



Groundwork Catalyst

Vikas Javed

Walking alongside Vikas Javed on Elmora Avenue means walking among waves and hand shakes from every passerby. It is evident that he is one of Elizabeth, New Jersey’s most respected and influential youth. So when Jonathan Phillips, Executive Director at Groundwork Elizabeth (GWE), needs help planning a project, he knows he can turn to Vikas. “If Mr. Phillips tells me ‘coordinate this’, I’ll do it for him in a heartbeat. Once it’s done, once we get there, people and other kids my age are having a blast.”

As a member of GWE’s first Green Team, Vikas has progressed from an artist & environmental steward to a project planner, recruiter and educator for new members. “I love doing it because people...want to be apart of something which is beneficial to others, and at the same time, have fun.”

Helping others is “extremely important” to Vikas, and is his primary motive for remaining on the Green Team and one day becoming a doctor. Following the Native American teachings of Green Team Leader Dave Wiener, Vikas’ sense of healing has matured through learning how to track animals, identify medicinal plants, and expand his sense of self and the environment. As he joined Mr. Wiener on

“At first I just thought Groundwork Elizabeth was just another non-profit organization, but once I got involved, I just can’t leave...I’ve benefited so much from it.”

“dry runs”, exploring the streets of Elizabeth, Vikas soon discovered that any environment can be a learning venue. “When I walk down the sidewalk, it’s not just a sidewalk; I see it in a different perspective. I see plants, here and there, and if anything were to happen, I could use them for my and other people’s benefit.”

“AT FIRST I THOUGHT ‘WHOA WHAT IS THIS GUY TALKING ABOUT?’ BUT THEN I REALIZED ‘HE’S MAKING A LOT OF SENSE.’ NOW WHEN WE GO HIKING, IT ALWAYS BECOMES MORE THAN JUST A SIMPLE HIKE.”

*-Vikas Javed,
on Green Team Leader Dave Wiener (GWE)*

Last October, Vikas and his teammates took their teachings to the Groundwork USA Youth Conference in Washington D.C., tracking deer in a forest along the Anacostia River with a curious crowd of Green Team members from other Groundwork trusts. “They had no idea what tracking was...when I spoke to them, many of the other teams planted flowers, built community centers; they were more hands-on...so, we basically passed that trait [tracking] on to the other Green Teams from all over the nation, and they gave us many more ideas on how to plant.”

Never one to shy away from teaching, Vikas continues to seek out knowledge-

sharing opportunities. “When I was a freshman, I used to tutor geometry...and soon we’ll [GWE] be talking to the veterans of [Peterstown Community] Center and tell them what kinds of plants we planted, why we planted these certain plants, and their benefits...I don’t mind teaching, because I also learn in the process.”

Experiences like these are cultivating a future educator and healer in Vikas. “I want to be a doctor so I can teach people..and heal people, not just with the latest medication, but even with natural and, medicinal, herbs.”

“I WANT TO BE A DOCTOR SO I CAN TEACH PEOPLE..AND HEAL PEOPLE NOT JUST WITH...THE LATEST MEDICATION, BUT EVEN WITH NATURAL AND MEDICINAL HERBS.”

With pre-med courses only a year away, Vikas is appreciating how momentous his Green Team experience is at GWE. “I never knew how much I would gain from it. At first, I just thought Groundwork Elizabeth was another non-profit organization, but once I got involved, I just can’t leave...I’ve benefited so much from it. I go around and I say ‘hey, I’m part of Groundwork Elizabeth and I’m making a difference.”

