

Teens spend summer pitching in

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An Omaha woman's home is getting a new wheelchair ramp with help from a group of teenagers from around the country.

The teens were in Omaha this week as part of a Catholic Heart Workcamp program, which sends young people across the United States to fix homes, care for children and distribute food.

Connie Alda, 84, said she is thrilled that a new ramp is being built at her home near Eighth and Castelar Streets. Her daughter, Delores Henderson, 60, has been using a wheelchair for 27 years as a result of domestic-abuse injuries.

For the past six months, the wheelchair ramp at Alda's home, where Henderson lives, has been unusable. It was built in 1983, Alda said, and has rotted and decayed.

The teenagers working on the new ramp said the project was challenging and rewarding.

"It's fun to help people," said Annie Kimball, 14, of Austin, Texas. "It's not easy to build a ramp."

The five teens started Monday by taking the old ramp apart, pulling weeds and clearing the area for the new ramp. They then dug holes, put in the posts, poured cement and built the ramp out of wood.

About 225 Catholic Heart campers came to Omaha this week. Others worked at day care centers, libraries and other homes.

Summer projects

Here's a sampling of other summer projects by teens:

Mission Omaha: More than 220 teenagers from across the country will come to Omaha June 28 through July 4 to refurbish homes. The majority of homes that will be repaired are in the northeast section of the city. Home improvements will include painting, deck and wheelchair ramp building and weatherproofing.

United Way Summer Youth Volunteer Program: About 100 Omaha children and teens will assist local nonprofits. Projects include helping senior citizens at the Florence Home assisted-living center, working at the Omaha Food Bank, landscaping at Lauritzen Gardens and caring for children at area day care centers.

Dundee Presbyterian Church: A group of middle and high school students traveled to Westmoreland, Tenn., this month. Their main project was building a fence for a Vietnam War veteran. They also painted fences and did remodeling work. Fifth- and sixth-graders are planning a service trip to Minneapolis next month.

First Lutheran Church: Teens from First Lutheran will travel to Chicago in July. They plan to work with Su Casa, a Catholic organization that provides homes to Hispanic victims of domestic violence; Night Ministry, which helps homeless teens; and Interfaith Youth Core, which encourages inter-religious dialogue.

Catholic Heart selects projects it can complete in four days, said 16-year-old Joel Gehler, of Cecil, Wis., the teen leader at Alda's home.

Alda said the new ramp makes her daughter safer.

"If anything should happen, she can get out by herself," Alda said.

The Catholic Heart campers aren't the only group of teens doing repair work in Omaha this summer.

Later this month, 220 teenagers taking part in Mission Omaha will refurbish 32 homes. Mission Omaha is a local organization that partners with the Group Workcamps Foundation, a nonprofit that sponsors mission trips that bring teens nationwide to the city to help elderly, low-income and disabled homeowners.