



- Courtesy photo

Down-to-earth service

[CARA PALLONE](#),

CANYONVILLE – With shovels in hand and hard hats on heads, a dozen Fremont Middle School students left their own little mark last week in the Alder Creek Children’s Forest west of Canyonville.

For about half a day, the kids raked and cut a 300-yard hiking trail through scattered trees. What may seem like a short jaunt through the woods will make accessing the great outdoors much easier for seniors and young children. The trail connects to a much longer, scenic path that was only accessible before via a steep climb up a heavily forested hill.

“We were separated into two groups and we met in the middle,” Brandalyn Nugent, an eighth-grader at Fremont Middle School, said of the work party.

For the past eight years, Douglas County students have been learning the true meaning of community service through a group called the YMCA Earth Service Corps.

The group was founded in Seattle in 1989 at the Metrocenter YMCA as a way to get kids out of the city and into the countryside, said Gary Williams, Douglas County YMCA teen and family director. Since then, Earth Service Corps. has expanded into a national YMCA teen program model.

The program was introduced in Douglas County in 2000. Under the supervision of Williams and a couple of teachers, students at Douglas High School and at the Glide schools have painted buildings, cleaned parks, picked up trash, cleared trails and raked seniors’ yards. Williams said the Douglas High School group traveled to Mexico one year, where students spent a spring break painting a school and sprucing up a soccer field.

“It gives kids a chance to work together as a team,” Williams said.

The program combines four key elements: leadership development, environmental education, service learning and international/cross cultural awareness.

As a former employee of Adapt, Sam Moore spearheaded the Glide Service group. When she left Adapt to take a position as the Roseburg School District drug prevention coordinator, Williams asked Moore once again if she would head an Earth Service Corps at Fremont Middle School.

After pitching the idea to seventh- and eighth-graders, many of whom are involved in other drug prevention and leadership groups at the school, Moore recruited 12 kids to help build the trail in the Alder Creek Forest last Friday.

Nugent volunteered her time because she lives on a farm and clears on a regular basis.

“I figured I could help the other kids,” she said. “We all had a good time. It looks like it will be a pretty good

trail.”

Eventually, Williams said he would like to implement an Earth Service Corps. in each of the schools, but the YMCA will need help funding the program in the current economic climate.

Moore said the next event will be in April and could be in the form of a garbage sweep through Stewart Park or a beach cleanup.

“This is a way for kids to fit into something positive, for them and for their community,” Moore said. “It’s a wonderful program.”

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