

Article published on July 18, 2009

Nice brush work

Hundreds of teenage volunteers descend on region

By MADDIE HANNA Monitor staff

July 18, 2009

Three teenage boys stood on ladders Thursday morning, working quietly, painting Janice Clark's house a new coat of seagull gray.

Clark stood outside, watching admiringly. "I'm not used to seeing teenagers working and working and working without a whip," she said. "It's very touching."

Her home in Warner was one of 48 sites visited last week by hundreds of teenage volunteers from across the country, dispatched to the Kearsarge region to fix up homes for elderly, disabled and low-income residents unable to do the work on their own.

The effort, which involves church youth groups from nine states, is the third of its kind in the area, and the logistics have been daunting. First came choosing who to help, a process that included community outreach, advertising, and site visits.

Next was figuring out where to put the hundreds of teens, who have spent the week camped out in classrooms at Kearsarge Middle School in Sutton. Other questions were less obvious like tracking down 90 ladders.

That task fell to Doug Dean, the pastor at Trinity Bible Church in Sutton.

About a hundred volunteers from his church have been working with staff at Casey Family Services over the course of the year, preparing for the 400 teenage volunteers and adult supervisors who found their way here through Group Workcamps, a national organization.

Yesterday marked their fifth and final day of painting, building decks and doing light roof repairs at the sites, which were scouted out by church members and Casey Family Services. "In most cases, it's work that just wouldn't get done," Dean said.

That was the case in Warner. Clark, who is 56, has endured compressed nerves and blown disks in her spine, injuries that have kept her out of steady work. So this is a godsend, she said, watching the teenagers, paintbrushes in hand, standing on ladders propped against the side of her home. "The boys and girls that have been here have been so sweet. Just wonderful . . . Once everyone got here, they all made it so comfortable."

Clark and other repair recipients were chosen from a pool of more than 100 applicants. Virtually all of the recipients are homeowners, since investing in rental property could drive up the cost of rent, said Jen Delorme, who works for Casey Family Services.

The New Hampshire director of Casey Family Services, Ed Rennells, said the organization raised money for materials from local companies. The teenagers paid or raised about \$400 each to participate, which covered their food and other materials needed for the repairs, as well as the cost of staying in the middle school.

They also contributed more than 2,000 cans of food to Trinity Bible Church's food pantry, which serves 15,000 meals a year, Dean said.



KEN WILLIAMS / Monitor staff
Work Camp participants Donald Torre, (left) Brian Gill and Rachel Akerley help paint a woman's home in Warner on Thursday.

[Zoom](#)
[Purchase Photos Online](#)

Planning is already under way for a work camp in Franklin next July.

But besides the benefit felt by the communities, the teenagers involved said they gain from the experience, too. Donald Torre, a 16-year-old from New Fairfield, Conn., said it's satisfying helping someone who can't help themselves.

The teens seemed hesitant to estimate when they'd be done painting, not wanting to celebrate too soon. Brian Gill, a 14-year-old who's also from Connecticut, just seemed tired.

"It didn't seem like it would take this long," he said, looking at the house.

Rachel Akerley, however, wasn't fazed. Akerley, who's 18 and from Lancaster, Pa., has done similar projects the past three summers. This one is different because of Clark, she said.

"Janice is very concerned about us, just very grateful for what we're doing," Akerley said.

This article is: 6 days old.