

## OALP Helps PCYS

When most people are trying to stay inside during this extremely hot summer, an agricultural group rolled up their sleeves to help with landscaping tasks. Class XV of the Oklahoma Agricultural Leadership Program (OALP) spent an hour beginning at 5:00 p.m. on July 14, when the thermometer read 106 degrees, trimming branches, pulling weeds, weed-eating, and cleaning gutters at the Payne County Youth Services Shelter in Stillwater.



The class was in town during their eighth of thirteen seminars which are conducted around the state, nation, and world. During each educational agricultural seminar, they try to arrange a service project to give back to the community in which they are visiting. OALP Director Edmond Bonjour started this new aspect of the program when he became the director last year. “It is important for people to help others and if I

can instill this thought in the current OALP members, then I feel that it has been a worthwhile effort,” said Bonjour.

Shortly after the class members began their landscaping tasks a counselor came out and said that one of the boys wanted to help. The class enthusiastically invited him to join them. The eleven-year-old was placed alongside some of the women who were weeding the front bed.

Jessica Wilcox from Fairview immediately started a conversation with him and soon was educating him on different types of plants and plant-parts. “This is a rhizome,” Wilcox instructed.

A few minutes later, one of the young girls from the shelter also asked if she could assist. Her task was to shovel debris from the parking area. “It was great to see our class members working with these youth,” stated Bonjour.

Katie Reim from Stillwater said, “I really liked working with the kids and talking to them. It helps put things in perspective that even a smaller community like Stillwater has children that don't have anywhere to go.”

When the OALP group was having their photo taken, Bonjour asked if they knew about the purpose of the shelter. He barely started his explanation when the young boy from the shelter said that he would tell them. It was a poignant moment. Later, Kyle Dorton from Altus stated, “His story really tugged at your heart-strings.”

The Payne County Youth Services Shelter was established in 1972 to house juveniles who previously may have been placed in the county jail. Youth Guidance Specialists are trained to care for the young people 24 hours a day. The shelter is licensed for up to 17 juveniles, ranging in age from 9 to 17 years old. Another purpose of the shelter is to provide emergency short-term housing and crisis intervention. In 1984, the shelter was moved to a country setting on four acres where the OALP members worked. The shelter is a part of the wide programming of Payne County Youth Services which also includes counseling and prevention and diversion services.

“We were very excited to have been contacted by Edmond about this opportunity,” stated Janet Fultz, executive director at PCYS. “The assistance of this group provided for some very important tasks to be accomplished in the work at the shelter. It is clear, however, that the real gift was the interaction among the OALP members and our youth. We are very grateful to the OALP.”

The OALP is composed of professional people involved in agricultural production or agribusiness from across the state. “These people were chosen for our program based on their potential to be future agricultural leaders in Oklahoma,” stated Bonjour.

Bonjour said, “I hope their leadership made an important impact on two willing youth while working side-by-side.”