

Volunteers help repair Hopkinton's Serenity House

By Michael Morton/Daily News staff

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HOPKINTON — A day after hearing stories from women seeking sobriety, freshman Jeremy Cohen painted new window frames, pried up worn tiles and ripped out old planks yesterday at the Wilson Street treatment center they call home.

"It gives it that little extra motivation," the Sudbury ninth-grader said, calling the renovation work at Serenity House both fun and meaningful as he took a break to list 25 reasons to give thanks.

Nearby, 17 fellow teenagers under the watchful eye of a licensed carpenter and six other chaperons screwed in replacement boards for a handicapped ramp and laid new tile, all part of a weeklong volunteer effort involving students from three states under a Jewish program called Bonim Banim.

Translated from Hebrew as "building youth," the program was founded by Rabbi Joel Soffin of New Jersey to give high school freshmen and sophomores an opportunity to mix philanthropy with prayer and study.

Looking for a summer project, he contacted a protege, Rabbi Neal Gold of Temple Shir Tikva in Wayland. Gold recommended Serenity House, run by his wife's employer, the South Middlesex Opportunity Council. Soffin agreed, recruiting students from New Jersey and Pennsylvania to join local teens.

"We want to bring kindness and caring and compassion," he said, explaining that he hopes the students learn about the struggles of addiction and see recovering addicts as real people.

Offering space for 35 women recovering from drug and alcohol abuse, Serenity House currently has 21 guests and four of their infants. While the group was away on a camping trip during the first day of renovations, they will meet with the volunteers tomorrow for further sharing.

"I'm kind of excited to see their reaction," said Rachel Anderson, a New Jersey ninth-grader. "They really need someplace nice to stop thinking about alcohol and drugs and become sober."

In addition to installing new window frames, tiles and planks for the ramp, the group is painting the facility's basement. Local companies have donated construction supplies, as well as lunches for volunteers.

"The building really needed a tremendous amount of work," said Heidi Gold, Rabbi Gold's wife and South Middlesex's director of program development. "There had been talk of doing something, but it's always a matter of budget priorities."

While the volunteers are completing much of the needed work, South Middlesex is still trying to raise money to replace the roof, rewire the computer network and fix the plumbing. Donations can be made at www.smoc.org/serenity.

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