

## **Program changes lives, one kid at a time**

**BY JIM HART**

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**Andrew, 18, of Milwaukie, made a mistake soon after he became a teenager, and since then he has been paying the price for that judgment error.**

“I made one mistake a long time ago (more than four years),” he said. “It was just one little thing, but it changed my life.”

To pay restitution for the mistake, Andrew has been working for four years in Project Payback. The recent high school graduate said he learned a lot from his time with the work crews. He became a crew member because he was self-motivated to get his life back on the right track.

“You just have to have the right mindset,” Andrew said, “and you can get work done. This is better than the community service I have been doing for a few years. Here, I’ve learned a lot of self-discipline.”

Andrew’s mother, who visited the site on the final work day for the current crew, said she thought it has been a great program for Andrew.

“I’m pretty impressed,” she said. “It’s an excellent opportunity for the kids to get work experience. For Andrew to get a job at a fast-food restaurant without any work experience is tough. Hopefully, this (Project Payback) will really make a difference.”

For his part, Andrew has no regrets that he chose to work outside in the hot sun, moving rocks and gravel, digging holes, planting trees and spreading bark.

“I learned a lot of skills (in Project Payback) such as leadership and problem solving, where you work on a team to get things done. I’m really glad I did this.”

Andrew said he’s looking for a job now, and Hall said if he had a job opening he’d hire Andrew in a minute.