

# Guard helps dropouts stay in school



Photo by Staff Sgt. Russell Bassett

*OCYP challenges at-risk youth to make a better life*

By Spc. Nicholas Wood,  
115th MPAD

With the help of the Oregon National Guard, the Oregon Youth Challenge Program will start class number 32 on Jan. 12.

The OYCP is a program for at-risk dropouts that have given more than 3,000 young Oregon residents the chance to change for the better.

The program consists of a 22-week residential phase followed by a year-long mentoring program.

The residential segment includes a two-week "pre-challenge," which

Oregon Youth Challenge Program cadets are marched to a work site by a cadre member Nov. 6 in Bend. OYCP is an alternative school for at-risk teenagers run by the Oregon National Guard.

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## Service Learning

Wayward youth go in, involved citizens come out

By Sgt. Mary Jane Jacobsen,  
115th MPAD

In the high desert among sage brush and lava formations, lies a place known as the Oregon Youth Challenge Program, a learning and living place where young adults volunteer to attend because difficult circumstances in their

lives make it a good option for self development.

Program cadre member Buckley Morgan has been with the program for nearly a year.

"I can't believe that such a perfect job exists," he said. "I love this work, it is so rewarding."

Morgan frequently works with the female cadets during their service-to-community weekend projects.

"The community program has evolved through the years and is a big

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Cadets with the Oregon Youth Challenge Program remove asphalt debris in preparation for trail improvements at LaPine State Park Saturday. Service learning projects are an integral part of the OYCP curriculum.

Photo by Sgt. Mary Jane Jacobsen

# Cadet finds new strengths at military school

## Portland teen says program teaches respect, motivation and strength

Story and photos by  
Spc. Patrick Lair,  
115th MPAD

A year ago Portland teenager Joseph Hardy couldn't have seen himself carrying a guidon at the Oregon Youth Challenge Program.

He really didn't even see himself finishing school.

But four months into the six-month alternative school, a uniformed Cadet Hardy paces the concrete hallways with military bearing, proudly displaying the streamers that he helped win for his platoon.

Hardy, 16, is one of about 125 cadets currently enrolled in the youth challenge program, which uses a military model of discipline to reinforce formal education and other life skills.

"You have to learn a lot of things when you come here to live with kids from all over the state," Hardy said. "You have to learn that your actions affect a lot of people."

Hardy said the first two weeks of "pre-challenge" were the most difficult, when teens from different backgrounds came together under the same roof for an introduction to military culture.

"I didn't know anything about the military when I got here," he said. "I knew my dad was in the Navy and that's it."

But as his platoon bonded, learning to march, eat, exercise and sleep together, and the daily classes began, Hardy said he learned to like the new program.

"You learn a lot here... self-respect, respect for others, motivation," Hardy said. "It puts your

life on track and makes you grow up. It's pretty fun actually."

"Well, it's not always fun. There's a lot of work," he added.

But he must have done something right, because Hardy was one of a handful of cadets honored with the responsible citizen badge. The award is given to teens who demonstrate responsibility and good behavior.

A block of other badges line his breast pocket for things like drill team, physical fitness and academic excellence.

Hardy said his parents first suggested he enter the alternative school when his grades sagged at a Catholic Middle School in Portland.

"That was back in the days when I wasn't such a good student," he said.

After dropping out of his pre-



Hardy holds his platoon guidon, a flag which symbolizes the unit, and streamers which 2nd Platoon has won, for a group of prospective students and their parents at an orientation day.



Joseph Hardy and another cadet explain the challenges of the six-month youth course to a prospective applicant.

vious school, he came to Bend to give the youth challenge a try.

After four months, he said he'll not only graduate from high school when he's completed the program, but he'll finish by the end of his junior year, then get a head start on college.

"I plan to go on to get credits from a local community college before transferring to a four-year university in Atlanta," he said with a grin. "I've got family there, and I like the warm weather."

He's still undecided about a career.

"My parents are proud," he said.

While not all participants pass the six-month course, Hardy seems to be one of their success stories.

On Nov. 4, a group of prospective students showed up at the facility with their parents for a tour of the building and a sampling of the lifestyle.

Hardy stands at attention, directing traffic from one room to another.

"Right this way, ma'am," he said.

During a social hour, Hardy and several cadets entertain prospective students with stories and advice from the course.

"Your first week here, you'll think you want to leave," he tells a young man from Beaverton. "But just stick with it and you'll be alright."

"This program is doable for anyone who's willing to apply themselves," said OYCP Community Service Coordinator Ken Olson.

With 3,000 successful graduates, the Oregon Youth Challenge Program must have found a way to help teenagers apply themselves.

Ninety-five percent of their students who take the GED pass on the first attempt, said Missions Counselor Assistant David Medina.

And others, like Joseph Hardy, find new motivation they didn't know they had.

The Observation Post falls under the supervision of the 821st Bn, 82nd Bde.

The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the 115th MPAD PA Officer and may be sent to 115th MPAD 1776 Militia Way, Salem, OR 97309-5047



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The Observation Post is an Army newspaper published by the 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment in accordance with AR 360-1.

The October 2006 Observation Post is published in support of the Oregon Youth Challenge Program

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a two-week "pre-challenge," which determines the cadets who don't have the commitment to endure the full program.

"The first two weeks are the hardest, but it gets easier after that," Said Joann Wolffe, a cadet currently enrolled in the program.

After the first two weeks, classes begin, and cadets work through the curriculum at their own pace.

In order to qualify for the program, a prospective student must be an Oregon resident, drug-free upon entry, cannot be on parole or probation and cannot have been convicted of a felony.

On Nov. 4, the OYCP received prospective cadets and their parents with informational videos, a facility tour, and question and answer sessions.

During this orientation, Missions Counselor Assistant David Medina made clear the intent and role of OYCP.

"We don't change kids, we create the opportunity for change through self-discovery," he said.

Medina also explained that the OYCP curriculum centers around eight core values, academic excellence, service to community, job skills, physical training, leadership/followship, responsible citizenship and life-coping skills. He also made it clear that OYCP is not a drug-rehabilitation program and doesn't offer mental health services.

During the orientation, prospective

"We don't change kids, we create the opportunity for change."



Photo by Spc. Nicholas Wood

At Oregon Youth Challenge High School, Cadet Nicholas Hammell leads a tour for prospective students and their guardians as part of a mandatory orientation.

candidates were turned over to six cadets who are currently enrolled in the program. The cadets answered questions on a wide variety of subjects in order to clear up any misconceptions or doubts about the program's merit.

Each of the cadets opened by talking about who they were before enrolling in the program and how they have changed. Issues like drugs, gang activity and alcohol were all common openers. Finishing state-

ments unanimously declared self-respect, pride and a vision of where they would go after OYCP.

An accredited high school in association with the Bend-Lapine School District, OYCP can grant a diploma, GED or simply help a cadet get ready to "drop-in" to school.

To pass the all-or-nothing program, cadets must earn eight of 10 possible credits and satisfactorily complete all 22 weeks of the residential phase of the program.

Modeled after the military, OYCP could be mistaken for basic training, as some cadre members resemble drill sergeants, and physical training is a common disciplinary measure.

Many staff members have served or are currently serving in the military.

Glen Goins, who brought his stepson to orientation, said he is pleased to see the professionalism of the staff and facility. He was happy to see his son there.

Goins's stepson, Vince Kay, said OYCP is what he's looking for, though he may not enjoy it.

"Six months without coming home will be hard, No girls," he said with a laugh.

Oregon boasts no other alternative school that serves the entire state; however, the National Guard has 30 other Youth Challenge programs throughout the country.

In addition to the funding received by other high schools, OYCP receives federal funding through the National Guard Bureau. The program costs parents nothing.



Photo by Spc. Nicholas Wood

During the orientation, the potential cadets and their parents were shown exercise facilities, sleeping areas, medical care areas and classrooms

# Trading drugs, alcohol for family and education

Story and photo by Spc. April Dustin,  
115th MPAD

Nicholas Hammel of Prineville dropped out of Crook County High School at age 16. He spent his days doing drugs, skateboarding and partying with friends. When his mom Misty Grover confronted him about skipping school, he moved out of her house.

"She says I ran away, but I say that I moved out," Hammel said.

Six months later, Hammel realized he had hit rock bottom.

"I looked around one day and saw that everyone I was hanging out with was doing drugs, they had dingy clothes, they were stealing to make ends meet, and fighting to survive," said Hammel. "I wanted to have a better life."

To spend some time with this articulate, respectful 17-year-old – who now stands tall, looks people in the eyes and shakes hands with a firm grip – you'd never guess that he used to waste every day smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol.

Hammel was faced with a pivotal decision one day when his mom called and told him about the Oregon Youth Challenge Program, a state-wide, military-modeled alternative school managed by the Oregon National Guard and the Oregon Department of Education. His mother begged him to do her one favor and attend the school's orientation day to learn about the program.

"She brought my brother (Colby, age 11) into it, because she knows how much I care about him," Hammel said. "My little brother looks up to me, and I don't ever want him to do the things I was doing. If I ever caught him skipping school and doing drugs, I'd pound him."

Grover took Hammel to the orientation at the OYCP in Bend where they learned what his fate would entail.

The program includes a 22-week resident phase where students live in a military-structured setting, do physical fitness exercise everyday, attend class everyday and complete 80 hours of community service. Graduates of the program earn eight high school credits to return to their public high schools, some earn a high school diploma and others earn a General Education Diploma.

"After orientation I said no way, I'm not going there, it looks like jail," Hammel said.

Three months later, Hammel changed his mind and decided to attend the school so he could move back in with his family.

"I finally realized that I need my family close to me because they care about me,"

he said.

When Hammel arrived at OYCP and realized how difficult it was, he wanted to go home.

"It has been hell since day one. It's not a walk in the park," he said. "The first two weeks really suck, especially when your cadre are prior Marines."

"He came here kicking and screaming since day one, he didn't want to be here," said Hammel's first squad cadre leader Ed DuPont, a Prineville resident who has been a cadre member of OYCP since 1995.

A phone call with his little brother changed Hammel's attitude, as Colby begged him to graduate the program so that he could move back into his mom's house.

"Family is my biggest motivator, they keep me going - especially my little brother, he is absolutely loyal to me," said Hammel, who is now one of the top five cadets in his platoon. He is also a member of the OYCP Drill Team, performing military drill and ceremonies.

"To be a member of the drill team you have to go through a pretty intense interview process, where you perform (drill and ceremonies) in front of a board of cadre," Hammel said. "Cadets in the drill team are held to a higher standard."

"He has grown by leaps and bounds," DuPont said of Hammel's progress. "He's done a complete 180, I'm really proud of him."

Hammel achieved 10 high school credits, exceeding the OYCP requirement of obtaining eight credits to return to public school. Hammel will graduate from the resident phase of OYCP on Wednesday and will rejoin his class at Crook County High School on Thursday.

"I hate this place more than anything I've ever hated in my life, but I'm scared to leave," said Hammel. "The real challenge will be when I get home."

Once Hammel returns home, he will still have to go through a mandatory 12-month mentor phase, in which his progress will be monitored by an adult that Hammel chose to help him stay on track with his education



Nicholas Hammel completes math course work at Oregon Youth Challenge Program in Bend, Ore. Hammel, a high school drop-out, earned ten credits at OYCP to rejoin his peers at Crook County High School.

and behavior.

"The mentors are the key to this program because it keeps the students on track for one year following their resident phase," said Ken Olsen, OYCP Community Service Coordinator. "In all honesty, it's what sets this program apart from all other alternative schools."

Hammel's mentor is Mike Shinkel, Crook County High School teacher and wrestling coach. Hammel has known Shinkel since shop class and wrestling in middle school.

"He's like a father figure to me," Hammel said. "He's the only adult I could ever talk to. He showed me that I could trust him, I tell him things I could never tell my mom."

Shinkel has made mandatory mentor visits with Hammel at OYCP and will help him transition back to public school.

"I've seen him hit bottom, and now he's right back to the top. I'm so proud of him," Shinkel said during a mentor visit with Hammel at OYCP. "Once he made the decision to change on his own, he attacked this program with 100-percent effort, he is owning this place."

Hammel plans to stay busy and spend time with family in order to stay out of trouble once he returns to Prineville. He wants to join the Crook County High School wrestling team and get a part-time job, which will both require him to take urinalysis tests for drug use.

"I'm just going to stay busy," he said. "I have to stay away from the people I used to do drugs with, and I can't let myself skip school – not even once."



Above: A cadet works to remove asphalt debris in preparation for trail improvements at the La Pine State Park. (Photo by MJ Jacobsen)  
Inset: Cadet Jasmine Troncoso works hard to improve herself through service-to-community work. (Photo by Spc. Siobhan Gill)

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part of the over-all program success," Morgan said.

"The cadet's walk-in the door with attitudes that weigh them down," he continued, "The change in them happens gradually, they begin to let go of their anger and pain and really start to care a lot more about others and themselves. It's really an incredible thing to watch, as they grow and gain self confidence and a good self esteem."

According to Morgan, it costs nothing to the kids or their families for them to attend the program, and the community is paid back through the kids' efforts when they work on service-to-community activities.

"Some of the services the cadets have provided have been improving parks and park trails, building concrete forms, gravel spreading, installing windows and working with Habitat for Humanity," Morgan explained.

Cadet Jasmine Troncoso has been in the program for four months and enjoys the service-to-community weekends.

"We are cleaning up the asphalt here at La Pine State Park because a weakness in the concrete trail caused a woman in a wheelchair to tip over while she was camping here," Troncoso said. "I am making a difference in people's lives and it feels really good, and I feel great about getting out and helping."

Troncoso said she would like to continue work like this after she graduates.

"I set goals now and I will get my diploma, I have discipline and respect," she said. "I hope that it sticks with me and I don't fall back into my old habits."

Troncoso is looking into joining the Air Force or the Army some day.

Cadet Desiray Green, a classmate of Troncoso, said, "I really like giving back to the community, I used to be the one that littered, and I didn't much care about anything."

"I am the first one to pick up anything that has been left on the ground," she said. "I've learned to channel my anger and make myself more productive, I have life coping skills that help me a lot.

"I had really bad grades before, and now I am making all A's and B's," Green continued.

"I have goals now, and I want to be a flight attendant and travel the world," she said. "I really love the program. I respect the staff because they care."

Green worked with the Special Olympics through OYCP's service-to-community efforts. "I really liked working with the Special Olympics and being the announcer at their bowling tournament," she said. "It just made me feel good to be part of it."

Morgan summed up the service-to-community program by saying, "Valuable lessons are learned through these projects, and they are consistently and predominantly a sincere respect for others and the environment they live in."