



York student saw a need and acted on it

By Sula Pettibon The Herald

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YORK -- Living in downtown York, Will Lankford saw York Place Episcopal Church Home for Children every day.

But it wasn't until he started volunteering there that he understood what the residential treatment facility was all about.

The senior at York Comprehensive High School is helping his classmates learn about York Place, too. He's lined up clubs and teams to help him with various projects at the home this spring.

Lankford calls his project the "Cougar Connection," after his school's mascot. It's an assignment from the Emerging Public Leaders program he attended last summer at Furman University.

The Riley Institute hosted the 18 students, which included Jonathan Cote of Fort Mill and Brandy Durham of Rock Hill. They spent a week at Furman, where they took political science classes, went on tours and attended lectures.

They'll make the final presentations on their projects during a competition Friday and March 25 at Furman.

Lankford, 17, got the idea to form a volunteer partnership between the high school and York Place after meeting with his school principal and community leaders.

"I thought it was something that was lacking in York," Lankford said. "Everybody had to find something your community truly needs."

York Place serves 42 emotionally disturbed children on a 120-acre campus with a gym, indoor swimming pool, tennis courts and a chapel.

During his first visit in December, Lankford and members of the Future Business Leaders club decorated a tree and gave out candy during what he called "Cougar Christmas."

Today during "March Makeover," student council representatives and members of the art club will create a mural and will paint the kiln room.

Next month, the Future Farmers Club will plant flowers and help the York Place kids start a vegetable garden. Lankford also would like to conduct sports clinics with the help of school teams and would like to end the year with a field day, complete with games and a cookout.

Having the high school students visit is good for the residents, said Joyce Sanders, outreach/volunteer coordinator.

"They can relate better to young people," Sanders said. "They are just themselves and they allow the children to be themselves."

Sanders is impressed with Lankford and his ability to coordinate the various clubs.

"He's a very intelligent young man and very responsible," she said. "He's a really neat kid."

Next year, Lankford wants to major in business or economics and minor in political science. He's applied to a number of schools in and out of South Carolina and is waiting to hear about scholarships.

Until then, he'll be busy lining up activities at York Place, where he's hoping a student will continue his work next year.

"I saw how excited the kids were to have us and how grateful they were," he said. "That makes what I've done with this project worthwhile. For me, that's a measure of success."

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