

Youth Groups Join To Build Tricycle Trail For Head Start Kids

Organizers Hope This Is First Of Many Projects

By PETER MARTEKA
COURANT STAFF WRITER

By the end of Monday morning, Paul Sellew's hands and shoes were covered with driveway sealant and yellow spray paint.

While the black and yellow residue will eventually wash out, Sellew said the memory of the day

HARTFORD

he helped build a tricycle trail at a Head Start facility on Locust Street in Hartford will linger.

"To be honest, I was expecting a boring day," said Sellew, a sophomore at Glastonbury High School. "But it wasn't that bad and makes you feel good about yourself and what you've accomplished here. I can't wait to see the look on the kids' faces when they see this."

Sellew was one of more than a dozen teenagers from First Church of Christ Congregational of Glastonbury and from United Methodist Church of

Simsbury who took advantage of the long Columbus Day weekend to complete a "trikeway" for children.

When completed, the 6-foot-wide roadway will have miniature signs and yellow dashed lines, a kind of miniature highway for 3- and 4-year-olds to ride their tricycles during outdoor breaks.

The project's organizers said they hoped the tricycle course would be the first of many projects planned for the city by First Church of Christ. The church's youth group plans to take a break from out-of-state community work by spending next summer working at 22 Head Start facilities in Hartford and Middlesex counties.

"You hear all about these missions [that] churches do across the country all the time," Associate Pastor Denny Moon said. "We want to bring the youth groups from suburban and urban churches together to work on projects together for the sake of Hartford."

"All the suburbs depend on Hartford. We can't be afraid of it or see it as some foreign country. So many of us in suburbia don't make the connection about how important the city is to us."

Paul Fraleigh, a member of First Church of Christ, helped to come up with the idea of building the tricycle trail and the concept of linking church groups. Fraleigh said work over the summer would include repairing playgrounds and pilot projects

the group comes up with.

"You spend five minutes with these children, who are cute as buttons and so outgoing and welcoming, that you want to do all you can for them," Fraleigh said. "The older kids are getting a kick out of helping children. The rewards of this far outweigh the work they have to do."

Paul Bliss is in his fifth year of advising the First Church of Christ youth group.

He said it's important for teenagers to be away from home during the community work next summer, so they will stay at a local college or seminary.

"It doesn't work when the kids are a cellphone call or car ride from home," he said. "When they are away from home, they learn to rely on others and solve their problems on their own. They learn to work as a team and support each other."

Liz Dupon-Diehl, spokeswoman for the Community Renewal Team, which administers and runs the Head Start program, said the help is appreciated.

"We are always looking for more resources to help beef up our program," she said. "This is a tremendous help for us, especially when funding is an issue."

This kind of a program will get the whole community involved in what we do and will show what the needs are in the city."



MARC-YVES REGIS / THE HARTFORD COURANT

EW, 15, of Glastonbury, paints a line on a trail for kids Monday at the Head Start facility on Locust Street in Hartford.