NYC youth share philanthropic experiences

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KENDALVILLE — What do you get from 27 New York City students who are highly motivated to help the needy and beautify their city?

More than 13,000 hours of community service.

Those students — ranging in age from 10 to 18 — are visiting northeast Indiana this week to share some of their community service ideas and efforts. They expect to have a good time as they interact with 90 area youth associated with the Dekko Foundation and visit area attractions.

“We are going to work hard and play hard,” said Steve Ramos, senior program director for Fresh Youth Initiatives (FYI).

A nonprofit organization in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City, FYI works to support and encourage young people to design and carry out service projects while building their leadership skills. Every February FYI hits the road to visit communities where they can share their time and talent.

Twenty-seven FYI students and five adult staff members arrived by train Sunday in Waterloo. Their trip to northeast Indiana was made possible by a partnership between FYI and the Dekko Foundation and its philanthropic youth organizations.

Following a welcome lunch at the Kendallville Banquet and Conference Center, FYI members taught their northeastern Indiana hosts how to make sleeping bags for the homeless from scratch.

Learning how to make sleeping bags from scratch Sunday was a “hands on” learning experience for about 90 members of the Dekko Foundation’s philanthropic youth groups. Representatives of Fresh Youth Initiatives (FYI) of New York City demonstrated how they make sleeping bags for the homeless at a welcome event at the Kendallville Banquet and Conference Center. Pictured from left are Kimberly Schroeder, Dekko program officer; Ashley Everhart of DeKalb County; Megan Callahan of Steuben County; Travis Smith of Noble County; and FYI members Devin Robinson, Pedro Guadalupe and Yesenia Lantigua. At the far right is Steve Ramos, FYI senior program director.

The 27 FYI students have accumulated 13,336 hours of community service doing things such as making sleeping bags, working in their food pantry and removing graffiti. FYI is funded primarily by private donations.

Their Web site at www.freshyouth.org says FYI’s mission is to “support and encourage the efforts of young people in Washington Heights to design and carry out community service projects, develop leadership skills, fulfill their potential and realize their dreams.”

Service projects will range from moving books at the Columbia City library to helping with clean up projects at Pokagon State Park. But there will be plenty of time for sightseeing and fun at destinations such as Pokagon, Amish country and the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum.

They will leave by train Thursday. The trip is usually about 17 hours; however, they were delayed Sunday because of the snow.

“We want to thank the host families and the Dekko Foundation,” said Ramos.