From left, Raina Read-Clark and mother Hannah Read assist in the garden at the Public Library for Union County while volunteering during the Susquehanna Valley United Way's Day of Action on Friday.

Nonprofits benefit from United Way Day of Action

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THE WEEKENDER

More than 260 volunteers from across the five-county region rolled up their sleeves to assist 31 nonprofit organizations Friday during the Susquehanna Valley United Way Day of Action.

"I think having a Day of Action is important because it reminds us that we are all a part of a community," said Danielle Velkoff, senior director of marketing and communications at the Susquehanna Valley United Way.

The United Way enlisted volunteers from businesses from across the region to give their time to nonprofits in need of assistance with a variety of projects. The work was carried out in Union, Northumberland, Snyder, Montour and Columbia counties.

Shamokin Area High School softball players Nina Wilk, left, and Elizabeth Nye hammer an iron post into the ground to hang a sign about the Mrs. Meyers Clean Day grant acquired to fund a community garden on South Franklin Street. The students volunteered to aid the Shamokin Community Garden as part of the United Way Day of Action initiative.
In Shamokin, volunteers from UGI Corporation and Shamokin Area High School softball team members aided Shamokin Community Gardens members in putting the finishing touches on the South Franklin Street garden. The volunteers installed gutters on a tool shed, as well as a rain barrel, framing posts for the lattice fencing, bicycle rims along the perimeter of the pollination garden and a hand-painted welcome sign for the garden.

The garden, located near 244 S. Franklin St., also features 10 community planting beds for flowers or vegetables, a shed for tools and supplies, a seating area, a pollination garden with native plants, and fencing along the edge of the property nearest to the Shamokin Creek.

Once finished, the group spruced up other community gardens on Sunbury Street and Claude Kehler Memorial Park on Arch Street.

“We’re a very small core of older volunteers,” said Jeanie Crowl, vice president of the Shamokin Community Garden. “We don’t get external help often. Every once in a while out of the blue, we get a donation or gift cards, but this is full force. ... This is fantastic.”

In Lewisburg, Children’s Museum Executive Director Mary Beth Harris said she was thrilled to welcome volunteers to help with sprucing up various areas of the museum, both inside and out.

At the Lewisburg YMCA at the Miller Center, volunteers from McCann School of Business and Technology worked with 10 YMCA staff members to clean the facility.

Greater Susquehanna Valley YMCA CEO Bonnie McDowell said the volunteers inside emptied the storage closet of its vast array of youth sports equipment.

School softball players Nina Wilk and Elizabeth Nye were recruited to help in the effort to complete the South Franklin Street community garden.

“We heard and knew about it,” Wilk said. “We love helping the community.”

She held iron posts steady as Nye hammered them into the ground, which would be used to hang an informational sign about the source of the garden’s grant funding.

The Shamokin Community Gardens was awarded a $20,000 Lots of Compassion grant from Mrs. Meyers Clean Day and Kids Gardening and a $2,000 Joseph Robert Foundation grant, which were used to transform the vacant lot into the garden.

With their final tasks completed, the community garden will officially open to the public on May 19.

Back in the Lewisburg area, volunteers from the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) helped to spread mulch outside of the Public Library for Union County.

Don Adams, a volunteer at the library, said having the extra volunteers there to help was wonderful.

“We got a tremendous amount done in a short time,” Adams said. “It’s also an opportunity to share our philosophy of gardening, which is focusing around native species and pollinators. It’s just a wonderful group of workers. What they’re doing in a single day would take me eight days, easily.”

Volunteers from Evangelical Community Hospital gathered outside the Donald Heitter Community Center (DHCC) to pull weeds, plant seeds, and break down a splintered wooden bench.

“Giving back to the community is really important to us, and when the United Way reached out and had these opportunities for us, we immediately had volunteers that wanted to help today,” said Angi Lahr, vice president of clinical operations at Evangelical.

Lahr swept dirt from the DHCC porch while fellow volunteer Kate Sheeley, Alicia Brosius, Melissa Lutz, Desiree Powell and Matt Saylor worked on various projects around the building.

DHCC Executive Director Andrea Tufo found the day of community assistance to be “greatly impactful.”

Tufo explained that the DHCC staff consists of only three members, which makes it difficult to commit to side projects such as gardening.

Kids who attend the center have expressed their desire to plant their own vegetables and make salsa in the summer.

“What they’re doing is so important and vital to the kids who come here who want to have pride in what we do,” Tufo said. “We’re just so excited that (the volunteers) are here because they’re making it happen.... They’re making one of our kids’ dreams come true.”

Tufo also touched on the sense of community and networking that the Day of Action promotes. She and Velkoff highlighted the saying, “Many hands make for light work.”

Velkoff thanked all volunteers who assisted in the Day of Action “through their generosity.”

Crowl, of the Shamokin Community Gardens, said the group’s next plan of action is to use a $20,000 grant from the Degenstein Foundation to progress in refurbishing the Sunbury Street community garden, which is located across the street from Dunkin Donuts. She said they’d like to install a new retaining wall leading up to the second level of the garden and a staircase.

More information can be found on the Shamokin Community Garden’s Facebook page.