

JOURNEY'S WAY IS PROVIDING SENIORS WITH SUMMER BLITZ OF VOLUNTEER HELP

More than 100 visiting volunteers have worked their way through Roxborough, Manayunk and East Falls over the past month, performing free chores and fix-up for delighted older homeowners.

The community-service project – on track to serve 18 households by July 25 -- is coordinated by Journey's Way, the aging-services arm of Intercommunity Action, Inc. This is the third year Journey's Way has brought in the summer work teams, who stay at Eastern University as part of a Christian youth service program called M-Fuge.

Meanwhile, other M-Fuge teams have been visiting the Journey's Way Center, 6012 Ridge Ave., to socialize with the older adults there. They have performed interactive skits, sung, played table games, gathered oral histories, and helped to serve the daily lunch.

The M-Fuge work teams are a mix of high schoolers and adult chaperones, most from Southern states. They head out to seniors' homes in church vans and mini-buses to perform a variety of chores that Journey's Way staff members evaluated and methodically mapped out.

Sweating but smiling with good will, the volunteers cut through a mountain of tasks: installing handrails, painting rooms, weeding, pruning, fixing walls, moving furniture, removing debris, washing windows, and more.

By the time the five weeks of service ends July 25, they will have devoted more than 1,600 hours of free time. That is saving the older adults thousands of dollars in total – often for maintenance they would be hard-pressed to afford otherwise.

The homeowners have overflowed with praise, both for the physical improvements to their properties and for their quality time with the youngsters.

"They were so kind, polite, and friendly--absolutely beyond belief!!," said one homeowner "They turned everything around for me in my life... They cleared away years of clutter. I don't know how to thank them and you (Journey's Way) for bringing these people into my life. They were such nice kids -- they couldn't be nicer if they tried."

"I felt like I was in seventh heaven," said another recipient. "I'm 90 years old and can't remember a better experience than this. Those kids were so wonderful and so concerned for me. One young girl stayed around me like a mother hen - she was so afraid I might fall. It was just a wonderful experience. My house hasn't been this clean in 10 years!"

Community service is central to the M-Fuge mission, said Greg Clark of Greenville, S.C., one of the chaperones.

"I wish I could do this every day," Clark said as he paused from his efforts mowing an overgrown back yard in Roxborough. "To be set in life and just help people – that would be it, man."

His church assists people at a trailer park and a nursing home in South Carolina. Clark said he's found Philadelphians to be friendly, but is struck by the hidden needs he has seen.

"This has opened my eyes to the needs of folks, that it's everywhere," he said. "We say we're the home of the free, but we've been neglecting our own. People don't want to see it or hear about it."

Each Friday, Journey's Way bids farewell to that week's group with a thank-you party featuring water ice freshly made and donated by Nevaeh's Water Ice., 5925 Ridge Ave. Journey's Way also thanks Roxborough Baptist Church for making its parking lot available for the fleet of M-Fuge vehicles.

The M-Fuge chore work is a valuable supplement to the ongoing community assistance Journey's Way facilitates for older homeowners through its Neighbor to Neighbor program.

Under Neighbor to Neighbor, local volunteers provide light chores, errands, rides, and regular "friendly calls" to seniors. At present, 20 volunteers are serving more than 40 older adults.

To register for the services, or to join the volunteer team, call Journey's Way at 215-487-1750.