

Catholic Heart Workcamp Mission Volunteers Lend a Hand at NCC

Imagine taking a 20-hour, cross-country bus ride to serve as a volunteer in a city where you have never been. That's just what some students from Wisconsin did this summer, as they joined teenagers from several other states in sprucing up various sites around the New Community Corporation network in Newark.

The 11 volunteers and their two adult leaders, part of the Catholic Heart Workcamp Mission, spent their time painting and planting at NCC sites including the Hispanic Development Corporation, Gardens Senior building and Seven Generations Park, also known as Meditation Park, on South Orange Avenue.

We had a long bus ride here, but it's a lot of fun," said Megan Goetzman, 15, from Kaukauna, Wisconsin, as she painted a fence surrounding the NCC-owned Seven Generations Park.



Volunteer Megan Goetzman, 15, of Kaukauna, Wis., works on the fence around Seven Generations Park on South Orange Avenue.

The 13 volunteers assigned to NCC were among 42 work crews that fanned out across New Jersey during the week of Aug. 3-7, serving in communities as diverse as Newton and Jamesburg. Other states represented in the NCC volunteer group were Connecticut, Massachusetts and Maryland.

Catholic Heart Workcamp Mission, according to the group's Website, has a twofold purpose, "to revitalize communities and beautify homes for the elderly, disabled and those who cannot afford needed repairs" and "empowering participants to live as disciples of Christ through serving others."

"It is really an opportunity for kids to step out of their comfort zones to build a life-long habit of service," said Mary Connolly, who is site manager for the New Jersey group.

The volunteers stayed at The Archdiocesan Youth Retreat Center in Kearny during their week-long service period. The young people each paid \$300 to make the trip to Newark, with many fundraising throughout the year to make it happen. For most, it was their first trip to New Jersey and first time visiting an inner-city community.

"It looks good on a college resume and it is also a lot of fun," said Joe Ricciuti, 15, of Norwell, Mass.

At NCC's Hispanic Development Corporation, a group painted the children's area, lounge, erected a door, replaced tiles in a bathroom and put up new blinds at the front window. They also planted flowers outside the building on Orange Street.

"Instead of having the summer off, they are giving," said Ruth Kleinman, director of the Hispanic Development Corporation, as she watched them work. "This is a good lesson for everybody."

Lauren Gump, 16, of Appleton, Wis., was hoping the trip would help get her life "back in check" by allowing her to help the less fortunate.

"You take a lot of things for granted," she said as she painted at Hispanic Development.

This marked the second year in a row Julia Plants, 15, of Ellicott City, Md. has worked in Newark for the mission.

"It's really cool," she said, calling Seven Generations Park "a beautiful" space just in need of some tender loving care.

Leslie Leonor, director of Senior and Social Services for NCC, couldn't have been more grateful to the students for their help during the week.

"It is a wonderful thing when different community agencies can work together in making a difference in the lives of the senior population," he said. "This is what community service is all about. The contributions and efforts of these young people from Catholic Heart Workcamp should give us all an optimistic outlook on life."

