



## At-risk youth learn to fight fires, lead crime-free lives



*Camp Riverbend Youth Transitional Facility in La Grande, OR*

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At-risk youth at [Camp Riverbend Youth Transitional Facility](#) in La Grande train as firefighters for two reasons: to keep others safe during wildfire season, and to learn skills to help them find jobs after they return home.

One of [10 secure facilities](#) for at-risk youth around the state operated by the [Oregon Youth Authority \(OYA\)](#), Camp Riverbend partners with the [Oregon Department of Forestry](#) to train youth to become certified firefighters. After they are released from OYA, they can put their skills and training to work for good wages as productive, crime-free citizens.

“Ever since I was younger I wanted to be a firefighter,” said youth Curtis. “So now that I actually am one, hopefully I can carry it one when I get out.”

Brett Dunten, a professional firefighter who supervises the training, said the youth also are learning to put their past mistakes behind them. “We’re really trying to get them to learn that it’s all about changing whatever their past was and looking to the future.”

Camp Director Greg Westbrook agrees: “I believe in second chances and I believe in opportunity,

and the young men we have here have shown people that they’re motivated to make a difference.”

Camp Riverbend youth were deployed in 2013 and 2014 to support local and state crews battling wildfires in eastern Oregon. With experts predicting a highly active fire season this year, the youth are ready and willing to lend their skills to help their fellow Oregonians stay safe.

“It’s an exotic job to have and a trade,” said youth Teddy. “Not only are you helping and giving back to the community, you’re also saving people’s lives, property, livestock – the things that people depend on out here.”

[Watch this video](#) featuring Camp Riverbend youth during a recent training exercise.