

# Garden project provides youth with chance to grow

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Thanks to a federal stimulus grant, a group of local youth are hard at work constructing the new community garden at Town Hall.

The grass and soil from the courtyard was removed on July 1 and The Sonoma County Summer Youth Ecology Corps began the construction of the raised beds and the installation of the gopher wire and weed fabric on July 6. The youth group is being supervised by The Center for Environmental and Social Stewardship (CESS)

The students are part of the Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corp. The six week program includes 250 county residents between the ages of 14 and 24 working at sites around the county. Participants were chosen for the program after completing an application process and are paid \$8 per hour. The program is funded through a \$1.2 million grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment act.

Nancy Lesa, executive director for the CESS said the garden project provides students with an opportunity to develop work related skills while improving their town.

“It’s hands on work experience that becomes something they can put on their resume,” she said. “They are owning their community in a positive way.”

Crew member Kendell Jack said he felt a sense of accomplishment from the project. “After seeing the final product, I can say that I built that with my hands,” he said.

Eduardo Martinez said working with a team was a valuable experience. “It makes me happy to accomplish something with the crew,” he said.

The work crew will work on the project from start to finish, including construction of the boxes, installation of equipment and planting. Crew supervisor Shaun Diaz said finishing the project provides a powerful example of how hard work can pay off. “To start the project and go from a lawn to a garden was huge for us,” he said.

Participants in the CESS program are considered “at risk youth” and organizers said they hope the program will provide lifelong benefits by showing youth the value of teamwork and employment.

Manuel Lopez, Family and Youth advocate with CESS, said completing a project forced participants to become invested in their work. “They need to learn to take pride in what they do,” he said.

The demonstration garden is also being constructed with the help of several local companies and private volunteers.

A design committee consisting of Thomas Eddy, Rob Huebschmann, Dianne Graner, Anya Perron-Burdick, and Carl Uebel provided plans for the design.

The Town Council has also approved a plan to transform the currently unused land directly in front of the Town Council building into a new garden.