

YouthBuild USA  
**YouthBuild Innovations**  
Creative and Effective Practices from YouthBuild  
Programs  
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**ReCycle North integrates YouthBuild into social  
enterprise; promotes green building, sustainability,  
and job readiness**

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- Tom Longstreth, Executive Director, ReCycle North

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Editor's Note:

YouthBuild is a movement dedicated to liberating the positive energies of young people in low-income communities. There is also an emerging effort for local YouthBuild programs to incorporate environmental stewardship in their building practices. One might ask how these two honorable goals can be brought together.

This story shows how these two goals can be integrated into an effort that also provides an income stream for the parent organization. It combines environmental stewardship with early

exposure to work while generating income through deconstruction and retail activities. Students play critical roles in every area.

ReCycle North in Burlington, Vermont demonstrates that all of these efforts can be integrated. They have demonstrated how YouthBuild can be integrated into a social enterprise, and how this integration can have benefits for students, staff, the community, and the enterprise itself.

Madeline McNeely-Esposito interviewed the staff of ReCycle North. This article was the result of a recent national survey of green building practices at local YouthBuild programs conducted in the fall of 2005. This was carried out by YouthBuild USA staff Eva Blake, Green Initiative Coordinator and Aya Sethi, Director of Research and Evaluation.

For more information about ReCycle North and its approach, contact Tom Longstreth, the executive director or John Westie, the YouthBuild director at ReCycle North. They can be reached at [tlongstreth@recyclenorth.org](mailto:tlongstreth@recyclenorth.org) or [jwestie@recyclenorth.org](mailto:jwestie@recyclenorth.org). You can also call them at (802)658-4143.

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## Why did you decide to recycle and reuse construction materials?

ReCycle North made the decision to start a Building Material Reuse (BMR) enterprise in 2001 after completing a small reuse pilot project and completing a business plan for this new enterprise. ReCycle North has a three-part mission of reuse, job training, and poverty relief and felt that developing this new enterprise could advance each part of this mission. ReCycle North started the reuse and poverty relief components first, and then added YouthBuild as the training component in 2004. ReCycle North seeks to fully integrate the reuse, job training and poverty relief components of its work because each part reinforces and strengthens the other. According to Tom Longstreth, Executive Director of ReCycle North in Burlington, VT, "This has definitely been the case with YouthBuild and the Building Material Reuse enterprise as the combination has allowed us to improve our training, to create jobs for graduates, and to increase the amount of reuse and poverty relief we accomplish. Reuse sales also fund some parts of our training."

There are actually three parts of the BMR. (1) A Deconstruction Service gives homeowners and construction contractors an environmentally responsible alternative to traditional "crunch and dump" demolition. Buildings, rather than being demolished, are systematically taken apart through reverse construction. Up to 80% of the materials are salvaged for reuse. ReCycle North charges for this service but this cost is generally competitive with demolition. Customers also may deduct the value of the materials salvaged if they decide, as most do, to donate these materials to ReCycle North. (2) Materials salvaged by the Deconstruction Crew are brought to ReCycle North's Building

Material Center. This store is open to the public who are attracted by the low prices and great finds. Low income people and non profit organizations are able to get materials for free through ReCycle North's Essential Goods program. (3) The most recent addition to the BMR enterprise is called Waste Not Products. Salvaged materials are converted to new products including garden sheds, picture frames, shelving, and bird houses. This enterprise creates jobs, provides valuable carpentry training opportunities, and generates revenue.

YouthBuild is involved in each of these enterprises. YouthBuild crews use materials salvaged by the Deconstruction Crew in their affordable housing construction projects. Students benefit by working with the professional staff in each of the reuse departments and many students graduate and take jobs within the enterprise.

### **How does YouthBuild fit into this scheme?**

#### Construction training available; obtaining a job is a goal

"We build low-income housing with Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity. Habitat acts as the developer while ReCycle North YouthBuild serves as the general contractor. " And like traditional YouthBuild programs, ReCycle North has an entire training component focused on construction training. They call their students 'Partners'. "This designation is capitalized even mid-sentence. This touch makes clear the unique level of respect we accord them," said John Westie, ReCycle North's YouthBuild director. They usually enroll five to eight individuals during each of three intake sessions during the year. The program lasts nine months. This includes eight months of intensive work with a paid stipend. Partners are required to look for a job during the last month of the program.

Every Partner is also required to participate in academic training to attain their GED.

Partners are also required to participate in weekly BMR staff meetings and provide updates to the rest of their colleagues.

### Program enhancements through the BMR enterprise

#### *Building with recycled and reused materials*

The program also has several enhancements that are related to its BMR activities. They are teaching crews how to build with recycled and reused materials. Adam Miller, ReCycle North's job site supervisor believes using salvaged materials in the construction adds to the value of the training. "If they can build with reclaimed materials and do it well, they will be even better at new materials once they're out in the construction workforce," Adam commented.

#### *Deconstruction: Taking out reusable materials*

Once a month, YouthBuild Partners work with the deconstruction crew to take apart old buildings. Together they pull out cabinets, windows, lights, doors, hardwood flooring, and other reusable materials. In several days Partners learn to save vinyl siding, use specialized tools like a denailing gun, and re-roll insulation. Unusable clean wood goes to the Burlington Electric power plant for burning, and metal no longer suitable for construction is recycled for other uses. Currently there are four full-time staff working on the Deconstruction Crew. Three of the four are YouthBuild graduates. "The advantage of working on the deconstruction crew is that Partners can see what goes into a house in about four days. This is something that they would learn in four months if they were just building houses. They also have access to more experienced staff who have experience in the construction industry," Tom Longstreth observed.

### *Internships in retail and fine carpentry*

Partners also have access to internships through other parts of the organization. This includes placements in ReCycle North's appliance and computer repair departments, both retail stores, and the administrative office. This provides a range of useful learning experiences. Partners who have completed their GED are eligible for these placements and earn \$24 for each 3-hour block of time spent at the placement in addition to their stipends.

ReCycle North also has internship opportunities for partners interested in fine carpentry work where they take scrap wood and other reusable materials to build custom furniture, picture frames, bird houses, and even garden sheds. Partners who show an interest in this work can do more job shadowing with the staff person whose work focuses in this area.

### *Program and organizational culture emphasize performance*

ReCycle North started out as an enterprise sustaining itself through its retail, fine carpentry, and deconstruction activities. Performance has been a big emphasis since the beginning. Efficiency in deconstruction work, fine craftsmanship, and good customer service have been hallmarks of the BMR business.

ReCycle North maintained this emphasis on performance when they added YouthBuild to their portfolio. They evaluate students and reward good effort through a Performance Multiplier. In order to get paid in full, Partners are required to meet a set of performance standards that are part of every work area.

### **What are the indications that your approach is working?**

Some YouthBuild graduates end up working full-time for ReCycle North. One of the graduates from July, 2005 is going to the

University of Vermont taking three night courses while working full time on the Deconstruction crew.

The program has also developed a network of support from other community-based agencies. Other youth counseling and shelter programs provide applicants for the YouthBuild program, for example.

### **What would you advise other programs that are interested in starting this line of business?**

#### *Exposing students to diverse work experiences*

"There is a certain amount of synergy and magic when you have two completely different efforts under one organization," reflected Tom. "These different activities create a context that works for the Partners. Each Partner can shine in a different context. Not every student shines in the same work environment, but change the work environment and we see miracles happen with the Partners."

Tom encourages program directors to design as many opportunities for diverse work experiences as possible. He suggests that programs can do this by making use of the program organization's resources to offer experiences in office management and maintenance. "The varied experiences really make a difference forming a work ethic [among students]."

#### *Joining the BMRA*

Tom encouraged organizations to get more information through the Building Materials Reuse Association (BMRA), a national network of organizations. Go to <http://www.ubma.org> for more information.

### **Other YouthBuild USA resources on related topics**

The following materials are available to order or download by going to the YouthBuild USA Web site at [www.youthbuild.org](http://www.youthbuild.org).

Cobb County YouthBuild design charette sparks student creativity; increases knowledge of sustainable building practices. In **YouthBuild Innovations**, July, 2005. This is available free to download.

**Working Hands, Working Minds Curriculum Guides.** Especially Unit 5: Housing and Community. This is available to affiliates for \$35.00

Green Education Complements the YouthBuild Experience. In **From the Field**, July, 2003. The Environmental Issue. This is available free to download.

Builders and Buyers Benefit from Energy-efficient Housing. In **From the Field**, July, 2003. The Environmental Issue. This is also free to download.

Hands on Green Construction. Find it in the YouthBuild Conference Materials. This is a free download.