

Volunteers spruce up school yard

City Year La. rolls up sleeves for 100 hours

- By [CHANTE DIONNE WARREN](#)
- Advocate staff writer
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The same volunteers who show up every day to help 10-year-old Ahmar Muse with reading and math problems on Monday helped refurbish his school's playground and added a splash of color to the campus.

"They've helped make the school and the playground look a lot better," said Muse, a Progress Elementary School fourth-grader. "It makes me excited."

Brick walls and concrete slabs are now covered with colorful murals painted in red, blue, gold and white, bringing life to walkways and buildings at Progress Elementary School.

The City Year Louisiana 100 Hours of Power project kicked off Monday at Progress Elementary and Scotlandville Parkway, a BREC park. Work will continue night and day for 100 consecutive hours on community projects in Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

Among the projects are the construction and painting of a school sign and benches at Magnolia Woods Elementary, and decorating the Main Library at Goodwood Boulevard for summer programming, said Angie Lau, program manager for City Year.

More than 70 volunteers, most members with City Year Louisiana, helped refurbish Progress Elementary's playground by adding a butterfly garden and planting trees, constructing new outdoor benches, renovating the teacher's lounge and painting the basketball court and flagpole platform.

Muse is thrilled with the outdoor classroom benches.

"That will be fun. You get to look at the sky and the trees and the birds," he said.

Progress Elementary Principal Sarah Henry, said her school has about 360 students, some from New Orleans who moved to Baton Rouge following Hurricane Katrina.

Members of Volunteers in Public Schools and a group of New Jersey volunteers who adopted Progress students following Hurricane Katrina, also participated in the 100-hour

program.

City Year members, who mentor and tutor Progress students on a daily basis, have put on school talent shows, story-telling workshops and holiday camps, Henry said.

Joel Shuherk, a City Year member who tutors and mentors Prescott students living at Renaissance Village, said the experience has taught him lessons about perseverance.

“It makes me appreciate everything. These kids got kicked out of their homes after the hurricane and they are living in trailer homes,” Shuherk said. “These kids are going on being kids and they’ve gone through more than any of us can dream of and they are hanging in there.”

One of the students he tutors is 9-year-old Brittney Barbarin, who gets help in math, social studies, science and spelling. “It makes me feel better,” she said.

Shuherk considers Barbarin a “champ reader.” He said he believes that City Year has made an impact on students.

“You only have a year with the kids, but while I’ve been here, I’ve been able to help them take their education seriously,” Shuherk said.

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