



Camp Riverbend youth gain skills — and confidence — through house build

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When you're afraid of heights, the idea of climbing up seven-foot-high scaffolding or onto a roof sounds terrifying, to say the least.

But if you're building a house — hammering pine boards onto the ceiling, applying plaster to the walls, adding shingles to the roof — you learn to get over that fear quickly.

That's what happened for Juan R., one of 11 youth from Camp Riverbend Youth Transitional Facility who recently worked with La Grande contractor Chandler Manufacturing Inc. to help build a 4,100-square-foot home in Cove, Oregon.

Many of the youth barely knew how to swing a hammer when they started last spring. Now, they walk around the construction site with confidence.

"I was pretty scared of heights at first, but as time went on, I got better and I started understanding what they told me to do," Juan says. "I helped build this from scratch. I know how to build a house now, and it's a good feeling."

Camp Riverbend partnered with Chandler Manufacturing through Brett Dunten, an InterMountain Education Service District classroom assistant who teaches and leads work crews at the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) facility. Dunten asked Scot Chandler, owner of Chandler Manufacturing, if he'd be willing to let Riverbend youth work on a project — giving them valuable experience that they could use when they leave OYA custody.

The young men started on the Cove house by raising the trusses, and went on to do everything from framing to installing insulation to painting to adding siding.



Work crew leader Brett Dunten (left) and a youth work at the house in late September.



Climbing scaffolding to install a pine ceiling was one of the tasks Camp Riverbend youth had to complete when building the house.

"They've come a long way from not knowing a lot, to the point where I can let them loose on almost any project," Chandler says. "They are good at their jobs. These guys are happy to be here."

Like Juan, Anthony G. had almost no construction experience when starting the build. Now, he says, he can do "pretty much everything a contractor would do."

Anthony also earned his wastewater certification at Camp Riverbend and is known as the “maintenance guy” around the facility. On a recent day, when a drain backed up on one of the living units, Anthony went in with a plumbing snake and fixed it.

“It really is a confidence booster to feel needed,” he says. “When that drain backed up, they called my name for help because they knew I could do it. It feels good to know they can count on me.”

Chandler plans to continue working with his new crew after they finish the Cove house. They’ve already helped him refurbish an old barn and renovate a duplex.

“I’m trying to expose them to as many parts of the business as possible,” Chandler says. “Hopefully it will help them to get a better job, and show them there’s a better way than what they did before.”

