

## From the New Hampshire Union Leader

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### Young people learn giving their time pays benefits

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**GOFFSTOWN** — Over the past year, more than 30 young people did everything from raise money for hurricane relief to lobby officials to start a transitional housing program for reformed youth. In the process, they learned a lot about how government works.

That was the goal of Public Achievement, a nationwide program started this year at the New Hampshire Institute of Politics at St. Anselm College. The idea is to encourage youth to get involved in their communities, with the belief that they'll stay involved as they get older. Recently, those involved in the program celebrated the completion of Public Achievement's successful first year at the college.

"The reality is, as young people enter adulthood — if people don't vote, it doesn't happen. Young people cannot just be told to be involved. Young people can learn right now that they can make a difference in their worlds, that they can make our world a better place," said Dale Kuehne, a St. Anselm professor.

The program, based at the Center for Democracy and Citizenship — itself affiliated with the University of Minnesota — was seen as a natural fit with the institute: One of its core principles is commitment to civic education.

The program also offered a lot of practical advantages for the students, who learned everything from letter writing to networking skills.

"These skills are going to be valuable regardless of what you're going to do," said Mica Stark, the institute's director of education and operations, adding, "That ability to learn through doing was another key element of this program."

And the students, helped by several St. Anselm student coaches and adult volunteers at several sites, did just that.

Groups of students from St. Benedict Academy in Manchester, Girls Inc. in Manchester, the Crispin's House After School Program and Mountain View Middle School in Goffstown — and even the Youth Development Center in Manchester — took part. Their activities ranged from raising money for hurricane relief in Florida to helping the elderly.

Best of all, the students found their involvement in the program both enjoyable and worthwhile.

"I learned that citizens do have a say in what's going on," said Dana, a teenager housed at the Youth Development Center. He helped lobby officials to create a transitional center at the YDC.

The YDC, based in a large complex in north Manchester, is in the process of building a \$29 million, 110,000 square foot secure building for housing inmates. But Dana, whose last name was withheld, said his group had hoped officials would use a building already on site, the Stark House, to house a transitional program for young offenders.

This way, Dana said, teens housed at the YDC could get reacquainted with the community while holding down jobs and taking part in other activities. He argued such a move would help prevent recidivism. And over the past year, Dana said, things went quite well.

"We got everything except the money. We need a lot of money," Dana said, regarding their proposal. Still, institute officials said the students' work had prompted YDC to have a grant writer work on the issue.

Younger students enjoyed the work as well.

"It was pretty interesting. I learned democracy — and big words to aggravate my mom," said 12-year-old Ariel Smith of Manchester, who along with a group from Girls Inc. created a public-service announcement about the responsibilities that go with owning pets.