

“Helping people like that hiker was a powerful experience.”

—DAN MARTINEZ
Yosemite Leadership Program

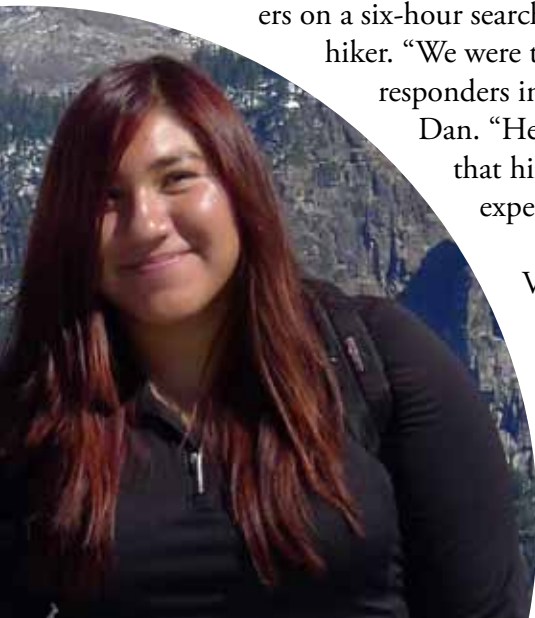
MAKING Dreams COME TRUE



Youth in Yosemite Participants Share Their Inspirational Stories

It was getting late, almost 11 p.m. The hiker was panicked, having lost contact with his friend on their trek back from Yosemite’s Half Dome a few hours before. The air was growing cold.

Fortunately, he arrived at a backcountry camp staffed by two park rangers and four interns with the Yosemite Leadership Program (YLP). YLP partners University of California, Merced students with National Park Service employees to teach stewardship and leadership skills. Dan Martinez, 25, one of the interns onsite that night, set off with the others on a six-hour search for the missing hiker. “We were the first responders in the area,” shared Dan. “Helping people like that hiker was a powerful experience.”



Vera Reyes, 19, faced a different set of challenges in Yosemite as a participant in Adventure Risk

Challenge, a 40-day summer immersion program that uses the wilderness experience to improve academic, literacy and other skills. One of her memories was gaining the confidence to teach younger students about the park’s ecology. “Many kids didn’t know what a meadow is,” she said. “To help educate them meant a lot to me.”

Vera’s and Dan’s experiences stem from a common bond: both participated in Youth in Yosemite Programs supported by Yosemite Conservancy. The Conservancy has contributed more than \$2.3 million over the last two years to fund a variety of Youth in Yosemite Programs with a goal to provide \$1.3 million this year. These programs combine the best in youth development with park preservation, such as restoring trails, teaching children about the wild or working in wilderness areas alongside National Park Service staff.

Learning By Doing

Growing up, a trip Dan took with his uncle hooked him on the outdoors. “We went backpacking in Alaska and my uncle taught me about natural history and animal behavior,” Dan said. “Little conversations



TOP Dan Martinez (far left in uniform) with fellow Youth in Yosemite participants. **LEFT** YLP participant, Dan Martinez, pauses for a photo by the Grizzly Giant in Mariposa Grove.



DID YOU KNOW?

Over 95 miles of trails have been restored by Youth in Yosemite participants through the CCC (California Conservation Corps) and YCC (Youth Conservation Corps)

about food sources for a Red-winged Blackbird had a big impact on me. It made me want to try and give back and contribute to the environment.” He seized that opportunity with YLP.

He said the YLP staff serve as role models and mentors that teach young people about becoming better leaders and about self-empowerment. “They love what they do and they’re passionate about it,” he said. “That feeling is contagious.”

Dan’s summer season was spent working with park rangers in the search and rescue group in Little Yosemite Valley. He advised hikers about tricky spots on the trail, provided basic first aid and once even helped to evacuate a hiker suffering from seizures.

Dan remembers with excitement working with the team to pinpoint the lost hiker’s location. “We finally heard a faint voice in the distance. For sure, it was him,” Dan recalls. The lost hiker was stranded on a large rock outcropping, too nervous to go up or down. With the dedicated help of the park search and rescue staff and the YLP interns, by 5 a.m., everyone was safely at camp, the hiker reunited with his relieved friend.

Dan explained that these hands-on experiences in Yosemite reinforced his love for the outdoors and that he’d like to eventually work for a nonprofit conservation group. “Your experiences in Yosemite always stay with you,” he shared.

His experiences have encouraged him to pass along the wonders of Yosemite to others. Through YLP, Dan has worked with children to connect them with nature. “My first year in Yosemite we taught kids about the black bear’s unique appearance, how they live in certain areas and why they make good mothers. This gives them a deeper appreciation of nature and a desire to conserve and protect wild places,” said Dan.



One memorable night he led an astronomy program for a youth group at the base of Lembert Dome in Tuolumne Meadows that literally had them reaching for the stars.

“It was just so clear, the stars jumping out at you. It was probably one of the most vivid night skies I’ve ever seen,” he said. “Sitting there with those kids, seeing how they also were enthralled with it -- definitely one of my highlights.”

Finding Your Dream Job

Vera hadn’t had the chance to visit Yosemite until she was in 11th grade, even though she grew up two hours away in Dos Palos a small town in California’s Central Valley. Her family was busy with agricultural work and did not have time for exploring the outdoors. That changed for Vera when a friend invited her to Yosemite.

“The first thing that caught my eye was El Capitan. I had no idea there was such a granite rock like that,” Vera reminisced. “Just seeing and knowing this place existed gave me an urge to come back. It made me wish I had a job there.”

By participating in ARC, Vera overcame her fears of public speaking, heights and trust in others. Along the way she developed a newfound confidence and strong leadership skills. By learning to depend on others she found new strength in herself. She also credits the program with improving her writing and presentation skills.

In one ARC exercise she had to work her way through a ropes course 50 feet off the ground. She said her fellow participants were like her family, shouting words of encouragement as she climbed.

“When I was up there, there were a lot of emotions,” she said. “I was supposed to depend and trust my classmates.

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Support Youth in Yosemite Projects by becoming a Yosemite Conservancy member.

Make a gift today that will preserve and protect Yosemite for today and for future generations. Click [here](#) to make your gift.



“It changes how you feel about yourself and about the need to protect wilderness.”

-VERA REYES
ADVENTURE RISK CHALLENGE



ABOVE Participation in the ARC program leads to educational success and youth empowerment, building of life skills and personal achievement.


They were holding the rope steady for me.” By learning to depend on others, she developed a new inner strength and was inspired to give back to the community. Vera has volunteered with a local church choir, tutored children with their reading and planted areas to improve bird nesting.

During her journey of self-discovery, Vera began to understand the transformative power of nature. “It changes how you feel about yourself and about the need to protect wilderness,” she said. For her ARC graduation ceremony, she made sure to introduce another person to Yosemite that had never visited before. “My mother took so many pictures on her first visit, probably 200, of simple things like trees, large rock formations and meadows,” she said. “Just like my first visit, I wanted to stop at every point in the Valley because there are so many inspiring things to see that are new and different. The visit helped her understand why this place means so much to me.” ■



Learn More!

YOUTH IN YOSEMITE VIDEOS



The Youth in Yosemite signature project encompasses 9 individual programs on education, mentoring and wilderness exploration.

Watch interviews from participants and learn more about the projects.

CLICK TO WATCH VIDEOS

