

Urban high-schoolers are often disadvantaged in engineering and other fields. **Green Works** is giving them opportunities.

By David Karas / Correspondent

Lyndon Ersery is a junior studying engineering at the University of Missouri. Thanks to intensive workforce training, he is well on his way to a successful career in the field.

A product of the public school system in Kansas City, Mo., Mr. Ersery is familiar with the barriers that students who don't have access to contacts and internships encounter in trying to explore such a field. He credits Green Works, a nonprofit organization in Kansas City, with helping to provide him with a launching pad for his collegiate – and soon professional – career, and with “educating inner-city students like me and giving us a beacon of hope that we can be someone.”

Founded in 2007, Green Works blends workforce development and environmental education for urban high-schoolers. It forms partnerships with other organizations to help establish networks and opportunities for students, who receive job skills training and financial literacy education, in addition to paid internships.

Since the nonprofit's founding, at least 280 students – Ersery included – have participated, and the team is working with 100 more students this academic year.

A how-to for students

For Jerry Rose, Green Works's director of community outreach and partnerships, the workforce development aspect of the organization is all about fostering opportunities, as well as the skills necessary to take advantage of those opportunities.

“Most organizations that mentor youth are activity-based,” says Mr. Rose, a retired FBI agent who came to Kansas City wanting to give back to the community and mentor young men and women, including those who don't have positive adult role models. “Few nonprofits actually sit down with them and instruct, and tell them how to conduct themselves, how



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POSITIVE EXPERIENCE: Jerry Rose (l.), a member of the Green Works staff, poses with college student Lyndon Ersery at the nonprofit's headquarters in Kansas City, Mo.

to prepare for an interview, how to act at work, how to be responsible, how to be accountable, and how to take criticism.”

The Green Works approach includes training in each of those areas, including the creation of a LinkedIn profile and strategies for pursuing an internship.

Kate Corwin, Green Works's founder

Green Works has educated 'inner-city students like me and [given] us a beacon of hope that we can be someone.'

– **Lyndon Ersery**, college student who has participated in the nonprofit's programming

and president, is familiar with the dearth of professional opportunity for many city youths, having grown up in an urban neighborhood herself, and from her experience working with disadvantaged populations. “Our students live in neighborhoods with few resources,” she says. “They have less exposure to role models from the business community. Many of our students are from low-income families and lack not only financial resources, but social capital connections to help them transition into the workplace.”

Ms. Corwin launched Green Works after seeing students graduate from high school without the means to continue their education. She also saw them struggle to find their place in the workforce.

“I realized that I could create programming that would expose high school students to growing careers including environmental careers in weatherization [of

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GALLERY OF RECENT PROFILES



The Rev. Faith Fowler is working to curb homelessness in Detroit through a tiny homes project.



Shara Fisler is bringing the ocean – as well as science – closer to low-income youths in San Diego.



Irene Li is trying to improve an interconnected food system via a food truck and restaurant in Boston.

buildings], sustainable energy, and resource management,” she says. “Not only would it benefit the young adults, but it would benefit Kansas City by increasing the number of young people working at their capacity and contributing to the economy, not to mention caring about the environment.”

The environmental focus

As Corwin alludes to, Green Works offers environmental educational experiences,

with some tangible outcomes for participants. Organizers have seen some of them make more-informed decisions about personal care products and food after learning about ingredients, and many become more comfortable in natural settings that aren't always common in urban communities.

In this way, Corwin says, Green Works uses the environment “as the learning platform” for students, who usually participate for at least two years but often remain en-

gaged in educational and service-oriented projects following the program.

“Our goal is to make long-term and life-changing investments in our students, empowering them to care for our environment, contribute to our economy, and create healthy communities,” Corwin says. “These students are future voters, taxpayers, homeowners, and environmental stewards.”

■ For more, visit greenworkskc.org.

Five ways to give back in 2018

As a new year begins, here are some ideas for being ‘the best you.’

THIS COLUMN is part of an occasional series about how you, too, can make a difference. It is written by the head of our partner organization UniversalGiving, which helps people give and volunteer in more than 100 countries.



By Pamela Hawley

It's a clean slate! As author and motivational speaker Les Brown says, “You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”

Many of us are inspired to live better, cleaner, more positive lives. A lot of us have created New Year's resolutions, although some of us have a simple, general resolution, such as being “the best you” that you can be. As Mr. Brown encourages us, it's never too late to be a new you.

With that in mind, here are five ways to give back in the new year.

Shop in your closet. Yes, it's time. You keep thinking that you're going to wear that shirt or that sweater. So either do it, or gather such items up and give them away.

Please note: You will be giving not only to others, but also to yourself. After paring down your closet, you'll be able to find your clothes and decide on outfits more quickly. Meanwhile, your clothes will be helping someone else present themselves in a better way, personally and professionally.

Give yourself a trip abroad. Have you wanted to go somewhere exotic, but felt guilty about spending the money? Don't feel guilty anymore. Visit Vietnam and do some sight-seeing, and then tag on a volunteer trip!

For example, you can volunteer in Vietnam with The Bamboo Project (<http://bit.ly/VietnamBamboo>). Share your skills and

heart in orphanages, disability centers, and schools in the capital, Hanoi.

Remember, volunteering is life-changing. Be prepared that when you return from your trip, your life won't be the same. You may be more moved to help others live a simpler life and to give back even more.

Support women-led businesses. Such ventures often take a lot of courage to start and maintain. Look up a women-led business in your community today and patronize it.

One example is in San Francisco: Farm-girl Flowers, which was started by Christina Stempel. It sends out 1,200 to 1,400 flower arrangements a day; every month, it donates to nongovernmental organizations.

When you support a women-led business, you support women models for the younger generations to come.

‘Be prepared that when you return from [a trip volunteering], your life won't be the same.’

— Pamela Hawley, philanthropy expert

Be an extreme volunteer. Many of you have done one-day volunteer projects. But have you thought about being an “extreme volunteer”? That means a weekly commitment to helping someone in serious need.

One option is serving as a CASA volunteer (the acronym is for the national organization Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children). You train to be a legal advocate for a foster-care youth who needs extra support. He or she might need to be encouraged in education, protected from a



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neighbor, or simply listened to. Volunteering for three to five hours a week may be the most consistent presence one of these youths has.

Give back to yourself. While I've talked about ways you can give to others, giving back to yourself is important to keep yourself reenergized.

Some people need downtime watching a football game. Others would like to leave work early and spend more time with their children. Some people pray or meditate. The point is, you have to do something that will allow you to breathe and attain peace. Then, go back into the world to be your best self.

* * *

Live a new life by giving back in fresh and different ways. I hope this column has given you some good ideas for 2018 that will make your life vibrant and filled with joy.

■ Pamela Hawley is the founder and chief executive officer of Universal-Giving (www.universalgiving.org). She is a recipient of the Jefferson Award – the Nobel Prize of community service. She also writes the blog “Living and Giving” (pamelahawley.wordpress.com).