

Summer 2023 Teen Urban Tree Corps Report



Introduction

Speak for the Trees' 2023 Summer Teen Urban Tree Corps program was once again filled with joy, vitality, and growth. The focus of this summer's program was expansion and refinement of past years' successes. Now in its fifth year, the program design, as in summer 2022, centered around caring for the street trees of Dorchester, while also providing the participants with opportunities to learn, explore career opportunities, and develop outreach activities.

Program Goals and Design

The goals of the 2023 summer program focused on tree care, youth learning and career exploration, and outreach and advocacy.

1. Care for the Street Trees in Boston's Dorchester Neighborhood

During the summer 2023 the teens mulched the trees on their routes during the first week of the program, before watering the trees. This improved the often compacted soil's capacity to absorb water, thereby improving the watering process, and also had the added benefit of reducing evaporation and providing nutrients to the trees.

- *Water more trees in less time*

To increase the efficiency of participants' watering work, the staff standardized the number of trees in each watering route, limited each route to 15 trees, and increased the number of watering groups by expanding program enrollment.

2. Learning and Career Exploration

- Each week the youth learned about different topics, including urban forestry, tree biology, green infrastructure and urban planning, tree care, tree management, and urban ecosystems.

- Providing connections between Boston youth and professionals in the fields of urban forestry and arboriculture was another goal of the summer program. Over the course of the summer, the participants went on field trips led by urban forestry professionals and met with guest speakers and presenters who shared their career paths and work experiences. The culmination was a career day where the teens were able to interview eight professionals in a range of career fields related to climate resiliency and urban forestry. These opportunities introduced the TUTC participants—predominantly Black and Latinx youth—to the field of urban forestry, a field that is currently made up primarily of middle-aged white males.

3. Active Role in SFTT Outreach Activities

In 2023 for the first time, the teens were involved in outreach work, helping to connect with Dorchester residents to share information about TUTC and the importance of urban trees.

One outreach activity focused on building public awareness of local street trees through the creation and design of tree tags that identified the species of each tree the teens were watering. In addition, the teens participated in two outreach events:

- Hosting an information table at the screening of *The Lorax* film organized by BOLD Teens at Loesch Park
- Speaking at Juice Foundation's Community & Sustainability Day

Participant Demographics

The program included a diverse group of participants. Of the 21 youth who completed the program, eleven of the participants self-identified as male, nine as female, and one as non-binary. The group was racially diverse as well, with 71% identifying as Black or African American, 14% identifying as white, 5% identifying as Asian, 5% identifying as Hispanic, 5% identifying as mixed race. Participants came from five Boston neighborhoods - Dorchester, Mattapan, Jamaica Plain, Hyde Park, and Roxbury - and represented a total of 16 different schools.

Assessment

To track program impact, the participants were asked to complete anonymous surveys that focused on their comfort with and understanding of various environmental topics, their career interests, and whether the program provided a quality experience. These surveys were given both at the start and end of the program.

One of the main takeaways from the pre and post-surveys was the increase in teens' comfort to engage in a conversation about various environmental and urban forestry topics.

Other assessments tracked the participants' progress in topics that included their knowledge of the variety of tree species in their neighborhood, as well as their interest in various career fields. Regarding tree knowledge, there was a measurable improvement from the start of the summer to the end. Collectively, the participants were able to name 16 tree species at the start of the summer and 32 by the end of the summer.

Finally, a trained observer through [Boston After School and Beyond](#) conducted a site visit during a field trip to Mt. Auburn Cemetery and wrote up an Assessment of Program Practices Tool (APT) Summary. Additional metrics were assessed by a Boston After School and Beyond pre and post survey that measured several program characteristics, including “Supportive Social Environment” and “STEM Interest.”

Successes

1. Tree Planting

During the first week of the program, the participants worked in teams to assist in planting 11 trees at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Dorchester. This was the first year TUTC has included a tree planting. The activity received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the participants.

2. More efficient watering process

The TUTC team was able to water trees more efficiently and with a smoother process than in summer 2022.

3. Outreach activities

TUTC participants participated in public speaking and tabling opportunities at outreach events and used their creativity in developing tree tags for the trees they watered.

4. Professional Development Day

The Professional Development Day during the last week of the program expanded the participants' understanding of the career opportunities in the field by bringing together eight professionals in different urban forestry careers. Participants had the opportunity to interview each person about their careers and career pathways.

Challenges and Takeaways

1. Tracking of watered trees

Tracking watering and care activities for individual trees presented difficulty, primarily due to occasional team leader absences. Looking ahead, it may be more effective to have the tracking of tree care led by the teens and managed by the team leaders. This way, every member of the watering group would take on responsibility, and tracking would remain consistent in the event that a team leader was absent for a day.

2. Mulching

Despite overall success, mulching still proved to be a difficult task to coordinate and plan. The mulch needed to be distributed by multiple staff members to a large number of trees early in the morning. This proved especially challenging. A goal in the planning for summer 2024 is to improve delivery of mulch for the street trees.

3. Planning for inclement weather

In summer 2023, the program contended with a relatively high number of rainy days, as well as a few incredibly hot days. On these inclement weather days, the staff sometimes scrambled to pull together meaningful indoor activities. In preparation for summer 2024, the staff will plan a series of meaningful, connected, and purposeful indoor activities.

Looking Ahead to Summer 2024

TUTC plans to expand program enrollment in summer 2024 if resources allow. In addition, TUTC is exploring partnerships with youth programs in other environmental justice communities in Boston as a way to extend the tree watering work to additional neighborhoods.

Funders and Partners

SFTT is grateful to the following organizations for their support and partnership:

Funders

[Accenture](#)
[Boston After School and Beyond](#)
[Cabot Family Charitable Trust](#)
[City of Boston SuccessLink](#)
[Delta Air Lines](#)
[Greening Youth Foundation](#)
[John Hancock MLK Scholars Program](#)
[Mifflin Memorial Fund](#)
[New England Biolabs](#)
[USDA Forest Service](#)



Partners

[Zuice Foundation](#)
[American Forests](#)
[Arnold Arboretum](#)
[BOLD Teens](#)
[Boston Parks and Recreation](#)
[Cedar Grove Cemetery](#)
[Franklin Park Coalition](#)
[Friends of Loesch Park](#)
[Friends of the Public Garden](#)
[Harvard Forest](#)
[Mount Auburn Cemetery](#)
[Women's Tree Climbing Workshop](#)