

Greenhouse helps youths prune bad habits

Chillicothe Gazette - Chillicothe, Ohio

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Date: May 20, 2011

Start Page: n/a

Section: NEWS

Document Text

Editor's note: Because of the nature of why people are in the program, last names have not been used in this story.

BAINBRIDGE -- The greenhouse at Lighthouse Youth Center has become a Mecca of peacefulness and pride for some youth.

The center, which is a residential rehabilitation center for male teens adjudicated for felony offenses, highlighted the greenhouse and its new gym during a community open house Thursday.

While the inhabitants at the Paint Creek center aren't there by choice, 18-year-old Michael, of Cleveland, thinks it has been the best place for him.

"It's one of the best things that's happened to me, for real," he said.

In the past six months, he has been one of at least 20 young men who were hired to work with horticulture specialist Rodney Throckmorton. The greenhouse, which includes tilapia growing tanks, was started about three years ago with the help of a private donor.

Michael said he enjoys tending to the plants and watching them grow from seeds.

"It's nice. It makes you feel proud of yourself," he said.

Along with pride, the youths also learn a little about work ethic and earn a little money, Program Director Mark Ingles said. They also help sell each Saturday at the Chillicothe Farmers Market and have sold plants in Bainbridge.

"It's really good interaction with the community for our kids," Ingles said. "One of our primary goals here is social interaction, and (the boys) learning those skills. ... One of the things (the program) tends to look for are kids who really need experience at taking care of something; empathy training."

Throckmorton said the teens apply for a job at the greenhouse and go through an interview process. Many apply, he added, because they've heard the others talk about it.

"This is a really relaxing atmosphere out in the greenhouse. Even I like to get out here and relax," Throckmorton said.

Diario, 18, of Cincinnati, agreed, saying the greenhouse is a nice place to take your mind off things.

While the job can be relaxing, Throckmorton teaches them about work ethic, working up to speed, and he puts them in charge of different things. They like the responsibility, he added.

Outside the greenhouse, Michael and Diario said they also are learning other skills -- how to budget money, develop patience, set boundaries and focus on goals. The center also runs a charter school program, providing youth with core curriculum, electives and credit recovery so they graduate.

"It helps you start a more independent life," Michael said.

Throckmorton said he's seen tough cases turn around at the center.

"I think they see people really care. Most of our staff really cares about the well being of the boys," he said. "I treat them like I do my own kids. A lot of them probably haven't had that in their lives -- a positive male role model to lead and

teach them. ... A lot of what I do is teach them good work ethics because if they can't keep a job out of here, they'll be selling drugs and whatever."

According to its website, youth completing the program at the center have recidivated -- done something causing their return to the system after release -- at the rate of less than one-half that of traditional institutions. The most recent study done in July 2007 indicated a 16 percent recidivism rate.

MORE DETAILS

Interested in buying some of the plants or tilapia raised at Lighthouse Youth Center? They are set up most Saturdays at the Chillicothe Farmers Market from 8 a.m. to noon in the parking lot of the Ross County Service Center. People who are interested can make appointments to visit the Tong Hollow Road facility by calling (740) 634-3094.

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