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Student program helps hurricane victims in Mississippi

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DOVER — When students with the Quantum Opportunities Program traveled to Waveland, Miss. to assist with clean-up efforts from the hurricanes that ravaged the Gulf Coast last year, they were surprised at how much of the area remains devastated. But more surprising was the resiliency of residents living there.

"It's amazing to see how much of a good attitude the people have," said Teresa Chapman. "They don't look at all the bad things. They say, 'I'm still here, I can still do something.'"

Six students with the Quantum Opportunities Program at the Seymour Osman Community Center and three adult advisers went on the trip to Waveland, Miss. Students Teresa Chapman, Alex Goodwin, Nathan Marsolais, Mark Boud, Chris Neslusan and Corey Nachampassak went on the trip. Liz Puchacz, coordinator for QOP; Brandy Barshaw, youth development coordinator for the community center and Joe Caproni, youth liaison with the Dover Police Department, also attended the trip.

Puchacz said the students were inspired to do a large volunteering project after participating in May in the Global Night Commute, an international night of action designed to draw attention to the plight of children in Uganda.

The students were surprised to find that the region is still devastated, nearly a year after hurricanes and flooding ravaged the Gulf Coast. The main road out of Waveland is still out of service and only a few residents have electricity.



Members of the Quantum Opportunities Program recently journeyed to Mississippi to construct and deliver storage pods to hurricane victims. Front row, left to right, Liz Puchacz, Brandy Barshaw, Teresa Chapman, Cory Nachampassak. Back row, left to right, Alex Goodwin, Joe Caproni, Nathan Marsolais, Mark Baud, Chris Neslusan. (John Huff/Staff photographer)



"It was destroyed," Nachampassak said. "Everywhere you turned, there was a pile of debris."

The Wal-Mart in town was empty, and the group had to drive 25 minutes away to find a restaurant.

"There's not a whole lot to do," Boud said. "Nothing's open. We just worked a lot." There was garbage and debris in the water, but Boud said people continued going about their routines, hunting for crab and picking up debris.

Quantum Opportunities Program students Alex Goodwin and Teresa Champan and program coordinator Liz Puchacz construct storage "pods" for residents of Waveland, Miss. (Courtesy photo)

wrecked homes had to deal with looters stealing their things. The pods were also big enough to hold a washer and dryer. Once a pod was complete, the students would deliver it directly to a person. In their off hours, the kids went crabbing, took a bayou tour and got to taste local cuisine like whole shrimp.

The group worked with the Pathfinder Mission, a faith-based nonprofit group. During the day, the students built "pods," eight-by-eight portable storage sheds that residents used to store their belongings. The pods served an important role, Puchacz said. Residents who managed to salvage valuables from their

"It was a good feeling, knowing that we helped," Goodwin said. "People were crying when we delivered these things."

Nachampassak said the trip impacted him, but he's not quite sure how.

"It hasn't hit me yet. When it does, I'll know it," he said.

The Pathfinder Mission is still seeking donations of tools and materials to build the storage pods. For information, visit www.pathfindermission.org. The trip was funded through donations from the Dover Police Charities, Inc., the Dover Police Department, Martel Plumbing, Holy Rosary Credit Union and the Eisenhower Foundation.