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Growing Trees Instead of Gangs | Earth911.com

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Long known as the Emerald City, Seattle has struggled to maintain its famous tree cover under the pressure of rapid growth. The city's most recent Tree Canopy Assessment revealed a disappointing statistic — white, wealthy neighborhoods are more likely to have trees lining their streets than their poor, nonwhite counterparts.

Now, teenagers are doing something about it.

Benefits of Trees

It's not just a matter of pretty landscaping. Decades of research confirms that exposure to green space significantly enhances the quality of life for urban dwellers. Trees and vegetation can dampen ambient noise, improve air quality, cool over-heated urban centers, and even reduce crime. Studies show a link between nature and healing. Among city residents with similar incomes, those who live near green space have lower levels of illness and disease. Contact with nature improves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development in children.

Duwamish Valley Youth Corps

Surrounded by highways, industrial land, and the Superfund-designated Duwamish River, South Park is a low-income Seattle neighborhood. Its population skews young, with 30 percent of the population under the age of 18. In addition to the threat of gang violence, youth in this neighborhood face disadvantages that range from insecure housing to the highest rates of asthma in the city.

Presenting youth an alternative to joining gangs, the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps pays kids to learn about the