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Grant puts local at-risk youths to work rehabilitating homes

Program helps young people, community

Melissa Domsic
mdomsic@lsj.com

Eric Hoskins says he's tired of looking at the run-down Lansing house that's been vacant since he moved in two doors down about 1 1/2 years ago.

But that should change. The house at 540 Paris Ave., near Cedar Street, will be rehabilitated by a group of young adults through a federally funded program launched Tuesday.

"That house has been vacant for a while, so we were wondering what was going to happen with it," Hoskins said. "We're all going to appreciate that the house will be livable."

Capital Area Michigan Works has received a \$1.1 million U.S. Department of Labor grant to train 60 at-risk young adults and put them to work fixing up five houses in Lansing owned by the Ingham County Land Bank.

"These 60 at-risk youth are going to receive training and very likely end up with jobs with local contractors," said Bruce Johnston, executive director of the Ingham County Housing Commission.

The young adults - ages 18- to 24-years-old - will spend about 32 hours a week working and learning, said Brindley Byrd, the program director. They will be paid about \$230 a week.

They also will receive Lansing Community College's residential building certification, nationally recognized green building certification and training in lead-safe work practices, which should help them land jobs.

Of the \$1.1 million grant, \$416,500 will go to pay the participants. The rest will be spent on construction materials, LCC tuition and other program costs.

The white, one-bedroom home on Paris Avenue has boarded-up windows, peeling paint, growth in the gutters and a second story with low ceilings.

YouthBuild participants will install a new raised roof, plumbing, windows, siding and flooring.

The Land Bank purchased the homes from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for \$1 plus closing costs. Most of them were likely foreclosures, Johnston said.

The land bank typically buys, rehabilitates and resells about 20 houses a year in an effort to improve neighborhoods, raise property values, and put properties back on the tax rolls.

The program not only will spruce up neighborhoods, but also help the young adults who participate, Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero said.

"This is a tremendous opportunity to put their shoulders to the wheel directly in improving our community, and have the sense and the reality of making a difference right here in our neighborhoods," Bernero said.

Participants will take four building trades classes at LCC in addition to on-site construction and leadership training.

The YouthBuild program will train 30 people a year for two years.

Each session lasts eight to nine months, but YouthBuild will provide follow-up and support services for up to two years, Byrd said. Byrd also is the executive director of the Michigan Construction Career Council, formerly known as the Capital Area Construction Council.

Additional support and training will be provided by Lansing-based Eaglevision Ministries Inc., a workforce and academic development organization, and the Michigan Laborers' Training and Apprenticeship Institute, a nonprofit trade group.

Additional Facts

Get involved

- To participate in the YouthBuild program, interested young adults ages 18-24 must attend an information session at the Capital Area Michigan Works office, 2110 S. Cedar St., Lansing.
- The sessions are from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Aug. 19 and 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 21.
- To register for an information session, call 492-5574.

Participants must have one of the following qualifications

- High school dropout
- Have a General Educational Development certificate
- Current or former foster youth
- Former offender
- Possess a documented disability
- Migrant farm worker
- Low-income