

Community Kids Connection

“ADOPTED” CHILDREN MAKE AN IMPACT ON LLU STUDENTS’ LIVES

On Saturday mornings, children between the ages of 3 and 12 show up at the small white building at the Social Action Community Health Systems-Norton (SAC-Norton) clinic, near Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, California, anxiously awaiting the morning’s events that include singing songs, listening to stories, playing games, participating in arts and crafts, and other activities.

The Community Kids Connection (CKC) is a two-hour program that provides Loma Linda University students with opportunities to develop relationships with children and families from diverse backgrounds in the neighboring communities of the SAC-Norton clinic.

On the walls inside the building hangs brightly colored construction paper, with words like: “Love,” “Joy,” and “Peace.”

In front of the backdrop is a six-foot-tall silhouette of a person, adorned with multicolored paper organs—lungs, heart, brain, kidneys, pancreas, and more that the children cut out and placed on the silhouette during an earlier CKC program.

He stands as a reminder to the children that we are all different—all wonderfully made—and that we can work together to help others to know about God.

Community Kids Connection seeks to promote a Christ-centered perspective to community service that nurtures a sense of

personal concern for others which crosses cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic boundaries.

“These relationships serve to provide positive role models for the children served, as well as to increase the partnership between Loma Linda University and its surrounding communities,” points out Juan Carlos Belliard, M.P.H., program director, Students for International Mission Service (SIMS), who supervises the program.

Students from each of the university’s six schools take turns organizing the pro-

gram, based on a theme chosen for the quarter. In the past, Community Kids Connection has had themes such as: “The Seven Days of Creation,” “Animals of the World,” “Manners,” “Family,” “Countries of the World,” “What Do I Want to Be When I Grow Up,” and “Food.”

On average, there are approximately 25 to 30 children, and 10 to 15 university students. There are days when the ratio is one student per child, and that is significant when groups sometimes have as many as 40 children.

“Our students pick up the children before the program, and sometimes visit them during the week,” says Mr. Belliard. “They really care about these children.

“Parents also participate in the program, and help the children with the various activities that take place.”

Last year, CKC participants went to Camp Cedar Falls with the Kamp Kula group. Other events included field trips to the San Diego Zoo, the mountains, Live Oak Canyon, and the San Bernardino County Museum.

Ryan W. Carroll, a student in the School of Public Health, wrote about his experience working with Community Kids Connection: “. . . As a student of the sciences, I am trained to be an empiricist—I must see it to believe it. I need to see the effects of my time with these kids. I must be able to document their improvement for me

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Tana Brinckerhoff, a School of Public Health student, shares the Christmas spirit with a Head Start preschool child at an annual CKC Adopt-a-Kid Christmas party.

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Nearly 50 Community Kids Connection staff members, parents, and children visited the Live Oak Canyon Christmas Tree Farm in Yucaipa, California. The youngsters enjoyed pony rides, face painting, and a petting zoo while at the farm. Here, the group poses for a picture at the pumpkin patch.

Missy Pitts, a physical therapy student, and Patricia, a CKC participant, stop for a picture during their tour of the San Diego Zoo.

to claim I'm making an impact!

"But God works beyond the rational facet of my science-grounded mind and calls me to action, even if I will never know the outcomes. I have to remember what it says in Hebrew 11:34: 'Out of weakness we are made strong,'" says Mr. Carroll.

"My attempts to better the lives of the children with whom I come in contact are weak and feeble. Nevertheless, as I've had the opportunity to work with the children of San Bernardino through SIMS, I have learned that my efforts, no matter how weak I perceive them to be, will be made strong through the work of the Lord."

"So, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on Saturdays, I will continue to cut, glue, play, sing, laugh, and learn with the kids that my body can be used to better His creation."

Though the Community Kids Connection program is geared for children in the SAC-Norton area, it is just as rewarding for the students and volunteers who lead and participate in it. The program has become so popular that children and students are waiting at the gate on Saturday mornings to begin the day's activities.—Reprinted by permission from *Loma Linda University Scope*, Autumn 2001. ☞

Jennifer Lund, a School of Public Health student, joins her CKC "little sister" to pose for a photo at one of the Community Kids Connection weekend programs.

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University students work on an art project with children from neighboring communities of the SAC-Norton clinic.