

GRAND RAPIDS

Local organizations introduce kids to skilled trades

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) — A partnership between nonprofits and a contractor is giving young people in Grand Rapids a chance to both learn a trade in a positive environment and earn money.

Top Knotch Kids, a brand under nonprofits Descendants of the Truth, and **Save a Life a Day outreach ministries** have partnered with **Cella Building Company** to give kids an opportunity to learn a trade.

“Top Knotch Kids is actually a spinoff from the Stop the Violence movement,” founder Corey Mcliechey said.

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Mcliechey and William McFadden linked their community organizations together for a bigger impact.

“We are just trying to get the kids from the streets basically and make a change in their life. If we can stop the hate and bring them to something they can do in the community such as making money or receiving funds,” Mcfadden, who is a community organizer of Save a Life a Day, said.

Onsite construction occupations employ a lower percentage of Black or African American workers compared to occupations with similar job requirements, according to the analysis of 2019 American Community Survey [data](#).

This partnership is giving marginalized communities in Grand Rapids an opportunity for equity in the construction field.

“Some local contractors in the area do a local outreach program and they connected with the owner of our business through a panel meeting,” said Scott Uzarski, the Cella Building Company sites’ superintendent. “They came out last

week to discuss it with us and we brought them in this week to do a lot of unit cleaning for us.”

Young adults are learning trade skills that can fund their future.

“We are having electricians, plumbers, (and) carpenters all talk with them and kind of give them some insight of what they do on a daily basis, and then the other thing is getting them some hands-on experience. We are starting easy. We have units that are completed and we are having them clean them out before the tenants move in,” Uzarski said.

Top Knotch Kids’ motto is, “We don’t kill with guns, we build with guns to try to change the narrative of guns.” Mcliechy said that mission is reflected in this project.

“Instead of destroying a life, you could save a life. You could beautify your neighborhood and make money while you are doing it so everything is all positive,” Mcliechy said.

Uzarski said it’s important to have exposure and opportunities for marginalized communities.

“I know not everybody has people in their family who can help in the trades so it’s cool to have the outreach program and the guys from Top Knotch getting involved was fantastic,” Uzarski said.

“One kid said, ‘I always wondered what it felt like to be on a construction site,’ or whatever and I said, ‘Now you are here,’” Mcliechy said.

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