

SUMMERWORKS SUPPORT: SHEA DE LEON

SUPA FRESH YOUTH FARM: WORKSITE SUPERVISOR



Photo by Sean Bascom

I moved to Portland 10 years ago to attend the Portland State Leadership for Sustainability Education program. I had just completed my Master's Degree, and I was looking to work with young people. My main area of interest is where food and education systems overlap. The same groups of people are consistently left behind by those systems—and the people that suffer the most are children, teens, and young adults.

I've been working at Supa Fresh since 2020. I was drawn to this organization because we really look at youth in a different way. We support their development as whole people. A lot of young people come to us from a range of backgrounds, including unstable financial situations and marginalized identities. They need a place that will help them develop agency and self-sufficiency. I feel really lucky to play a small part in making that happen.

Our crew members work between 12-15 hours a week. We'll start early at 9 and usually do about 4 hours. Over the summer we'll run Community Supported Agriculture, sort of like a farm subscription service. Every week we'll have customers pick up produce and it's a good opportunity for crew members to

"Even if they don't choose to be farmers (though I wish they would!) our goal is that they go out into the world confident in the choices they make and have an uninhibited outlook on their future."

-Shea

interact with the community. They get to experience the whole food process; starting by growing the produce and ending with seeing who it feeds.

As a team, we try to keep in mind that our staff's identities don't always match the youth that we serve. In order to better understand and support them, we do equity training and focus on being trauma informed. We want them to be here and to show up in any way they can. We're far more focused on people over productivity. Person-to-person relationship building goes a long way to help youth that may not have the best experience with authority feel a lot more comfortable.

I get so much joy from being around young people every day — they're all so weird and fun in the best way. It really makes you question your own learning and approach to life when you see it through their eyes. It's refreshing and renewing, and it keeps me coming back. I love it.



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