

For the second year in a row, our Youth Mission Trip team headed to Farmington – a rural community in the western mountains of Maine – to work with [Mission at the Eastward](#) (M.A.T.E.) After a laying-of-hands during the June 25th church service, 16 high school students and 4 chaperones marched out to Shalom Chaverin and got in the three vehicles we had loaded up the evening prior with luggage, tools and food to get our week started. Nancy Cooney miraculously found a 15-passenger van to rent, Angélique Kania once again rented her beloved minivan, and seasoned mission trippers and new college students Addison Thawley and Greg Kania co-chaperoned a group and drove the Thawley's large SUV.



After stopping in Kennebunkport, Maine for lunch, we arrived at the [Farmington Conference Center](#) around 3:30 to [Campers on Mission](#) from Georgia and Texas getting the grounds and facilities ready for us. Our kids jumped right in to help gather up the piles of leaves, mow the lawn, and move some debris. Greg and Addison even got the unassembled ping-pong table the Conference Center had purchased and put it together in less than half an hour! This turned out to

be crucial for our down-time activities, as Sunday was our last day of sunshine and doing anything outside.

Despite a week of wet weather, the kids didn't complain. They were true examples of turning lemons into lemonade. So instead of campfires and swimming in the river, we spent our downtime in the central building where we ate, played cards, listened to music, colored, played ping pong and the newly created and VERY exciting game of TRASHKET-BALL.

We learned from last year that traveling for over four hours, unpacking everything and having orientation with Dan Flint from M.A.T.E. does not lend itself well to a complicated

meal on our first Sunday night, so this year, we had baked ziti and meatballs that we brought with us from Mamma Mia's for dinner – easy and delicious, and plenty of leftovers for another night! Dan filled us in on what we'd be working on for the week and we settled in, the kids filled with energy, the adult chaperones ready for bed. The pouring rain and thunderstorms eventually lulled everyone to sleep, and we began bright and early on Monday morning to start our work!

Angelique's group

"The best laid plans..." the saying goes. A lot of thought went into the work groups I had created – construction abilities, siblings, friends, ages, etc. We learned first thing Monday morning that the group going to Stacy's house would be greeted by seven cats and two dogs. Riley was supposed to have been a part of this group, and since she has an anaphylactic response to cats, we were extremely grateful to have learned this before she arrived! A quick swap with Quinn was made, Riley became part of my group and Quinn got to spend all week loving and taking care of those cats!



(One of our daily trips to McDonald's for a lunch and a Grimace shake treat)

I took my group back to the home of Durwood Swett, a 92-year-old veteran whose home we had painted and re-sided last summer in Jay, Maine. This year, we had smaller, more precise jobs to do. Fortunately, the staff at M.A.T.E. listened to my pleas of having someone with more construction knowledge than me stay with us, so they put out the call for mentor volunteers. Cary from NH came to help us for the week and was assigned to facilitate our three groups from Pilgrim Church. He spent most of his time with my group, as Addison, Greg and Nancy are much more adept at building and renovation.



As is the case with many of the homes that are worked on, what began as a simple task of replacing rotting window casings revealed more significant rot in the siding underneath, which of course costs much more to replace. The same thing happened when removing rotting floorboards – the whole support structure under a wall was rotting and needed to be replaced.

So Monday was spent waiting for MATE's "blessing" to take on these additional projects. Fortunately, we got it!



Once again, as in life, deconstructing is the easy part. Building up is much more challenging. While Ben and Lucas worked diligently with Cary to fix Durwood's entryway floor,

Riley and Allie were able to clear out space in Durwood's small barn to get priming and painting of the new side panels and window casings done.



Nathan and Sebastian used a jigsaw to cut out rotting window frames. While waiting for more guidance from Cary, we also completely re-did Durwood's front flower beds. The weeds and overgrowth went away, new rose bushes and lavender plants were planted. We topped it off with mulch for a new and fresh look! We also took shelter in



Durwood's well-stocked, but rather disorganized tool shed. When the rain passed, the shed was looking much more organized and user-friendly!

We spent our lunch hours at nearby Bass Park in Wilton, Maine. Most days were spent under the gazebo out of the rain at the picnic tables, but on our final day, the sun was shining and the kids took the opportunity to go for a swim in the lake!





When we came back to Durwood's after the swim, we found him outside trying to get his riding lawn mower working. The loud sputtering led him to believe that there was water in the gas tank, so Nathan, Sebastian and Lucas helped him syphon out the gasoline. They re-filled the gas tank and tried again. No luck. After an hour or so of the mower sitting in the sun, they tried again. Success!

Sebastian and Lucas took turns mowing the large yard, with Nathan finishing the job, just as the torrential rains began again. Getting drenched didn't stop him from completing the task, his boots filled with rain and his body and clothing got completely drenched. Riley and Allie cleaned the barn of painting supplies, and the mower was backed into the shed, out of the rain, safely ready for Durwood to use next time.

Durwood seemed really entertained and pleased to see all the kids having a go at mowing. When the kids were teasing each other about forgetting to lower the blade, Durwood laughed along with them. We had some time to talk with him and learn about how he had built his home over the course of one summer in 1961 along with help of his friends and neighbors. We learned he had been a foreman in the nearby paper mill, and then the "shoe shop." And based on items we saw in his barn and shed, it's clear he loved to bowl and play golf. It was



wonderful to spend time with him and learn a little of his story. His smile and delight at what we were able to do for him were the bright spots in our week.

Nancy Cooney's group's experience – in Nancy's words

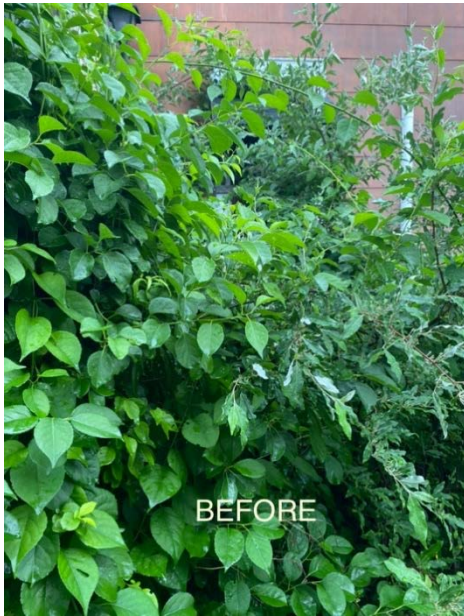
Ella Edwards, Isabella Vose, Lily Romanelli, Peter Evans, Jake Fall, and Ben Elliott made up a team of very hard working young adults that I dubbed "The Poison Cherubs." The cherub part of this name is obvious, but the poison part was due to the rampant poison ivy that unfortunately covered most of Bill Allen's property. The only greenery that seemed to rival the poison ivy was the invasive Bittersweet vines which seemed to have been growing unimpeded for well over 20 years. The bittersweet completely blocked any view of the house from the street. The vines grew twisting together, and wound tightly up into the trees in front, which was slowly suffocating everything they touched.

Bill is retired, and has adult children who live nearby, but have been unable to help him with yard work. On the first day we drove up, it was overwhelming to see the condition of the house and yard. Bill was unable to access his back deck because of old metal roofing and rotten lumber that had been stored there from years ago. The Bittersweet vines covered the whole deck as well. We also had difficulty locating the side stairs that we needed to replace. The old stairs had collapsed years ago and were covered with Bittersweet vines as well.

We all got right to work- starting on the yard and battling the bittersweet vines, removing all the debris from the deck. It was hard work, and often throughout each day it would be pouring rain.



We broke up into teams- Ben working on the side stairs with help from Lily, Peter, Jake, and Isabella, and then alternately the same crew helping to replace the rotting railing on the deck. It was a lot of work, and countless times these young adults problem solved, made plans, worked as a team, and revised plans as needed with a tenacity that was beyond admirable.



Because of the persistent rain, it was decided that our team would switch gears on day two, and instead install a floor for a seamstress named Maria who lived in the next town over. Maria was so kind and very happy that we were there to help. Soon after we met Maria, she left for the day to work at her sewing and alternations shop in town. Isabella, Lily, and Ella started right in on measuring and installing the flooring that Peter had been cutting with the circular saw. This was a slow and tedious process as there was settling in the foundation, and no two measurements seemed to be the same. While this team was working on the flooring, we also noticed that there were many branches that were hanging close to Maria's home. After a quick call to ask permission from Maria to do the tree work, Ben, Jake, and I cleared a lot of branches, bringing more light to her home and helping to keep her roof dry and safe. At the end of that day, Maria had a beautiful new floor in her bedroom and all the branches were cut away from her home, making her yard look bigger and brighter.



(Pictures from Maria's house)



On day three back at Bill Allen's home, Ella and I tackled mostly the front of the house, pulling and cutting Bittersweet vines and dead trees making good use of a chainsaw, a pole saw, and every other cutting implement



that we had. It took about 3 days to clear the front and side of the house.

It was quite a transformation. It was also a wonderful opportunity to say hello to people walking by and waving to people drive by. Some younger kids walked by and said, “Wow that’s a big difference!” Which was welcome feedback during what was exhausting work in the pouring rain and with that almost certain promise of poison ivy as a souvenir to take home. Lily cleared the front porch and began the prep work for the next crew to paint the porch.



Because of the constant rain, even though we put up tarps to try to keep the porch dry, it wouldn’t have made sense to try to paint in these conditions. The projects that needed to be done were completed to the absolute best of our ability, and the outcome was wonderful to see. We went to the store and got two sturdy outdoor chairs that would give Bill a place to enjoy his new



outdoor living space. We planted some flowers in pots and hung hanging planters from the front porch. Bill Allen was so happy and excited for these projects to be finished. He said that he was going bowling that night with his senior league and he was going to tell his friends all about MATE and the work that we did. We also became friendly with Bill’s neighbor next door Jim and brought him an application for help with repairs on his home as well.

As I reflect on this experience, I think I was impacted the most by the tenacity and resourcefulness of these young adults especially in the difficult wet, dirty, disheartening and often overwhelming conditions that they were consistently in. They made the most of it, and because of



their perseverance, I know that Bill is enjoying the outcome of their efforts every single day. I also believe that there is a ripple effect that has been brought to this community as well. It was a privilege to be able to help our neighbors in Maine, and I am so thankful for the experience and countless memories.

The 3rd group, based on experiences shared, in Angelique's words

Our third group was chaperone-challenged from the beginning. Due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, we had to scramble to find chaperones for this group at the last minute. Fortunately, Greg Kania and Addison Thawley stepped up for the first part of the week, fresh out of their first year of college, but with a couple mission trips under their belts. Roy Wood came up to finish the week on Wednesday until we left on Friday. We are so grateful to these three for stepping up when needed!

One thing this group had working in its favor was that this job was completely inside the house, so the rain didn't affect them at all. The downside was that in addition to the multiple cats and litter of kittens, there were also several dogs in the house who didn't stop barking. Fortunately, our group was a group of animal-lovers for which the homeowner was immensely thankful.



This group accomplished some remarkable work. Ceiling and plasterboard that had been damaged by a leaky roof was ripped out and replaced with new sheetrock. The kids were surprised to find that the "beams" under the eaves were actual tree limbs with the bark still on them.

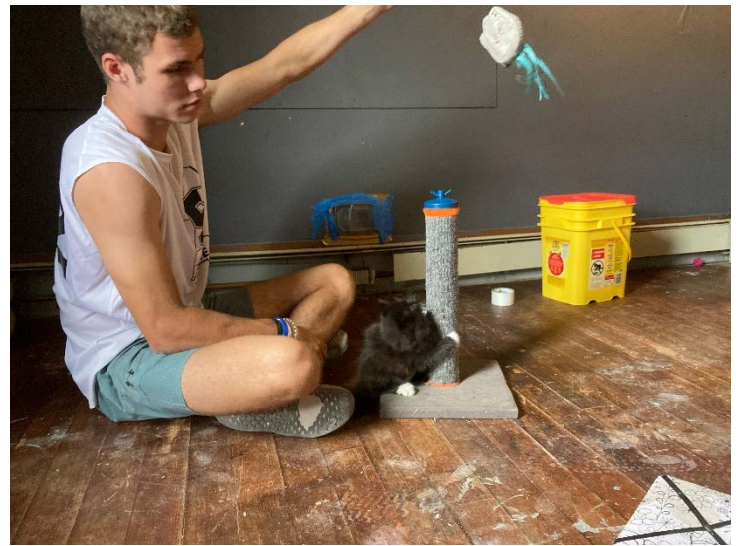
And once again, as in life, destructing is the easy part, albeit quite messy and dusty. Constructing is the difficult part. Fortunately, not only is Addison a mature young man and great leader, he's also really knowledgeable about home repair. With his guidance, new sheetrock was put up and all was repaired.



Under Roy Wood's guidance and leadership later in the week, new windows were even put in! We're so appreciative of Roy's flexibility and leadership for this group at the end of the week. The MATE leaders were impressed with how quickly he figured things out and worked with what they had. His group was impressed and pleased with the sweet treats he bought for them each day 😊



While the others were getting dusty in the room being repaired, Quinn took the initiative to help the new mama cat and her litter of kittens. After playing with the kittens for a while, Quinn knew that the cat room needed a thorough cleaning. The cats (and homeowner!) LOVED the newly spruced up room. Zach commented one evening at dinner that the work Quinn did was remarkable. He even went into have some fun with the kittens!



Quinn wasn't the only one who took initiative. Maddie saw that painting of one of the girl's bedrooms had been started, but never completed. Maddie knew it would be a treat for her to come back to a fresh, completely painted room. Maddie got to work done and by the time the girl came back, the room had a whole new look!



We had some special visitors during our week!

We couldn't believe our eyes when the mythical Bigfoot showed up!

What a relief to know it was actually one of our own pulling a prank on us 😊

Chris Delisle, from M.A.T.E. also came to thank us for all our efforts and shared with us the difference we're making in so many people's lives. He asked for input and was appreciative of all the feedback he got from our kids.

A new tradition was created by Allie, a first year Mission Tripper that I absolutely love. She made a playlist of the music that motivated, inspired and entertained us throughout the week ranging from Zack Bryan's [Revival](#), Taylor Swift's [Nothing New](#), to the Bill Withers' classic [Lovely Day](#).



We left Maine on Friday knowing that the help we provided, the work we did and the care we showed was God's love pouring forth from our hands and hearts. God lives through us!

With gratitude and love to all our Mission Trippers,

Angélique