

Commissioners OK grant for Youth Chore program

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Delaware County commissioners on Aug. 2 approved a 2011 grant application for the county's Youth Chore program, which has been conducted since 1993 in partnership with the county Council for Older Adults. Under the program, people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are low-income or have special needs under the Workforce Investment Act program are paid to work summer jobs, doing routine household and lawn maintenance jobs for senior citizens. In recent years, the program has served about 90 to 95 households, doing everything from small painting jobs to washing windows to mowing grass.

Tracey Merrin, employment service counselor for the Delaware County Jobs and Family Services, said seniors apply to the program through the Council for Older Adults.

"As we get older, to stay in our homes, we need some assistance," Merrin said. "Our summer chore kids do anything from lawn care, weeding, washing windows, painting walls, anything a senior may not have time or ability to do. When I'm 70, I see a cobweb and I want to go after it, but is it smart for me to do, to get up on a chair to do that?"

The program has traditionally operated for eight weeks during the summer, but the application approved Monday could allow the county to provide full-time service.

"We would like to apply for a grant that would allow us to operate year-round," jobs and services director Mona Reilly told the commissioners.

Rhonda Leasure, workforce development supervisor for the jobs and family services, said the program was being extended this year beyond the usual eight weeks, because federal stimulus money has been made available to allow the program to continue to Sept. 30.

"We do this in collaboration with the Council for Older Adults," Leasure said. "Normally we offer eight weeks during the summer. They provide us with some grant dollars, and we match that with other dollars we have available. This year, because of additional grant dollars ... some stimulus money, we'll be able to extend it to the end of September."

Leasure said the Youth Chore program helps seniors and youth.

"The whole goal is to keep seniors in their homes," Leasure said. "It helps avoid assisted living. It's a quality of life issue, because seniors are most comfortable in their homes. We help with home maintenance and lawn maintenance to keep them out of trouble with the city for failing to mow lawns, or trying to get up on ladders and then fall and have a serious injury.

"The kids also benefit. They're paid wages, so they get to have a summer job, so they get work experience. And they have money to help with expenses or school."

Leasure said a crew of four does the work.

"Right now our crew is 17, 18, 19 years old," Leasure said. "They provide chore services. We call it summer chore, because they go to the home of the seniors to do requests. It's a variety of things. They do the physical aspects. We're not professionals, we couldn't fix pipes. We're looking at simple tasks." Merrin encouraged more seniors to apply for support. "If there are seniors who are not aware of this and would like to join in, we'd like to get this word out to the community," Merrin said.