

Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire reopens its doors

By [Michel Nolan](#), *The Sun*

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The nonprofit Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire, told to close its doors because of the federal government shutdown, is back in action — effective Monday.

The corps, which for years has worked to give at-risk San Bernardino youth options other than crime, was shuttered Oct. 8 along with its umbrella group, the Southern California Mountains Foundation.

The organization was impacted directly during the 16-day shutdown.

“The kids did not understand the government shutdown. They felt more betrayed and hurt than angry,” said Bobby Vega, deputy director of the San Bernardino-based Urban Conservation Corps.

“I’m just glad that the doors have been partially opened, and the kids have been given the opportunity to get on with their lives,” he said.

They share with him how much the stipend they get means to them saying it helps support their family, according to Vega.

“The stipend is just \$800 a month, but it’s something, for someone on a fixed income. It does make a difference,” he said.

“Sarah Miggins, executive director of the Southern California Mountains Foundation, called this morning to say the organization is fully operational again, as of Monday,” said Sandy Bonilla, Corps director, on Tuesday.

“I’m so glad the UCC is operating again and hoping there’s no government shutdown in the future because it’s too hard on the young people who depend on this job,” said Bonilla, adding that the closure of the Urban Conservation Corps meant that 50 people — staff and young adults — would be out of work.

“This closure was brutal,” Miggins said. “We’re still waiting on some grants and agreements to be executed for 2014 operations.”

Miggins said the Southern California Mountains Foundation is being more cautious.

“Small businesses and nonprofits like us don’t have an on and off switch,” she said, “so we don’t know what the costs of the shutdown will be.”

The corps, made up of inner-city youths, is one of the largest programs of the nonprofit Southern California Mountains Foundation.

Corps members — ages 18 to 25 — recruited through word of mouth, work on projects including emergency response, natural resource protection, forest restoration, park maintenance, community revitalization, recycling and tree planting.

Working gives them a sense of responsibility and makes them feel they are contributing members of society, according to Miggins.

“The kids come first, and they know Sandy and I will go to bat for them,” Vega said.