

Jobs For Youth Project

By PAT DOUBLEDAY

ORANGE — Sometimes all you need is a helping hand. This is what the Franklin Hampshire Career Center has been doing for youths recently who are at risk or are in danger of becoming at risk.

Called "Orange Jobs For Youths Project," in fiscal year 2004, 11 young residents were given jobs in an effort to help them turn their lives around. It worked.

The project is part of the SNI (Safe Neighborhood Initiative) program, and the Attorney General's office allocated \$10,000 to the Jobs project for the first year. Jim Parcells, director of planning and youth programs at the Center, said that since the funds were received in January, the project has been in place for five months. There were six job slots for the youths; some worked less than 10 hours a week because of their schedules and others worked more. Most were still in school, he said.

This fiscal year the Center is seeking to expand the project, but initially the youths were placed in non-profit or government jobs, said Jeff Aho, who is an assessment counselor at the Center. He said they were given these jobs because their employers had experience working with this type of worker.

Some of the jobs were in the town hall, the 1794 Meetinghouse, YES (Young Entrepreneurs Society), and Wheeler Memorial Library.

Joining the Career Center is Work Opportunities, a private, for-profit company that works with the Department of Social Services. The company is headquartered in Dover, N.H. and currently has offices in six states. Ellen Shimer, a director at the company, said the organization came to Orange to help young people become employable and find them jobs.

"Flipping burgers is not a bad gig," Shimer said. "But McDonald's is inundated with applications, and the Youth project offers them other opportunities."

The opportunities are far ranging. For instance, a youth in the town hall worked in the town accountant's office learning about procurement, said Town Administrator Rick Kwiatkowski. Shimer said a youth working at the 1794 Meetinghouse learned about restoration when trying to match a color when that kind of paint was not in existence when the building was constructed. The youth working at the library learned how this facility is operated.

These jobs were a big responsibility for the young workers, and they, the youth, were not sure they could handle it, said Shimer.