



## NEWS RELEASE

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### New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg Receives National Award from The Corps Network for their service project –

#### Plan ‘Bee’: The Pollinator Project



**Washington, DC – February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020**— New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg received a 2020 [Project of the Year Award](#) from The Corps Network in recognition of their service Project – Plan ‘Bee’- The Pollinator Project - at a ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC as part of The Corps Network’s 35<sup>th</sup> annual national conference, “[Thrive: The Power of Community](#).”

[The Corps Network](#), the national association of Service and Conservation Corps, presents this prestigious award on an annual basis to select organizations from their [membership](#) of over 130 Corps across the country. Through advocacy and providing Corps access to funding opportunities and expert guidance, The Corps Network annually enables more than 25,000 Corpsmembers to strengthen communities, improve the environment and transform their lives through service.

Four Project of the Year Awards are presented on an annual basis to Corps that have undertaken especially influential or innovative initiatives. Projects of the Year are noteworthy for their ability to provide both a positive experience for Corpsmembers and meaningful improvements to the community. Awardees are chosen through a competitive nomination and review process.

Now in its 35<sup>th</sup> year, New Jersey Youth Corps is one of the largest youth service and conservation corps in the United States. Funded through the [New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce](#)

[Development](#). Youth Corps is a year-round, locally administered, voluntary program that engages young adults (ages 16 to 25) in full-time community service, training, and educational activities. Guided by staff who serve as mentors and role models, teams of youth called "crews" carry out a wide range of service projects. [New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg](#) primarily engages young adults in environmental and conservation work in the Warren County area while pursuing an alternative path to education.

In return for their efforts to restore and strengthen communities, Corpsmembers receive:

- education development in basic skills and preparation to obtain a high school equivalency diploma or locally issued adult high school diploma.
- life skills and employability skills instruction.
- personal and career counseling to build self-esteem, clarify values, and develop leadership skills while they are developing their career portfolio.
- transition services and continuing support services as they transition to college, training, employment, or other national and domestic service opportunities.
- community service opportunities, which develop positive employability skills while addressing unmet community needs. Corpsmembers receive a stipend while enrolled in Youth Corps.

The rolling farmland outside Phillipsburg, NJ offers [NJYCP](#) the perfect environment to engage Corpsmembers in sustainable agriculture. Wanting to introduce young people to all stages of the food production cycle, the Corps began offering training in the ancient practice of apiculture, or beekeeping. To date, NJYCP's programs and projects have relied on the collective experiences and knowledge of Corps staff. For this endeavor, NJYCP relied on help from their local 4-H chapter and other volunteers. Getting the program started also required drawing on the Corps' other talents: they used their woodworking skills to build and repair hives and used their landscaping and gardening skills to install native plants to support pollinators. Over the past calendar year, 30 Corpsmembers served over 1,000 hours on The Pollinator Project. Twenty-six of the 30 participants successfully completed the NJYCP program and nearly all of them have secured employment or entered college or another training program. Corpsmembers overwhelmingly cite work on "Plan Bee" as influential to their success. The program teaches environmental sustainability, helps Corpsmembers overcome fear of nature, and gives them a sense of responsibility and confidence. Considering NJYCP's nature as a "second-chance" program, the name "Plan Bee" – which was coined by Corpsmembers – is especially meaningful. In 2019, Corpsmembers harvested over 40 pounds of honey, leaving plenty behind for the bees to winter-over. The program has created a lot of "buzz" in the community and raised the Corps' profile. As the program demonstrates, "communities thrive when they are tended to."

"Over the past year – with funding from the **NJYC Recognizing Individuals Struggles and Experiences (RISE)** grant – we have taken a more intensified approach in addressing issues of substance abuse and the stigma of mental health issues. We could not think of a service project that better parallels the lives of our Corpsmembers. Bees are besieged by insidious forces not readily visible to all and they are facing an ever-growing lack of resources and suitable, sustainable habitats. Our Corpsmembers face similar dynamics. Plan 'Bee' has proven to be an effective model for increasing both the Corpsmembers and bees' ability to thrive in their respective communities." said NJYCP Director Michael Muckle.

"The Project of the Year Award celebrates ingenuity in the national Corps community. Projects of the Year demonstrate the power of national service programs to change lives and change communities," said Mary Ellen Sprenkel, President and CEO of The Corps Network. "With this award, we have the opportunity to recognize extraordinary individuals and programs from our

network and shed light on the vast capabilities of Corps. The Corps Network is humbled to represent such inspiring and impactful organizations as New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg.”

NJYCP Program Coordinator Jenn Fazekas added “Since beginning our beekeeping journey in the spring of 2018, I have been lucky enough to work closely with other beekeepers within our community. Being able to learn from them has allowed me to extend my newfound passion and knowledge to our Corpsmembers. The entire experience has been so rewarding, especially being able to bridge the gap that exists between so many young people and the natural world. Teaching the inner-workings of a beehive, stressing the importance of how each worker bee must perform a specific job that coincides with all other jobs to create a harmonious and bountiful hive, has certainly translated to our Corpsmembers being able to see within themselves the vital roles they play in making their community a place they want to live and be an active part of. After all, communities, much like beehives, thrive when they are tended to.”

For more information about New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg, please visit [www.njycphillipsburg.com](http://www.njycphillipsburg.com)

To learn more about The Corps Network, visit [www.corpsnetwork.org](http://www.corpsnetwork.org).

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Above: (l-r) Marie Walker, Adam Zipkin, Jennifer Fazekas, Michael Muckle



Above: (l-r) Lauren Edwards-Johnson, Conor Rooney, Rep. Tom Malinowski (NJ 7th), Michael Muckle, Tyler Begley