

# BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

## ONE STUDENT'S STORY IN STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

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SCA ALUM SPOTLIGHT: JULIA TABOGA



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conservation  
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## Student Conservation Association

The Student Conservation Association (SCA) is the largest provider of hands-on environmental conservation programs for youth and young adults in the United States. Founded in 1957 by Liz Putnam, the SCA aims to build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of the environment by engaging young people through real-world service projects. Through its programs, participants help protect and restore national parks, marine sanctuaries, cultural landmarks, community green spaces, and urban environments. The SCA offers a wide range of opportunities, from single-day events, individual placements to service corps, across all 50 states, often in partnership with federal and state land management agencies. After working with the SCA, young people gain environmental awareness, practical conservation and land management skills, social responsibility, and leadership experience, positioning many for further study or careers in environmental fields. The SCA is dedicated to engaging people from diverse backgrounds, fostering access to natural spaces for all, and building a conservation community that reflects the communities it serves. Through conservation work, community service, and leadership development, SCA not only protects land but also helps shape environmentally conscious citizens and future conservation professionals.

### New to Nature



Julia Taboga (far right) with fellow SCA crew members. (Photo Credit: Julia Taboga)

Julia Taboga has always considered herself an indoors person.

“I do orchestra and a lot of art stuff,” said the senior in high school. “I was never really a nature person.” That all changed at the start of her sophomore year of high school when her guidance counselor told her about a school-year program with the Student Conservation Association.

“It just seemed really different to me,” Taboga said. “First job-wise, it seemed like something that you wouldn’t find anywhere else.”

She applied, and before long, Taboga was a member of the 2023 Charles County Resilience Authority Youth Tree Corps. Throughout the school year, the crew was tasked with strengthening the region’s climate resilience by planting and maintaining native trees.

She enjoyed the experience so much that she signed on to join a summer crew and then returned for another school year crew the following winter.

## Keeping it Local



Julia Taboga after planting a tree with SCA crew members. (Photo Credit: Julia Taboga)

In early December 2024, Taboga’s crew participated in a tree-planting at her own high school, where 481 native seedlings were planted in a single day.

“Thomas Stone is in an Urban Heat Island, and trees help us adapt to increasing temperatures by providing cooling benefits with shade and reducing both air and surface temperatures; these newly planted trees will contribute to energy conservation and improve air quality while storing carbon dioxide, a primary driver of climate change,” Stacy Schaefer, Executive Director of the Resilience Authority of Charles County, told The Baynet.

While Taboga appreciated the work, what she enjoyed most about all her experiences with the SCA were the people.

“I got really close with my crews,” she said. “I loved being in the car with them. We had a playlist that we made, and we would jam out. There was a lot of Beatles on there, a lot of ABBA, Elton John, Bruno Mars, Michael Jackson, Nat King Cole, Radiohead, Queen.”

## An Emerging Leader



Julia Taboga speaking during an SCA reception in Washington, D.C. (Photo Credit: Julia Taboga)

While she had always self-identified as an introvert, Taboga willingly stepped outside her comfort zone repeatedly during her time with the SCA. She engaged in public speaking opportunities, staffed tables for the SCA at public events, connected with other conservationists, and even met Maryland Department of the Environment Secretary Serena McIlwain.

“I hadn’t really been into any environmental stuff like that, so it just opened that path for me,” she said. “I learned about how many different branches there are that I can go into, with data or being out in the field or being connected to people. I’ve learned about a whole different world.”

While joining an SCA crew may not be your “typical” high-school job, Taboga said it’s a path worth exploring.

“No matter what you’re into, the SCA is going to find something for you. It covers such a broad category of interests that you’re going to fit in, whoever you are,” she said. “I’m just really grateful for the experience. I feel like it truly did change me as a person. Would recommend.”

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The original article can be accessed directly on the Student Conservation Association’s website.

[SCA Alum Spotlight: Julia Taboga](#)

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