



City Year Participants & UNH Students Partner to Spruce Up Manchester School

By BETH LAMONTAGNE HALL
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MANCHESTER – They came to build, pull weeds and paint.

More than 180 University of New Hampshire Residential Life staffers joined Manchester's City Year volunteers Thursday for a day of services at Gossler Park Elementary School. The college students spent the afternoon in the hot sun building cupboards, bookshelves and benches for inside the school, painting the playground blacktop, planting and painting window boxes and doing general trash pickup around the school grounds.

One team worked at the front of the school, pulling weeds and watering the neglected raised flower beds, and another team focused on the rear of the school, raking mulch under playground equipment, evening the ground and making it safer for children to play on.

Eric Hopkins, City Year's civic engagement manager, said sprucing up the school, where a team of City Year volunteers will soon begin their work tutoring students in basic math and reading skills, is a good start for the new school year.

"Yes (students) need essentials, they need to attend school, they need to learn math and English, but they need to also have pride in their school," said Hopkins. "When they come here, they will be happy and engaged."



UNH student David Houle of Manchester assembles a storage cabinet. He was one of about 180 students from the University of New Hampshire who teamed up with 20 members of the City Year organization to do upgrades and improvements to the Gossler Park School in Manchester on Thursday afternoon. Photo by Bruce Preston/Union Leader

This year, five City Year teams will be working intensively with the city's under-performing schools. The volunteers began training this month and broke into teams this week. One team spent the service day coordinating the UNH volunteers while the others headed into the city to familiarize themselves with the neighborhoods and meet community members, Hopkins said.

The teams' focus will be on tutoring and mentoring students to prevent them from dropping out of school.

City Year volunteer AJ Allen of Newburyport, Mass., said his role at one of the Manchester elementary schools will go beyond academics.

"We are going to show them they are expected to be there," said Allen. "It makes them feel important, like they have value."

Allen came back to City Year after spending his middle school years involved in the City Year's Young Heroes program in Massachusetts. The New Hampshire version of the program takes middle and high school students from Portsmouth, Dover, Manchester and Nashua and has them participate in volunteer events, such as cooking and serving food in a soup kitchen.

"Once I got out of high school, I decided to come back to City Year," Allen said. "I had a role model in Young Heroes, and now it's time to give back and become a role model."