

From San Diego, with love



Local children reach out to needy children here and around the world, one at a time, through Kids for Peace

BY EMILY VIZZO

Sometimes the Kids for Peace mission helps other youngsters understand and appreciate cultures from faraway places like India, Nepal, Iran and Nicaragua. But sometimes their reach is much closer to home. This spring, the group is creating and donating an estimated 500 knapsacks filled with toothbrushes, pencils and books for children living in San Diego hospitals or homeless shelters.

Skyler Pinto, a 9-year-old student at Deer Canyon Elementary in Carlsbad, submitted the application that earned Kids for Peace the \$2,500 grant that is making this latest venture possible.

"I like going to hospitals and delivering Peace Packs," Skyler said. "It makes me feel good, because then the kids in the hospital know someone is caring for them."

Skyler joined Kids for Peace in first grade with his brother Cody, who is now 7. His mom, Donna Pinto, is a board member for the organization with 50 chapters worldwide, including 12 in San Diego County.

The Pintos' Carlsbad chapter has between 20 to 30 kids ranging in age from 4 to 11 years old.

"When the older generations see kids doing sweet, pure acts, it raises the awareness of what's going on around them," said founder

Skyler Pinto fills a "Peace Pack" at a recent Kids for Peace event, destined for a local child in need. Inset shows some of the items being given.



Jill McManigal of Carlsbad. Her children, Hana Craft, 11, and Bodhi Craft, 8, are members.

"Our grand vision is peace on earth in a world where all children are connected and living a life where they can pursue their dreams, be kind and respectful, take care of each other and live a happy life," she said.

Participants regularly engage in activities that promote gratitude, kindness and compassion.

"We see that all kids are natural peace builders and we provide a place for them to be who they are naturally," McManigal said. "If we give them opportunities to learn about other cultures and express themselves creatively, that natural peace builder will emerge."

During their Great Kindness Challenge in August, children did 50 kind deeds in one day, Donna Pinto said. They've also offered thank-you cards and songs to veterans, attended an Encinitas City Council meeting to thank members for their hard work, organized beach cleanups and written letters to President Barack Obama.

"They're having an effect," Pinto said. "It's contagious."

When children create the Kids Care Packs, they include a handwritten note of friendship, their own handprint and a wish.

"It really embodies everything the Big Ideas are all about," said Daisy Kline, media marketing director for Clifford's Big Ideas by Scholastic Media, which gave Kids for Peace the current grant. "Certainly one of Clifford's Big Ideas is to be kind. That absolutely resonated in Skyler's idea and everything the Kids Care Packs are about."

Judges from the grant evaluated criteria based on a project's feasibility, creativity, sustainability and impact.

Volunteers have delivered packs to India and Nicaragua, but they've also been distributed locally to hospitals and homeless shelters, Pinto said.

Skyler and other volunteers once traveled to an orphanage in Mexico to deliver knapsacks, he said. It was his first visit to an orphanage, and the avid soccer player noticed the poor repair of its soccer field.



Kids for Peace members take part in activities promoting gratitude, kindness and compassion.

"On the soccer field, there was dirt and not really much grass," he said. "There were clotheslines to hang towels and lots of kids. They looked happy, but it made me feel lucky that I wasn't in an orphanage."

Knapsacks cost about \$5 each to make and the group hopes to create 500 packs, McManigal said. They're planning a springtime celebration with picnic table assembly lines so that volunteers — including recipients — can help build packs.

"The hope is to inspire people to get involved in their communities, to reach out and help others," McManigal said. "The grander vision is to let more people know what we're doing, to inspire people to start their own chapters."

The idea is to plant seeds for change, McManigal said.

"We believe the children are learning from an early age that they can make a difference and their actions have true impact," McManigal said. "We also believe that if everyone learns about other cultures, understanding, respect, love and peace will happen."

OurCity recommended volunteer opportunities

Visit volunteersandiego.org for more information or to sign up for one of these projects.

California Native Planting January to March

Lakeside's River Park Conservancy has several group volunteer opportunities available. California Native Planting season started in November and continues through March. Help plant trees and see how it can make a difference years from now as the trees grow. Besides planting, there are other projects for volunteers such as trail building, weeding, trash pick-up and painting.

QUASH 2010 Feb. 27

QUASH is one part scavenger hunt, one part obstacle course and more fun than you'll have all year. Think along the lines of that reality TV show where teams race around the world, but without the cameras and the month-long commitment. Participate in QUASH as a volunteer or competitor and make this unique fundraiser a success for the Alzheimer's Association. The Alzheimer's Association provides essential services in our communities that improve the lives of individuals coping with Alzheimer's disease as we research to find a cure.

CPR Saturday March 13

CPR Saturday is a yearly community event in which the American Red Cross offers free Adult CPR certification and training to the public. In order to successfully pull off this event, the organization needs the help of about 500 people. As a volunteer for CPR Saturday, you will have the opportunity to help with the following areas: registration, testing, re-testing, certification, logistics, security, food and set-up/take-down. While you're there, you can also go through the training to receive free Adult CPR certification.

Spread the peace

To help Skyler Pinto and the Kids for Peace organization give back to the youth of San Diego and kids around the world, visit the Web site kidsforpeaceusa.org, call 760-730-3320 or email info@kidsforpeaceusa.org.

Volunteer San Diego helps nearly 36,000 individuals, families, corporate and community groups fill volunteer needs at 500 community organizations each year.