

THE BEACON HILL TIMES

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Photo (1) - Jen Roy

Teen Leaders working to beautify The Esplanade

By Joseph Domelowicz Jr.

A NEW TEEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM, put together by The Esplanade Association, in cooperation with the Boston Youth Fund, is already showing great promise as the eight Boston area teens enrolled in the program meet the halfway mark of their summer involvement.

"This program allows teens from around the city to apply for summer jobs, working with The Esplanade Association to take care of the Esplanade and at the same time open them to career possibilities they might not have considered before," said Teen leadership Program Coordinator Ninya Loeppky. "The Esplanade Association has a longer term vision of having a youth council - similar to the one that operates in New York City's Prospect Park - and they felt that a good way to start was to have a summer program that brings youth into the park, especially youth who might not ordinarily come to or use the park."

Loeppky, who was hired this year to get the program off the ground, said that the eight teens involved in the program have been enjoying the program immensely, even though the program can include work like scraping paint off walls or benches or pruning trees and trimming back weeds.

"The kids spend half their time on direct park maintenance, such as with the giant mural we're working on now, or pruning trees or keeping up with the invasive plant species," said Loeppky. "The other half of the time they visit other parks or state parks to get ideas, both for personal careers they can pursue and for ideas they can use here on The Esplanade."

Loeppky noted that many of the youths involved in this summer program had never been to The

Esplanade before joining the program this summer. Yet nearly all of the teens involved have already inquired about returning to the program next summer or even before.

"We're hoping that as early as next year, we'll be able to expand the program to be a year round program," said Loeppky. "Also, it would be great to continue the relationships with the teens for a longer period of time. A lot of the kids are from neighborhoods like Dorchester or Mattapan, where they don't have lots of parks and this program helps to educate them to things like gardening and makes them familiar with the concept of greenspaces and looking outside of the city for their future."

Loeppky said she has been impressed with how professionally the teens have conducted themselves, especially when in public on behalf of The Esplanade Association.

The teens' salaries and application process were handled by the Boston Youth Fund, while The Esplanade Association received two donations to offset other costs associated with the program. One donation was from the Blossom Fund and the other was a private donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

"Logistically, it has been a bit of a challenge, because the park is so big and we basically have to walk everywhere," said Loeppky. "But this is also a program that is aimed at teaching leadership skills and they've done well." ▶