

iServe project offers teens time for community service

Michael Boscolo of Greencastle, Pa., spent two days last July sorting food, painting a wall mural and helping the staff at Food Resources, Inc. in Hagerstown as part of the iServe project.

Later this month, he hopes to be back with iServe, joining nearly 70 other student volunteers who will offer their time and sweat at various service agencies in Hagerstown.

“For it being a work retreat, it was actually pretty fun,” said Boscolo, 17, who attends St. Ann, Hagerstown. “It’s fun because you’re working with a bunch of other teens. You get to know more people.”

Organized last year by youth ministers from Frederick and Washington counties, iServe offers a smaller, closer option to the week-long Justice Action Week, which is sponsored by the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry.

“A lot of high school kids are working during the summer, so they can’t take off all week,” said Irene Wonderlich, coordinator of youth ministry at St. Mary, Hagerstown, which is host for the iServe students. “With all of the service agencies located in downtown Hagerstown, the sites are easily accessible. They can walk to a variety of the agencies.”

Last year, 80 high school students worked two half-days at a handful of non-profits in Hagerstown.

“It was a huge success” Ms. Wonderlich said. “The service sites loved the teens that worked there. It allows the high school kids the opportunity to learn about serving in a comfortable setting. It’s really a special two days.”

Like Justice Action Week, the goal of iServe is to give students an idea of the importance of volunteering and community involvement, while providing a boost to

non-profit agencies.

After working the afternoon of Monday, July 29, at their assigned agencies, the teens will spend the evening at St. Mary, enjoying dinner, games, social time and a Mass. They will return to their same agency the next morning.

Officials from the non-profits are looking forward to having the young volunteers.

“They were very productive for us,” said Ruth Anne Callaham, executive director of Food Resources, a food bank warehouse that distributes food to other agencies and programs in the region. “They gave us 120 volunteer hours. It was awesome. It’s such a valuable connection to the community. It gives you that warm fuzzy because you are actually doing something.”

The program has expanded to serve 10 agencies this year, including the Union Rescue Mission, Easter Seals Adult Day Care, Boys and Girls Club of Hagerstown, REACH homeless shelter and the United Way.

Boscolo said he is up for “whatever they throw at me” this year during iServe. He expects an even better experience because more of his fellow students from St. Ann will attend.