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Youth work in service of others

Local Beach City Service League members help with some yardwork in a Santa Ana group home.

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NEWPORT BEACH — With tools in hand, a group of local high school boys spent a day getting their hands dirty in someone else's yard.

The boys gutted the place, pulling out everything from roots to trees to make way for new plants and flowers.

But pulling out the trees that Sunday morning was no easy feat, so dads were on hand to help out, said Charlie Welsh, a freshman at Mater Dei High School in Santa Ana.

"That's when you need the big, old football players," the 15-year-old said Thursday at the Balboa Yacht Club in Newport Beach.

The boys are part of the Newport-Mesa chapter of the Beach City Service League, a philanthropic organization for high school boys and their mothers to spend time together to better the community.

A group of 27 members came together Feb. 13 to re-landscape the front and backyards of a boys' group home in Santa Ana. Some of its members also made a 10-foot wooden picnic table and benches by hand for the yard.



Marie Gentosi

The chapter's freshman members hosted the community service event to benefit Boys Hope Girls Hope, a national organization that houses children who can no longer live at home. It provides them a family-like atmosphere and preparation for college.

All grade levels showed up to help and, while it's usually a time for mother-son bonding, dads were invited to participate in the event.

Charlie said it was an interesting experience pulling weeds and digging "stuff" out of the sewer lines.

"It had a very unique smell to it," he said.

Working with the Boys Hope Girls Hope was just one of the service projects the Newport-Mesa chapter has done this year, but the organization isn't just about community service.

The boys attend monthly meetings by grade level where they learn about time management, etiquette and managing their finances. They also receive information about the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

"The meetings are educational," said Mary Welsh, Charlie's mother. "It's things they need to learn, and they don't offer it in school now."

The boys also elect their own leaders to run the meetings by Robert's Rules of Order, said Annie Quinn, who whose 16-year-old son Connor has been involved for three years.

The organization started in Newport-Mesa in 2007 with 43 boys and their mothers. It has since grown to more than 230 members. A second chapter formed in 2009 to include greater Orange County.

The organization is about showing the teens that community service is about more than just completing a high-school requirement, Quinn said.

It also gives the boys a chance to see that not everyone has the opportunities they do, Welsh said.

"I think it gives them an opportunity to see there's more out there than inside their little community," she said.