can be used in diverse settings and is accessible to diverse audiences. The program is offered in Spanish, in person in a classroom setting, online and in both community and carceral settings. The curriculum design is easily navigable, utilizes accessible language, and incorporates real-life examples that resonate with participants in the population we serve across diverse lived experiences, literacy levels, and settings.



III Meet Roots of Success graduate Karina Pinzon

Karina Pinzon went through the Roots of Success course in 2022 at The Unity Council in Oakland. At the time, Karina was a student at CSU East Bay majoring in International Studies. Karina's experience in the Roots of Success program reveals a transformative experience that extends far beyond the traditional classroom setting. Karina enrolled in the Roots of Success course because she thought the Pre-Apprenticeship credential would help her get a job. But after the first class she realized that what she was learning was directly relevant to her everyday life and that the classes were providing her with an exciting opportunity to learn more about environmental issues and broaden her understanding of the positive role she could play in her community. Although she was a quiet student in her college classes, the interactive and engaging teaching approach used in the Roots of Success course inspired Karina to actively participate in the class and share her thoughts. Karina greatly appreciated that in addition to traditional environmental topics, the course focused on social and environmental justice issues that resonated deeply with her personal experiences and observations of social inequality and fueled her passion for advocating change within her community.

Karina's journey did not end when she completed the Roots of Success Pre-Apprenticeship. What she learned in the classes had an enduring impact on her lifestyle and her professional aspirations. She became highly conscious of water and energy use and began to implement practical changes in her home. This commitment extended beyond her home in Oakland to include her ancestral and familiar roots in Mexico where her family has a house in a very dry

area of the country. With new knowledge, skills and inspiration gained through the Roots of Success course, Karina is working with her parents to explore innovative solutions, like green roofing and greywater systems, to reduce their water and energy use. Professionally, Karina graduated from the Roots of Success program with a new interest in issues related to community food security, which motivated her to seek employment in a community garden that provides local residents with access to fresh nutritious food. Overall, Karina's experience with the Roots of Success course equipped her with valuable environmental knowledge, introduced her to a wide range of jobs and career pathways in environmental fields, ignited her interest in food security and community gardening, enhanced her professional skills and future job prospects, and fueled her passion for sustainable practices and social change that transcends borders and communities.



Karina's positive experience extended to other students who took the Roots of Success course at The Unity Council. Course feedback from 3 of these students are illustrative:

"I took the course when I was a senior in high school. In the Roots of Success classes I've learned about how to prevent environmental pollution and how to advocate for myself and my community. The classes have influenced my behavior, as I now make more sustainable choices, such as shopping at a thrift store instead of a fast fashion retail store, drinking out of a reusable water bottle instead of a plastic single use water bottle, and using a reusable shopping bag instead of plastic one. The classes have also affected my thinking, since I now pay more attention to the policies being passed in my community, as the policies local lawmakers and leaders may try to pass may not actually be beneficial for my community, due to the lack of education and support my community possesses. I have already shared a bit of what I've learned from the Roots of Success classes as I've taken what I've learned there to my environmental science school class where I presented on the unsustainable nature and polluting effects that agriculture has on the environment and on people. I was able to discuss with my fellow classmates about how we could solve food insecurity in our community." (Marleny G, 2022)

"I took the class during my junior year of high school. I learned a lot about environment and social issues and how to improve my community. The class helped me change a lot of bad habits like letting the water run too long or not turning off the lights when not used. I shared what I learned with my family everyday after class so the information not only changed me but also changed my family. We may not make a big impact, but we will try to be involved to help the community as much as we can. I really enjoyed the class." (Tuyet K, 2023)

"I took the Roots of Success course as a highschool junior. I decided to enroll in the program that summer because I didn't have plans and thought it would be a good way to spend my time. I'm so glad I took the course because I learned so much. The course gave me the opportunity to think about new ways I can help the environment. Even if I reach a few people, those people can spread the word to others which will motivate people to help the world. Knowing this, I am definitely planning to share what I have learned with others and refer others to this program. I believe it is the community's responsibility to improve our environment and in order to do so we need to spread the knowledge. I am grateful for the information I was taught throughout these weeks and will conserve it for as long as I am able to." (Catherine L, 2023)

Course evaluations from instructors teaching in schools, community, and carceral settings consistently show that the Roots of Success course provides many benefits for students that include expanding their understanding of social and environmental justice issues, inspiring their



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community engagement, and supporting their professional development. An instructor who taught the course to high school students in the Santa Rita Jail stated:

‘The students that have experienced the Roots of Success class have done extremely well in absorbing the material from the modules. They have asked critically thoughtful questions and have engaged in rich discussions that are relative to their lived experiences. Many have expressed to me, as their instructor, that they’re grateful a class like Roots is offered while incarcerated; expressing how it will benefit them as they re-enter their communities. Also, Roots of Success meets the College & Career Indicator credit on student transcripts in order to complete state requirements for High School Diploma.’ (Lawrence B, 2018)