

Volunteers work to clean shelter for Youth Oasis

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An impromptu cheer rang out from the small group of volunteers huddled with shovels and picks near the back of the Youth Oasis yard at the end of the service day Saturday.

One City Year volunteer hoisted a stubborn — and hefty — tree root in the air for the crowd of high-school students gathered on the basketball court to see while another volunteer called for someone to come take a picture.

“We conquered the last root,” yelled Adrienne Cobb, 18.

And a bit more.

More than 30 City Year Corps members and City Heroes volunteers spent Saturday at Youth Oasis, an emergency shelter for youth located on South Acadian Thruway.

The volunteers cleaned and organized a food pantry and clothing room, painted the kitchen and a mural and reworked flower beds, clearing out weeds and more than a few tree roots from the back yard.

City Year is a nonprofit AmeriCorps organization made up of young adults from across the nation who commit to doing 10 months of full-time community service. City Heroes consists of high-school students who volunteer with City Year Corps members on Saturdays throughout the spring.

The group committed to spending Saturday at Youth Oasis working on projects that Alvin Smith, the executive director of the shelter, said would not have gotten done without their help.

The shelter, primarily sponsored by government grants and community donations, provides about 15 beds to homeless and runaway youth, Smith said. The volunteers provided muscle to complete tasks he had needed done.

An example, he said while volunteers finished the last of the work, was the second building on the campus that had been overwhelmed by storage. By Saturday afternoon, it was cleaned and ready to be used as a group home.

“Those are the kinds of things,” he said, “we just couldn’t do without their help.”

Alice Newman, a City Year Corps member from San Antonio who organized the service day at Youth Oasis, said City Year Corps members and the high school volunteers do at least two service projects each month in addition to regular work providing academic support at schools.

The projects provide a forum for the high-school students to learn about issues such as homelessness from the agencies where they volunteer, Newman said. The agencies, on the other hand, have a group of willing volunteers to spruce up.

The overgrown flower beds got the bulk of Cobb's attention Saturday, she said, before wielding her shovel on the last remaining root toward the end of the day. Cobb, a City Hero from McKinley High School, said she didn't mind the work.

"We've been getting dirty all day," said Cobb, her shirt and pants caked with dirt from the time she spent pulling weeds from underneath a wooden deck. "There's our hard work right there, no more roots."