

0:01
welcome to the garden gate a podcast where we talk to
professionals across many fields who work directly and
0:07
indirectly with plants and our natural world we are students at
american university in washington dc and interns
0:14
at smithsonian gardens we have created this project with the
hopes of inspiring a new generation to make sustainable and
0:20
meaningful change in our world i'm kira berba and i am caroline
mcdonald and
0:25
this week we are talking with ebony preston about plants and
what students can do now to jumpstart their career
0:31
ebony works at the greening youth foundation in atlanta georgia
as the director of operations
0:39
hi ebony good morning how are you doing today i'm great how
are you feeling a little bit warm in washington dc it's
0:46
getting really warm these days so i can say the same thing here
in georgia
0:51
the pollen is in rare form right now too i know my desk i've had
my windows open
0:56
completely covered in pollen yeah my car's green my car was not
green when
1:02
i bought it well we're really excited to have you can you tell us a
little bit about
1:07
yourself sure sure so as you said my name is ebony preston i
serve as the director of operations for greeny youth
1:14
foundation i've been here for about five years uh super excited
about that in millennial
1:20
terms that's like 100 years so it's a really big accomplishment in
my world
1:26
um but yeah i have the honor of working in the environmental
sector and uh kind of that
1:33
bridge between the environmental work and workforce
development what's really cool was this was not my
1:38
path this was not the plan i went to undergrad with the goal of
being an orthopedic
1:44
surgeon so i went to school in north carolina where everybody's
either a doctor or a lawyer so i chose the doctor
1:50
path and i studied biology and history the history was just to
learn a little bit about myself while being there um
1:58
but yeah that was the work i wanted to serve people through
science and through medicine and so i stayed on that path
2:04

until my senior year in fact and i went on a week trip with the
naacp
2:10
around the state maybe two hours away from campus i went to
school in durham and my world just opened back up i was
2:17
like people are really struggling out here they need some help um
and so i called my mom in a panic you know we
2:23
always call moms and i don't know what to do tell me what to do
help me fix the world and so i called her she said well
2:29
just take some time off like just just figure it out right and so i
ended up shortly after graduation i think i came
2:35
home for about a week i moved to louisiana and i did americorps
and i did a year of service through city year
2:42
completely changed my life the teachers and the social workers
there were the movers and shakers and they were getting
2:47
stuff done i was so inspired by the work so i called my mom
back again and said hey i'm not going to go to med school
2:53
anymore i'm going to go to the school of social work and she's
like what um but it worked out and so after i stayed in
2:59
louisiana for some time i moved to new york got my masters of
science in social work specifically studying social
3:06
enterprise administration and that would start me on my path of
workforce development and working with non-profits
3:12
and doing work there um and people always ask you know
what's sea what social enterprise administration i say having a
business
3:19
mind and a management mind but with the people in mind right
so the work on the community level really matters um and so
3:26
i i had a plan to stay in in new york but my brother was in high
school at the time he's like hey i kind of miss my
3:32
sister can you come home to georgia i was like okay guilt trip so
i ended up
3:38
moving back to georgia it all worked out i found greeny's
foundation shortly thereafter and i've been here for the
3:45
last like i said five years and it's just been an amazing journey to
work with youth and young people and the
3:51
environment i'm a small town country girl so it's been really nice
to kind of see that in my day to day
3:57
that's so interesting it's funny that you say that you kind of had
this changing experience
4:03
through americorps because the first person we talked to ryan
gooch had the same thing like
4:08

americorps really like changed his perspective on what he wanted to do with his life
4:14
before i came to college i did city year i didn't say you're in uh washington d.c yeah you said that i was like
4:22
city is magical i love city here it is it is an um yeah
4:29
i i could talk forever about it yeah it is magical oh i was just gonna say echoing uh
4:35
caroline yeah ryan also just like americorps changed his life and i was like yeah so it does
4:40
yeah no that's so cool to hear about your college experience and i think like
4:46
we just really want to like show people right like that our paths aren't linear so i really appreciate you sharing
4:51
absolutely so how did you come upon greeting youth foundation and what does greeting youth
4:57
foundation do sure sure so if i can be completely candid google
5:02
right so like i needed a job and i was in atlanta um as i said i worked in workforce development before and so i
5:09
knew i wanted to work in the nonprofit space is just really important to me to kind of be there that's the reason i
5:15
made the switch over and so i knew i wanted to do that and so i just found the opportunity there i
5:22
grew up in small towns between virginia and georgia and so just kind of reading the mission seeing
5:27
what they were doing being a part of that group of underserved underrepresented same similar narratives
5:33
that we had in americorps and with city year and how i just had this like dedicated time to giving to people who
5:39
typically weren't given to right they weren't given those extra resources and so when i saw that in a mission and i
5:45
had my interview um the ceo interviewed me and it was just like okay i see it
5:50
like these aren't folks that are just talking about it like they're actually doing the work and so just to kind of
5:56
frame it all what green youth foundation does its mission is to engage underserved underrepresented youth and
6:02
young adults and introduce them to careers in conservation and the whole entire environmental world if you will
6:09
and just to show that there's so much out there as far as opportunity and you
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know my background again like i said is social work and so just kind of finding refuge in nature and wellness and health
6:22
and how all of these things are connected um and just really giving them the exposure to do that and then again
6:28
if they're like hey i could work here then our job is like amplify right like we're really excited about those moments
6:34
where they say i can be a park ranger or a horticulturist or you know i can work in urban agriculture and being a
6:40
landscape architect or i can be a botanist and the list kind of goes on but just really creating these
6:46
opportunities and pathways for young people that's so cool and it's it's so funny how it happens like you just find
6:53
something that's so amazing on google and you've just never heard of it and it's doing amazing
6:58
things in your area just by like pure luck yeah it's just so funny i totally
7:03
agree i say when it's meant to be it's easy right so like when we're not supposed to fight stuff it just kind of
7:09
lines up for us so that's definitely what happened because google helped me that day definitely
7:18
yeah and how lucky are we to have like so many resources just like on the internet right that are just like
7:23
publicly accessible right yeah like sometimes it just takes like digging through pages and pages of
7:29
google to find something cool this was page one of results caroline page one of results which one yeah
7:35
that's what it's meant to be it's meant to be crazy
7:41
so do you want to talk a little bit about how high school students uh can start engaging with their futures
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like now from from what you've learned working with creating futures sure so i can shape it up too and
7:54
talking a little bit about our programming and opportunities there and how we've been able to engage students
8:00
of all ages right so starting with how we actually got our start so green news foundation was
8:06
birthed in georgia um so in gwinnett county our founder and ceo um was
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working with her neighbor or talking with her neighbor um they were and they wanted to do an earth day event at their
8:17
sun school um and so that's how we got to start they just wanted to kind of bring the environment to to these young
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folks our our ceo um she went to law school that's actually where she met our chief
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strategy officer they were classmates there but they had been in the legal field for so
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long and there wasn't a lot of representation at all she didn't have mentors she didn't have a network or
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people that she could kind of confide in that would understand her perspective and so the many layers there right in
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the millions of ways that she shows up to a space similar to how you and i show up in spaces um and so she wanted to
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create that and she wanted to make it accessible so thinking about all of that while doing an earth day event but
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needless to say she went into the school and she did that programming and it was such a good time that they ended up
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inviting them back to do more and wanted to do more programming and so that would kind of birth this after school or
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sometimes during school programs where they had a guitar and they had you know um little the globe beach balls that
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folks use and just talking about like composting and why it's good to recycle
9:20
and things like that um but what they found was that a lot of the students were already
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familiar with the the content so they were in snellville this is metro atlanta
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um and they were just like we can do so much more like we need to take this to the young people that necessarily don't
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that don't necessarily know about it and so they did that and they started moving within the city of atlanta and they
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found that the realities and the experiences of the young people were very different from folks that were in metro atlanta and so at that point they
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started to make a shift and make sure that the programming was culturally relevant that it was accessible that it
9:56
was age appropriate that it was dealing with the different nuances of this school versus that school or this
10:02
neighborhood versus that neighborhood or this reading level versus that one right and so considering all of that work and
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so through that it's like okay maybe it's we need to get to the point of talking about composting and recycling
10:14
but we also need to talk about like air pollution and why all of these kids have asthma or the fact that the kids think
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that milk and eggs come from the grocery store right like here's the whole process out there guys or like let's not
10:27
eat fast food every day or why we shouldn't litter or why does our park look the way that it does do i have
10:33
access to a park what is the implications of that of me not having access to green space so talking about
10:39
all these things that are right in front of their faces that they didn't even realize that were part of the environmental issues um even now we have
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kids that want to talk about flint and hurricane katrina and i'm like these are environmental issues and they're like
10:52
they are and so it sparks an ongoing conversation that we're able to have with these students so it's really about
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environmental stewardship for us and so i say that to young people k through 12 for these programs it's just learning
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right and putting yourself in situations and knowing that it's not an adult's problem it's not somebody else's problem
11:11
like it personally impacts us and so learning as much or getting involved as
11:16
possible so we have programs we have online programs but there's also organizations like 4-h or like boy
11:22
scouts and girl scouts or there's different meetup groups i know outdoor afro has several like meetup groups
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across the country where leaders are just going on hikes there's family days there too so i know kids got a million
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things going on with like school and just responsibilities and even with my adults i say hey if you're on something
11:41
and you're busy like especially with school like let that take priority but carve out a weekend once a month go
11:46
camping go hiking go go talk about you know what it go learn and talk about what it means to recycle and how you can
11:53
do that or if you want to compost at home but just becoming an environmental steward can be really simple it can
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start with something like recycling it can start by doing like a trash cleanup it could start by learning and
12:05
understanding where your food comes from um and letting that kind of be the path and so that's how we get started with
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our k through 12 students then we also have it's probably our big not probably it is our biggest department our
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internship program and that's where we're partnering with folks in the federal government with environmental
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ngos um with outdoor industry organizations so national park service
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forest service to like georgia audubon society to colombia and patagonia and
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keene organizations like this right and so there again workforce development that's that's what pulled me in this is
12:40
the department that got me uh to start working but to say hey if i give this young person an opportunity one i'm
12:47
going to pay them one i'm going to support them with like basic needs who would have thought right but giving them basic needs and support and a mentor and
12:54
a coach in a professional network in the skills and the confidence to do the work i bet they'll soar and we saw that it
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worked just that way and so in 2009 that's when our internship program started that's our youth conservation
13:06
corps and it's for really for people to test drive a career so we have students
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in there that maybe are freshmen and they're like i don't necessarily what i want know what i want to do my mom told
13:16
me i should study biology but like what does that actually look like in the field let me try it
13:22
sure you're welcome or folks that are saying no i knew from the age of three
13:27
when i first learned about chemistry that i wanted to be a chemist but i need some in the field experience sure you're
13:33
perfect for it too or hey i have a graduate degree and i know this is going to be my career and i know that i
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specifically wanted to work in a natural resource land management agency i want to work for the national park service
13:46
okay great you can come through our program and get a hiring authority and make that transition a lot easier you
13:51
come too so it's really meeting these young people where they are but also saying
13:56
you don't have to have a degree in a science field to be in this industry right so there's certainly a laundry
14:02
list of jobs and careers and opportunities there but then also look at me i have a background in social work
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uh our founders and ceo our founding team was two lawyers an engineer and a retired educator
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these agencies are also businesses at the end of the day so they need people in finance they need people in social
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media they need people um at the like for administration purposes
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like you name it and so these things are really really important so that's what we're kind of shedding light to and creating opportunities there so i say
14:32
again if you love science cool if you don't and you want to do something else cool you can still work in this
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environmental sector there's tons of opportunities there um and then just very quickly we also have our urban
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youth corps and so that was a kind of a homegrown effort in that we saw that we were creating so many opportunities for
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young people who maybe go their traditional route if you will of getting a two or four year degree but not
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everybody wants to go to school and not everybody has to and then the environmental world is very welcoming in
15:01
that way and that we say hey you can still be a leader in this and make a whole lot of money you can do good and
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do well at the same time and not have to you know get tons of student loan debt or go down that path of kind of planning
15:14
for scholarships and all those things whatever that looks like um but we have our urban youth corps which is based at
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about a four acre farm here in atlanta and so we're teaching young people about urban agriculture horticulture
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silviculture i jokingly say all the cultures of animal husbandry we have a hoop house we
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have trails we do a tree care program there we had a fire management program there and again they don't have to have
15:39
a formal degree so if they come to us and say hey i don't have my high school diploma yet or hey i don't have my ged
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yet we'll work with them to get those but then the extra credentialing and the experience in the hours that they have
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to put in we're doing it with them right so we're making it really accessible and people come out at the end of that
15:56
program with jobs with security with retirement plans with health insurance
16:02
like all of those things so there's tons of opportunities to kind of get in and we are one organization right so they
16:09
work with us for six months a year they can literally go anywhere with that work and there's other organizations doing
16:14
similar work so i just say i guess my advice there it's a long answer but is to say that there's so many
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opportunities and access points it's just a matter of finding the knowledge and being your own steward if if you

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will definitely and that just sounds so monumental

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uh i'm curious is it something that's confined to georgia or how widespread is

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the program yeah so our offices are in georgia but we've been national for since our start really um and so in the

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last couple of years we've been in 38 states in three u.s territories um so

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it's we the local efforts are really important right and so as much as we have programming um in different states

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we want to make sure that we're engaging communities from those states as well because kind of sending that back home

17:02

like hey little brother look what i did here at yosemite national park you know what i mean or hey this is what i was at

17:08

able to do at wayne national forest why don't you join me because i think community connection and this is also

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work of seeing is believing is really really important so we try to create those opportunities as much as possible

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the work that you all do is so extensive uh it's amazing thank you it really is

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um and like hearing you talk about it i just like love to hear from passionate people and i can like just hear how much

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this program means to you um how can folks who are not in atlanta join this program that's in other states

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sure sure so we're one we're always recruiting um and we work with a number

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of partner organizations community-based organizations there too right so we don't pretend to know everything about

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every place in all of the country i think if folks tell you that they're not telling you the truth don't listen to

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those people um but no i think it's really important for important for partner engagement so

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if this if last year wasn't like the age of kovid we would be on a plane in a car

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in a van on a bus and it's the team literally taking months at a time to go to different communities so if we know

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where our sites are that we're going to be working it's important for us to be on the ground like yes we have zoom now

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and you know we've always had the phone but that's not how a lot of these connections are made it's not meant to

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be transactional it's meant to be transformational right and so taking the time to invest in those communities i

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could call any of our partners right now and say hey i got a plan i got an idea like let's do this and i like game

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because people know that folks are here to do the work and to do it well and so i think making those connections is

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really important so i say that we're always recruiting because we're literally always recruiting so whether

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it's for partnerships whether it's for students whether it's for new opportunities whether it's for just new

18:54

friends or new stewardship and whatever that looks like the opportunity is always there

19:00

that's awesome i i can't even believe how amazing of a program this is it it's

19:07

so accessible to i i mean like i'm really like shocked to everyone because i just think it's so important because

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going back to what you're saying earlier about when you guys started uh with environmental stewardship like going out

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to the rural areas of of georgia where they just had less of an education about

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the subject i think to massachusetts where i grew up in the suburbs and we had like an environmental science and

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i got to learn a lot about it but i know that a lot of kids in boston itself the school systems aren't as good and i feel

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like they would really benefit from a program like this that would introduce them to careers that wouldn't necessarily need a degree or connect

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them to to opportunities um like that so just thinking how it would work in

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different communities like it would still work the same just like a little bit different it is is amazing i when when

19:57

you say that i think about we're all from some town right and we all have our different issues in

20:03

different spaces and places so boston you know to folks down south like boston's like whoa like that's up there

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that's where folks eat bagels and say really cool words like cookies and things like that but then when i worked

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and i got to move like i said i lived in new york and my friend when i was studying social work my best friend at the time she was also studying social

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work in boston and so we kind of used it as an excuse to go see each other but i

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got to do work with national parks of boston and so i've been able to do that with green youth foundation and so one of the other benefits and perks of this
20:35
work is that we're able to be a part of those conversations i'm a part of a a
20:40
network right now for park for every classroom and it's teachers and it's community organizations and it's folks
20:46
working at those national parks that are saying hey these students like what we saw in georgia don't necessarily know about
20:53
this or they don't know that agencies like the national park service exist i'm gonna be honest i didn't know the
20:58
national park service was an agency that encompassed all these different units until i got my job at green and youth
21:04
foundation and i was always in the like outside right like again small town country girl i always drove past like
21:11
cumber i went to cumberland island for a fifth grade field trip had no idea was part of the national park service i
21:18
drive by martin luther king all the time had no idea that it was part of national park service you know or it didn't
21:24
register everglades or yosemite national park that was a part of this larger agency so one
21:29
being able to have these conversations and it'd be like a real experience i'm like y'all see how into it i am i didn't
21:35
know about it until five years ago you know and so able to have that conversation with park rangers and
21:41
teachers helps to build that intentionality so it's more than just what green and youth foundation is doing
21:46
it's what organizations on the ground and what these larger federal agencies are doing too
21:52
yeah exactly like there are so many places in boston that like are historical places that are
21:57
national parks that you never would have guessed yeah that are part of this this system that you can work at it's just uh
22:03
it's so cool how it it looks different in every state oh yeah
22:08
but so there's really something for everyone so two really big programs that i'd love to highlight one being with the national
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park service and one with the forest service so starting with the forest service they have a program called the
22:20
resource assistant program um i think it's amazing so when i started with greening youth i like i said i was a
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program manager um and i got to really see this program from the very beginning
22:32
from the federal side but also from a partnership side um and so eventually down here in region eight so that's the
22:38
southern region for the forest service we created the career internship program and so again that intentionality that
22:44
we're talking about with with units and saying hey one there needs to be more
22:49
representation within the agency in so many ways but then two we need to
22:55
find a way to create like a pipeline or a pathway if you will and be really really intentional about it and so what
23:02
we were able to do is partner with the regional office down here to say what are jobs going to look like over the
23:08
course of the next year we knew that we had the hiring authority we knew that we could do recruitment i know the talents
23:13
out there it's never a matter of not having enough talent it's a matter of having enough opportunities for the
23:18
young people because they're excited people just need to know about it um and so we want to make sure that we're putting that in front of them um and so
23:24
we did that and so we said hey we're gonna hire 20 people for this cohort we're going to identify
23:30
some mentors we're going to identify some sites we're going to give them six months on the ground where we're going to be very intense
23:36
those six months but we're going to give them coaching we're going to give them field experience we're going to make sure that all the things that we wish we
23:42
would have had in that first year of a new job and then some that they get in these six months and when i tell you
23:48
that program was so successful i remember just kind of calling young people larry harris uh i'm gonna i'm not
23:54
gonna cry but larry harris when i reached him just for betting to say hey you know i see your resume you're coming
24:01
from tuskegee tell me a little bit about your interest and he's very much like me from a small town like i i like science
24:08
um i don't know necessarily what i'm going to do yet but i know that i want to be outdoors i know that i like the
24:13
environment and i'm like hey cool well i got a job in arkansas that i can match you with if you're interested in it he
24:19
was just like okay like i'll interview but he was like super emotional about it and i didn't know why it was our first

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time on the phone right and so he ended up wowing them i
wasn't surprised but he ended up getting selected for the
24:32
internship so me just calling him casually to say hey larry they
really liked you out in
24:37
arkansas they want to know if you'll take the position and he like
lost it he started crying
24:43
and i'm like what's happening what's happening like what's going
on i don't get it he's just like you don't understand like we don't
get
24:50
opportunities like this like this isn't something common like i
know i have my degree i know i've been told i can do it
24:55
and i see that i can do it but i didn't know how i was going to do it
right like what is that implementation i was like i
25:01
get that man like i get it i'm here with you like this is not a we
don't do internships where we make you an offer
25:07
and then you never hear from us again right like i'm in your
business if you don't call your mama i know about it right so
we're like in their business to
25:14
make sure that they are successful and so we did just that with
larry um i got to meet him several times over the
25:19
course of the internship and so what happened was at the end
he ended up getting extended so he ended up working
25:24
for a year but the force that he was doing his internship actually
made him an offer and so he got hired there and
25:31
so larry then calls me and say ebony guess what and i'm like
what larry it's wednesday at three i don't know he's
25:38
like i got hired i'm like hired by who and so he tells me and then i
start
25:43
crying so it was really like full circle but just to see how investing
in these young people you
25:49
never know how people are showing up even if it's just on the
phone the impact that you can make in someone's
25:55
life like literally in a year's time his life completely changed in his
communities in his class his classmates
26:01
or his little cousins and his family like people see what options
are so i think that's a beautiful um experience
26:08
and i'm so proud of that program the resource assistance
program i think overall with the partners they've
26:13
probably had like five or six hundred people matriculate through
the program at this point and they've had a whole lot of hires
26:19
for that first cohort that we had i think within the time period that
we were looking at we had about 60 hires

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but then over the course of the next couple of years 80 of the
people got hired by the federal government so
26:32
between the forest service and nracs um which is really really
good um to have
26:37
success for a program um so super proud of the work there and
then i'd be remiss if i didn't talk
26:43
about our program that we have with the national park service
it's actually our flagship program
26:48
hbcui so it's historically black colleges and universities
internship that's what the i stands for um and so
26:55
again a very intentional um program with the national park
service where they say hey there's a lot of there's there's no
27:02
representation like we we need to do better um and we can that
can connect these young people coming from hbcus to
27:09
cultural resource sites to natural resource sites to opportunities
within the national park service so over the
27:15
course of the last 10 years we literally had hundreds of um of
students matriculate through the program
27:21
we i made this stat the other day it was just a joke i was like our
admission rate is lower than harvard's like that's
27:28
impressive but it's just to show like the uniqueness and the
coolness of the program so we'll have like 40 positions
27:34
and have like 8 000 applications what like what and so it can be
hard for our staff
27:42
because so after i was the program manager i served as director
of programs so that allowed me to really tater kind
27:48
of what taylor what those wrap around services look like um and
i say that those wrap around services start from
27:54
the beginning of when you put in that application so if you apply
and you talk to someone on our team even if you
28:00
aren't selected you're you're there right like you're on my
caseload like i need to know about you i need to know what you
want to do
28:06
because if i'm recruiting and i and you took the time to come talk
to me while we're out there recruiting and you don't
28:11
get that job maybe you just weren't ready or maybe it just wasn't
a good fit or they needed somebody with more experience i don't
want that to be the
28:17
last time you do this right and so making sure that we're talking
with them and mentoring them and counseling them
28:23
and say well let's look at this well what about this okay have you
met this person do you know this community

28:28
organization have you tried volunteering here have you done an
internship here um and so doing that work and so my team
28:35
when it comes time for like vetting they're like oh ebony's gonna
be on because i'm like guys we we have to
28:40
interview we have to talk to all these people we're not sending
just these generic emails sorry you didn't get the job try again
later like no like these
28:47
are people on the other end of these are you this could be a
future chief or secretary of the interior like we don't
28:54
know um and so just making sure that we do that but i would say
all of those efforts that we pump into the applicants
29:01
the candidates oh man so they're the gyms right to be the 40 of
that 8 000. there's something special and sometimes
29:07
they don't always see that at the beginning they're just saying
hey i'm this young person from this college and i know that my
mom told me i had to get
29:14
a job but i'm just here and i'm just like oh no no there's so much
more and so we're working with them over the
29:20
course of the summer to do professional development for them
to do networking there's a bit culminating event we've
29:26
had so many people go through that program and then get hired
and then now our supervisors within the agency it's a
29:32
beautiful thing super excited for them to hit 10 years this year
um there's a big conference at the end of the the
29:39
program until everyone gets to come back together we're
actually planning for one to be in atlanta july of 2021 we'll see
29:45
how that goes um but just really i know seeing people in person
like who would
29:51
have thought it's such a foreign idea um but we're excited about
the opportunities there and like i said just
29:56
for them to network and grow and see what's possible i think is a
beautiful thing
30:02
that's so exciting uh hearing you talk about like how
30:07
you like keep the candidates who apply like close to you keep
them on your case let
30:12
you check in with them like that is just um that's spectacular and
like you
30:19
yeah i just don't even know what to say like that is just like what
people need you know and like i think a lot about
30:25
the students that i work with my a majors in education and i just
finished my student teaching um with
30:32

fifth grade students congratulations and thanks then they're just
incredible kids
30:38
and like as their teacher you know i just want the best for them
and i want the world to see how great they are
30:44
because i can see that and like hearing you talk about this just
like you know kids can get so discouraged um
30:51
even i get discouraged when i apply to something and i don't
ever hear back and i'm like oh like
30:57
you know we don't think about it as like we weren't the best fit
for them but we're a better fit somewhere else we don't think
about the fact that like
31:05
um you know those like little things and so i think it's so
important that you're there to be telling them that and to be
31:10
following up with them like you're you're a great student let's find
the right opportunity for you
31:15
um and that's amazing and it's so exciting because
31:21
we want more people to join these fields and um we want those
people who are so
31:27
dedicated who sounds like exactly who's applying yeah it's it's
cool and it's
31:32
because you never know how people show up on the other end
of the phone right like you don't know what people are
31:37
going through you don't know and it's so social working like it's
it's so social working
31:43
i i have four msw interns so this is my way of giving back so i'm
a field supervisor for folks that are getting
31:49
their msw and so i'm just like you always are a social worker or
you
31:55
here will always be an educator right like it's in you it's the way
that you think and when i moved into the director
32:01
programs role that's exactly what i said to our leadership team
like if we're gonna like effectuate change if we're
32:06
gonna encourage people to be leaders like that takes support
you know it's like you don't just wake up and you're a
32:13
ceo you don't wake up and you're a superintendent or a chief i
mean maybe you can but i haven't met that person
32:19
yet and that certainly wasn't me like even for me in order for me
to kind of grow in my
32:24
leadership i told you i got my msw i went back to grad school
again um and i
32:29
kept getting but it's because i felt like i needed certain things to
get me in certain places and so we all know

32:34
that we need that um that boost sometime and that can come from just somebody being on the other end of the phone and
32:40
saying hey you got it like let's take an extra 10-15 minutes to figure this out um so you never know and so i think
32:46
investing in people from the very beginning even if you don't know them can make such a big difference yeah you're doing a really special important
32:53
thank you for that you really are i say that one of the coolest parts of
33:00
my job is that i feel like my job is to go find unicorns right and so it's
33:05
really finding the talent that's out there that is so unique and crafted but what i found which is so ironic is that
33:12
there's so many unicorns um and so i just see the power that is young people
33:17
and the young voice that's there um so i know i was talking to some partners in um in detroit and they were talking
33:24
about how it's a law that 16 year olds can be on board it's like not like for small orgs but like big organizations
33:31
that like adults are competing for positions on like 16 year olds can be on those boards i see the same thing in
33:37
boston how they're having like youth representation in um in the school board and things like that and so i just i
33:44
guess my words to youth and like know that you are unique but there's also so
33:50
many other unique people out there too and so band together like find your people if
33:56
you will right like there's so much work that can be done by youth and for youth and with that youth perspective and so
34:02
be bold in your work and know that there are tons of folks like us you know like
34:07
there's organizations green and youth foundation that are saying hey no we want to find you and we want to support
34:13
you let us help um but we aren't the only ones and just know that your age doesn't you know determine what your
34:19
impact could be um i'm working now on a project here um i do some work with naacp and in
34:27
claudette coven um she a lot of people know about the story of rosa parks but claudette coven was 15 when she refused
34:33
to give her per seat and that says a lot like when we think about transit equity and all the work that comes with rights
34:40

of workers and things like that that was all birthed by a 15 year old you know or when we we just had a panel on earth day
34:48
um and the person who was moderating it was an intern um and so she's like in
34:53
her young 20s you know and so it's just like there's no age limit on this like people can do amazing things people it
35:00
doesn't have to be that i am a preteen or a teenager or an adult or whatever you know is the expectation just know
35:06
that people can do great things and so i say find your people find your community and do good
35:13
definitely like i it is really amazing like i remember my first year in dc
35:20
i went to the march for our lives and it was it was all basically children's speakers like
35:25
they're all teenagers which is amazing and this crowd of that was filling the entire all of pennsylvania ave
35:32
um like i can't imagine me at 16 doing something like that but like there's if you have a passionate movement like
35:39
you can make so much change it's really so amazing if you have like a mentor or a program like this
35:45
that that really like empowers you which is just just what's so special about this program i think
35:51
awesome awesome yeah some untapped talent right untapped right so now we're saying do it be great you don't have to
35:58
suppress it yeah and i think um
36:03
as with some of the students i work with you know they will be talking about a certain subject
36:09
and they'll be like miss verbal like that's so unfair why does that happen or something and i'm like yeah it is unfair
36:15
and you know but it can get changed right and they're like really and i'm like yeah like these
36:20
are the ways that like you can get involved to make sustainable change and like you have a voice and it's very
36:27
important and very powerful and people will support you if you have the you know if
36:33
you have the structure and so i love what you guys do thank you thank you for that yeah
36:39
i said yesterday you just reminded me so yesterday i have the honor uh to serve on the board for appalachian trail
36:45
conservancy so it's really really cool and so i got to work yesterday with their ed department and you know april
36:51

is like poetry month or something like that um and so we did like kind of like

36:56

this conversation conversation like this writing session and um really kind of posed it to to students and young people

37:03

to to join us in that like workshop um and we just wanted them to like learn

37:08

and write and talk about the environment and what that could look like like in their artistry um but in that we spoke

37:14

and we shared we played one of the poems for amanda gorman who did the inauguration right and just to say that

37:22

she started when she was really young and now looking i mean she's still really young and she had a speech

37:28

impediment and like all of these things now like she's a household name and she as she should be but it started young

37:34

and as you said like having that structure having that support is so so important and so the purpose of us

37:40

uplifting that and showing her work and showing other people out there and how it can be as small as writing a poem

37:46

that can impact the world is like we can make this stuff accessible like it doesn't have to be i have 10 years of

37:52

work experience and another you know 30 credentials and all of these things it's

37:57

not that i knew that i wanted to be an environmental scientist from the very beginning or

38:03

you know i i visit every single national park you know like these notches on here but it can be as simple as as i said

38:10

before recycling or writing a poem or just saying hey i don't like this i want to do something about it um so there's

38:16

so many opportunities out there for people to engage i think that's the beauty again of the environmental sector

38:23

yeah i definitely agree it really is just like an overlooked uh field and it's increasingly important

38:30

for people to get involved in and i'm so excited to hear the work that you're doing to get more youth involved

38:37

so awesome all right do you have like a single piece of advice that you would give to

38:43

high school students or like a really valuable piece of advice that you like to give students to encourage them

38:50

i would say just be bold and be unique and be you right like again this isn't a

38:56

path that has to be written for you like you can do it um whatever that looks like and so be creative the world needs

39:03

people that are thinking on their own right and so whatever you want that to be like let it be that and do it your

39:09

own way but just do it in the best way that you can so beautifully said

39:15

thanks ebony thank you so much of course

39:20

so great to talk to you um thanks for being here thanks for all the work you do

39:27

thank y'all for doing this this is really cool and the fact that it's for like younger folks like start them early

39:32

that that's what our environmental ed program is for like get people thinking about this stuff early because then my hope is that

39:39

adults won't be as jacked up on the end if they get some good stuff poured into them while their kids so

39:44

thank you the garden gate was created by kira

39:50

berba and caroline mcdonald as part of the learning by leading initiative with the smithsonian gardens this team

39:56

includes emily warsha as the education specialist jenna you as the marketing specialist nicollette kelly as the

40:03

recording assistant and megan hastie as the audio engineer the music is by

40:08

royalty-free music on soundcloud special thanks to cynthia brown and paula healy learn more by visiting

40:15

gardens.si.edu thanks for listening

40:21

[Music]

40:29

you