

# Students build homes and hope at Habitat for Humanity worksite

It was both learning opportunity and service experience. Over the past two months, several students from Cardinal Newman Catholic Secondary School have taken part in a co-operative education work placement at Habitat for Humanity Hamilton, building affordable homes for low-income families.

The students – an even mix of boys and girls – have been spending their weekday afternoons at the Niagara Street worksite learning the skills of the trade, from framing and dry walling to trim work and painting. The worksite is part of the Robert Land Development where Habitat for Humanity is building two four-unit townhouse complexes in the heart of Hamilton's old industrial core.

The placement will enable students to earn two coop credits toward their Ontario Secondary School Diploma while gaining real world experience in the construction trade.

"This is the best," said Sarah Steeves, a grade 12 at Cardinal Newman Catholic Secondary School. "With a lot of placements, you're just told things but at this place you actually get to do hands-on work."

On this afternoon, Sarah was helping to install a doorframe in unit #4 which is near completion. Three doors down, Mitchell Davis, Peter Matesic and Kayman Balram were putting up a vapour barrier under the watchful eye of Habitat Site Supervisor Ron Velenosi and OYAP Instructor Dave Clark.

"We're tough on them," said Clark, "but there's a big book on health and safety regulations and if they don't do things right when they're out there in the field, they're going to get it thrown at them pretty hard."

Because there are so many students at the Habitat site – eight students from Cardinal Newman and one from Cathedral High School – Clark was hired by OYAP Coordinator Leo Paone to work with the students at the job site and provide extra training support. Paone also provided students with the loan of tool belts and tools for the semester.

"If the students worked anywhere else, they wouldn't have these kinds of opportunities," noted Co-op Teacher Monitor Theresa Della-Maestra. "It's been a real eye opener for them."

The students are doing fairly high-level work, agreed Velenosi, although they're not doing any of the work that a certified professional would be doing.



Cardinal Newman student Peter Matesic and Cathedral student Kayman Balram (far right) put up a vapour barrier in Unit #1 under the careful scrutiny of Habitat Site Supervisor Ron Velenosi (left) and OYAP Instructor Dave Clark. [Click to enlarge.](#)



Mitchell Davis on the Habitat worksite. [Click to enlarge.](#)

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"They assist, they learn, they ask questions and are put to work," he said. "It's like an apprenticeship in a sense; they get the tough jobs, the clean up jobs, but they're learning all aspects of the trade."

Because the homes are being built largely by volunteers, progress can be slow, but that's part of Habitat, added Velenosi.

What's also part of Habitat is its focus on service, partnership, human dignity and faith. Building on its Christian foundation, Habitat for Humanity is committed to serve and work with people of all faiths and beliefs in a spirit of justice and compassion to build a world where everyone has a safe and decent place to live.

That philosophy makes the Habitat placement a very unique learning experience, said Co-op Teacher Monitor Lisa Owens. "Not only do our students acquire industry-specific skills but they're able to put their faith into action."