

YouthBuild program helps young people learn job skills while getting an education

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By **Tarryl Jackson** | Jackson Citizen Patriot



Ashley Miller | Jackson Citizen Patriot Katrina Bowen, 23, right, and Tameka Strouss, 20, both of Jackson, clean up dust while working on a house on S. Mechanic Street.

About a dozen young people spent Thursday afternoon cleaning and painting a home on S. Mechanic Street that they have been building for a local family in need.

At the same time, they are working toward their diploma or General Education Diploma to help them move on to bigger and better things in their future.

The project was part of YouthBuild U.S.A., a program in which people ages 16 to 24 work toward their high school diploma or GED while learning job skills and serving their community by building affordable housing.

The local chapter of YouthBuild U.S.A., which is sponsored by the Community Action Agency and partners with Greater Jackson Habitat for Humanity, was recently awarded a \$755,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The grant will cover two years of programming as well as one year of keeping track of and providing support services to students who finish the program.

The Jackson Community Foundation also awarded YouthBuild a \$17,500 grant.

Jackson resident Tameka Strouss said she joined the program "to better my education so I can move forward in my life and future."

Strouss, 20, just earned her GED from T.A. Wilson Academy and plans to attend Lansing Community College in the fall.

She said she has enjoyed doing construction through the YouthBuild program. "I like the hands-on experience and seeing the progress we've made," Strouss said.

Through YouthBuild, students usually work on one housing project throughout the school year. The house on S. Mechanic Street will go to a family in need.

The local chapter has been around since 2007. During the program, students build homes for Habitat for Humanity in the city's Partnership Park neighborhood. Habitat builds low-cost, no-interest homes for families to own in the Jackson area.

Paul Burnham, YouthBuild program operations manager, said the chapter feels good about the grants it was awarded and wants students to use the program as an opportunity to take the next steps in their future.

Jackson resident Charles Thomas, 19, is also working toward his GED at Wilson and plans to attend college after he is done.

"I just got to take care of myself and my kids," said Thomas, a father of three. "(YouthBuild) is one way I can do that."

Learn more

For more information about YouthBuild, contact Paul Burnham, YouthBuild program operations manager, at 962-2916 or [**pburnham@caajlh.org**](mailto:pburnham@caajlh.org).

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