

Urban Releaf



*Organizing Work Programs for
High School Students*
Kemba Shakur, Executive Director

Urban Releaf



Urban Releaf provides school-year work opportunities for approximately 200 high school students a year. "The need is so great," says Kemba. "Did you know Oakland is always several degrees hotter than Berkeley due to urban heat island effect?"

Through an innovative on-the-job training program that utilizes sophisticated equipment and computer programs to study the environmental benefits of trees, local youth learn not only important job skills as they plant and care for trees, but also math, science, and technology as they work with sophisticated equipment and computer programs to study the trees' environmental benefits.

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Since our founding, we have mentored and trained more than 4,000 youth in tree planting and maintenance projects. Trees provide meaningful educational experiences for youth.

At-risk teens from Oakland and Richmond learn about GIS data, statistical analysis, and measuring stormwater runoff and contaminants as part of a watershed research project with UC Davis funded by CalFed.

Urban Relief



Students involved in the California Watershed Grant project are responsible for:

- Communicating and organizing neighborhoods for tree planting.
- Preparing areas and planting the trees.
- Developing a GIS database and monitoring data on streets, parcel boundaries, land cover, land use, storm sewer flows.

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Youth from the Youth Employment Partnership, Inc. (YEP), East Bay Conservation Corp, and other local youth organizations provide hands-on tree planting and maintenance, community clean-up, office support and advocacy.

Urban Releaf provides volunteer opportunities for approximately 200 high school students a year. One year, students produced a coloring book for young students called "The Adventures of Captain Releaf in the City," focusing on urban forestry as it relates to an urban environment.

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Urban Releaf reaches out to younger children as well. Through the Urban Forestry Program, they have provided 1,200 trees to elementary schoolchildren and exposed them to the deep satisfaction of beautifying their environment. "Not one of those trees has been harmed," she notes. "The young people take care of them."

Urban Releaf's Urban Forestry Program at Oakland elementary schools and day care centers exposes youth to science, arboriculture, environmental education, tree planting and maintenance, and employment opportunities. Since 1999, more than 4,000 students have participated in this program.

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To date, Urban Releaf has planted and maintained more than 8,500 trees on median strips and public sidewalks in low-income communities through the East Bay. Urban Releaf concentrates on predominantly low-to-moderate income neighborhoods in Oakland and in Richmond, California.

Kemba knows they are making a difference in the community. "People tell me they never really saw trees before they met me, and now they see them all the time. That makes me feel like the work has been important."

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