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Adams students give back

Volunteers Corps finds a variety of ways to serve the community.

JENNIFER OCHSTEIN
Tribune Correspondent

A group of Adams High School students makes it a habit to break out of their comfort zones.

"It's very important for people to be exposed to the diversity in the world," said Elena Graham, a senior and co-president of the Adams Volunteer Corps at the school. "It's an awesome experience. It shapes you individually as a person. And it helps you accept new things. It's rewarding."

The Adams Volunteer Corps, formerly known as the Junior Civitans, started its year of service last week by picking apples at Lemon Creek Winery and Fruit Farm in Berrien Springs for the Food Bank of Northern Indiana and the YWCA of St. Joseph County.

Apart from picking the apples, groups of student volunteers will be working weekly at different nonprofit organizations throughout St. Joseph County, according to Judy Wein, a parent volunteer sponsor. The students have a long-standing relationship with the YWCA, including serving dinner there every Sunday and Monday night, activities with elementary students, and working with the students in music, poetry, art and storytelling.

The group also works with special needs kids at the Children's Dispensary in South Bend, volunteers at the Habitat for Humanity Restore and recently participated in Stuff the Bus, a

food drive sponsored by Martin's Super Markets.

This year, the Volunteer Corps has begun working with Alzheimer's patients at Milton Adult Day Services, doing activities and crafts with clients.

While the corps works with these organizations on a weekly basis, it also involves itself in larger projects. Annually, the group serves and prepares from scratch a Thanksgiving dinner for 100



Adams High School junior Bethy Williams, left, and sophomore Allie Soisson load handpicked apples onto a food cart at the YWCA of St. Joseph County.

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YWCA clients and families the week before the holiday and helps with The Foster Family Holiday Party at HealthWorks! Kids' Museum, where it helps provide food, games and gifts for foster children, said Wein.

"We really try to connect with the agencies that have limited funds," Wein said. "That's our mission: to help others meet their missions and goals."

To help pay for their volunteer activities, the student volunteers hold fundraisers, selling pizzas when there is a half-day of school, Wein said. With a fluctuating membership of between 50 and 60 student volunteers, Wein said, the goal is to build good citizenship in the students.

"We try to focus on community needs, and we hope to enhance the lives of people who are less fortunate," she said.

On top of that, the students also work to be good role models in the community.

"We want them to know that they can enrich their own lives by helping others," she said, adding that they stress living by the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Sam Wein, a sophomore who is treasurer for the Adams Volunteer Corps, said part of the reason he's a member of the group is because it gets him out of his comfort zone.

"You're around people that aren't your normal group of friends," he said. "There are new challenges, and it's always exciting because there's always something to do."

Besides, he said, volunteerism is simply important.

Many nonprofit agencies don't have the money to hire much help, he said.

"We just try to bring a smile and good mood so they feel like we care for them," Sam said. "And we do."

Indeed, sophomore Julia Crant said she's looking forward to getting started. This is her first year in the Adams Volunteer Corps.

"It's important to show that you care about other people and that you're willing to think of others besides yourself," Julia said.

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