

Voices from Greenbuild: Eva Blake

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When I arrived at the [2011 Greenbuild Conference & Expo](#) in Toronto, Canada, I flipped through the program to find that the Greenbuild Social Equity Scholarship Program page contained photos and quotes from [YouthBuild's](#) participation in the 2010 Greenbuild in Chicago. What an honor! That was the first year YouthBuild attended Greenbuild as an organized team of scholars and volunteers. Students of the YouthBuild program along with staff filled their cups in Chicago with knowledge and inspiration they continue to utilize in the building of affordable housing in their communities and in the development of their own personal and professional lives.

I was chosen as a scholar in 2011 to organize a similar group of young adults and YouthBuild staff to attend as scholars and volunteers. USGBC generously awarded YouthBuild USA with five scholarship slots and advance coordination of a group of volunteers. YouthBuild programs that sent volunteers and/or scholars include YCC YouthBuild Waukegan (IL), the Urban League of Rochester (NY), ReSource YouthBuild (VT), YouthBuild Schenectady (NY) and YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (PA). Volunteer hours were spent at the recycling stations where students learned more about recycling than they ever anticipated

Students representing YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School that attended as volunteers had only just finished the program's orientation and selection process called Mental Toughness. Upon return to the program, they posted [an entry on a blog](#) that YouthBuild USA and partner Saint-Gobain/CertainTeed created for them to showcase their work rebuilding green homes in their communities.

As residents of low- to very low- income communities, YouthBuild staff, students and graduates represent the people and places that too often bear disproportionately negative consequences of the unsustainable building practices of our society. Buildings and homes in these communities were built using cheaper and more toxic materials including lead paint and compressed woods. Waste treatment plants and other hazardous sites are located nearby. Food deserts offer little in the way of affordable and nutritional meals.

Poverty and prejudice plague YouthBuild cities and towns, making environmental justice a difficult task particularly where access to environmental education and awareness is weak. Like worker bees, the five YouthBuild scholars, 12 student volunteers and three staff volunteers at Greenbuild filled up on green building knowledge in order to go home and plant some seedling ideas for how their program can be a catalyst for change. It is our hope that we too provided something of value in the conversation about green affordable housing and the importance of the triple bottom line—making decisions that equally benefit people, profits and the planet.

YouthBuild USA has been supporting the building of more environmentally responsible homes and increased environmental awareness since the launch of the organization's Green Initiative in 2005. Since then, we have managed over \$2.8 million dollars in funding for green building trainings, industry-recognized certification, green career pathways development and environmental education. The Green Initiative is also administering a \$1.3 million Weatherization Innovation Pilot Program grant from the Department of Energy that will assist six YouthBuild programs to weatherize just under 1,000 units of low-income housing while training and employing YouthBuild graduates and other residents as installers, auditors, and crew chiefs.

We want to hear your voice at Greenbuild 2012 in San Francisco. [Apply for a Greenbuild Scholarship today!](#)

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