

# HELP by the

BY CHRISTA SKOUSEN

*Teens in Layton, Utah, refurbished 24 homes and strengthened nearly 300 testimonies in just two days.*

Imagine strolling down the streets of your neighborhood, only something looks different. Looking around, you may ask yourself, “Wasn’t that house white before? When did they find time to plant all these flowers?”

Many of the homes, which only two days before looked old and worn down, are now spruced up and polished. Is it a miracle? According to teens in northern Utah, it’s all in a day’s—well, make that two-days’—work.

The Layton Utah Kays Creek Stake hosted a fun, service-filled youth conference. For two days teens and leaders alike sacrificed their time and energy to fix up several homes in a nearby city.

And they weren’t just any homes. Through fasting and prayer co-chair Neil Wall and his committee carefully selected those people (some members of the Church and some not) they thought could really use the help—mostly single mothers, the elderly, and the disabled.

And then, with 16 homes in mind, donated supplies, and multiple prayers of faith, the youth set out to offer service in life-sized proportions.

## Working Together

These teens quickly learned that this degree of service (it was approximately 100 degrees both days) was not for the faint of heart.

But despite the heat, what was initially a good-sized service project grew even bigger when more hands—attached to energetic teens—showed up than expected. On Friday

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# HANDFUL





**U**p to their elbows in paint, concrete, and hard work, these teens tore into these projects.



afternoon approximately 240 teens participated, but by Saturday Brother Wall estimated there were closer to 270.

“We really thought we would lose some because it was hard work and it was very hot and the days were long,” he says. “We thought, ‘On Saturday we won’t get as many.’ And we ended up with more. It really surprised us.”

And many hands made light work. With handfuls of help, the stake restored more than 24 homes—not just the original 16. They finished all their contingency projects and then some.

“I know without a doubt they will never forget it,” Brother Wall says. “They admit, it was hard, it was hot, and it wasn’t fun in one way because it was work, but it was rewarding. They could sense that they were doing something good.”

And these Utah teens proved themselves quite handy. Working under the direction of volunteer contractors, teens spent the bulk of their time doing all kinds of odd jobs: mowing lawns, hauling away garbage, painting, pouring cement for ramps for the disabled, roofing, and so on. At one house they planted flowers in a yard where previously trees had been growing wild, sending branches through windows.

“Even though I was tired, I didn’t want to stop. I never realized how good it feels to give all your strength to help better someone else’s life,” says 17-year-old Ashlee Karpowitz.

Many of the youth agreed with Ashlee. They found that working outside in hot weather turned out to be surprisingly fun—plus a few added activity breaks didn’t hurt either. The event kicked off on Thursday evening with a dinner, music from a local band, and a movie under the stars. On Friday evening every last ounce of energy was spent slipping down a plastic water slide. Hearty meals also helped to break up the workdays.

Sixteen-year-old Taylor Merrill had only good things to say about it. “My favorite part of youth conference was using the spray-paint gun and eating the food. We had sub sandwiches for lunch every day. I always tried to eat as much as I could before we went back to work.”

### **A Good Cause**

But fun, sun, food, and spray-paint guns were only the beginning. In addition to the fresh paint and new leak-proof roofs, testimonies were refurbished as well.





“I feel like I accomplished something in my heart,” says 14-year-old Sarah Look.

“I made myself stronger, raised my feelings of self-worth, and strengthened my testimony.”

Like Sarah, many of these youth didn’t realize until later that service has spiritual side effects: when you forget about yourself and serve others, you can’t help but find happiness.

“I feel like I gained stronger friendships, a stronger testimony of the Church, and a closer relationship with my Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ,” says Kelly Smith, 14.

“While we worked on people’s houses I felt the Spirit of the Lord,” says 15-year-old Katie Stout.

The youth and leaders alike found the whole experience to be gratifying, but the homeowners were also blessed.

“Almost without exception, they were so excited, with tears in their eyes, just grateful that someone would consider doing it for them,” Brother Wall explains. “We had a fireside to conclude the event, and one of the sisters whose home we worked on came and spoke. It was just wonderful. The kids were just beaming.”

Today more than 270 kids may walk down the streets of this same neighborhood and see something different. Sure, anyone might notice the shiny paint, the newly made ramps, or the vibrant flowers. But when teens from the Layton Utah Kays Creek Stake walk down these streets, they will remember how good it felt when they served people who really needed help. These teens witnessed firsthand that, when it comes to serving, a handful of help goes a long way. **NE**



**G**ood food and good fun was a great finish to a working youth conference.

