



National nonprofit hosts annual volunteer event



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By **Daniela Toporek**

National women-empowering nonprofit Generation W hosted its annual Generation Works event Feb.1 at St. Augustine Youth Services, where youth volunteered services in the community and helped spruce up the campus.

St. Augustine Youth Services was one of 17 locations selected for the Generation Works event. Over 450 volunteers arrived bright and early at their specified locations to assist and “join in the process of improving family, work, community and beyond,” according to the nonprofit’s official website, GenWNow.com.

“We have four key elements of W,” said Christina Upchurch, manager of development and engagement at Generation W. “We have Generation W, which is the signature event; Generation WOW, our girls program for eighth grade through high-school seniors; our book, “WOWsdom, and Generation Works, which is what’s here at St. Augustine Youth Services today, presented by Deutsche Bank.”

St. Augustine Youth Services provides coaching, counseling and care in family-style therapeutic group homes and outpatient community services for at-risk youth in St. Johns County, as well as Putnam, Volusia and Flagler counties, according to Upchurch and SAYS director of development Chelsea Reppin.

“Here, we have 40 beds for children in the foster care system that have diagnosed mental illness,” said Reppin. “We also work with the youth in and around this county that need support.”

Volunteers and University of Central Florida students Craig Thompson and Carter Ellis said that they found out about Gen. W through their sports management program.

“We have to do 21 hours of volunteer service and our professor knew about this organization,” Ellis said. “Today our group planted flowers and gardens in front of some of the homes, painted some rooms, painted bike shelters and excavated a sandbox.”

Ellis also said that some of the boys from the SAYS campus eagerly joined to help and that they were “incredibly appreciative” for the Gen. W crew’s visit.

“Meeting them was very rewarding and motivated us that much more,” Ellis added. “At one point, a 14-year-old joined us. We worked with him for probably about an hour. He was very kind and hardworking, pushing Craig and myself even more.”

Reppin said that she and Upchurch knew each other, but it was first time Reppin and SAYS had an opportunity to partake in the Gen. W event.

“There are 17 different sites today across Northeast Florida and we’re just really fortunate to be chosen as one of them,” she said. “The boys are so excited and love it when people come to campus.”

After a day of hard work, Ellis felt just as fortunate to part of the team.

“Helping youth in the community and seeing how hard everyone at our site was working to get our job done, it felt really great,” he said. “And to know there are more sites across Northeast Florida, where people are working just as hard, was very inspirational.”

For more information on Generation W, visit www.GenWNow.com.