

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers
and supporters of Project
Understanding

Volume XVIII No. 7

July 2003



Helping and Encouraging One Child at a Time

By Marcia Wakelee
Tutoring Coordinator

Tutors give their students a beautiful gift—an hour a week where the student has the complete attention of a caring older person. This help and encouragement translates into improved schoolwork, and also growth in confidence and self-esteem.

The tutoring program provides free one-on-one tutoring to low-income students (kindergarten through eighth grade) who are referred to us by their teachers. This school year found 236 students and 171 tutors working together on reading, spelling and math and also enjoying each other's company with a game or story at the end of the tutoring time. Tutors and students are now taking a summer break, but will begin in September at our five tutoring centers—Avenue, Lincoln, Eastminster, Saticoy and Oxnard.

This comment from a Balboa Middle School teacher makes it all worthwhile. "This student has grown more than any other sixth grader I can think of this year. He has improved across the board in all subjects. I am very pleased!"

This is our hope for all of our students. We also hope to find a tutor for each child who is referred, but this is a challenge. We ended the year with 27 students who were on the waiting list for a tutor.

As you read about the tutoring program in this newsletter, please consider whether you could spend an hour a week with a young person who needs your help. If the answer is yes, call Kendra at 652-1326. ♦

Teachers, Parents Are Grateful for Avenue Tutoring

By Shelley Wilmeth, Avenue
Tutoring Site Coordinator

The Avenue Tutoring Center provided tutoring for 63 students from E. P. Foster, Sheridan Way, Will Rogers, Blanche Reynolds, Poinsettia, DeAnza, Cabrillo, and Ventura High school.

We started an algebra study group, which met twice a week for students in both middle and high school who needed extra help grasping the concepts of algebra. I would like to express my gratitude to Bill Hinds for giving his time and talents to these students who wouldn't



Student Armando Vargas smiles as tutor David Culton helps him with reading.

have made it through algebra if it weren't for him.

I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation to Nicole Buckner, Justine Caley and Ashelei Higuera from Foothill Technology High School, which has its students complete community service in order to graduate. The senior class completed a project in which they became a hero.

Their tasks were to commit to an organization and make a difference in the lives of some members of their community. They certainly are heroes at the Avenue Tutoring Center. They came several times a week to tutor several students. The Avenue site was blessed with many fine high school tutors this year. Jessica Minnier was the salutatorian of her St. Bonaventure class. Justine Caley was honored with the Presidential Award and CSF

One Child

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(academic) honors. Congratulations, Class of 2003.

We honor all of our tutors for the help that they have given to their students. This comment by an E. P. Foster kindergarten teacher on the progress of one of her pupils says it all. "Thank you so very much for your support. He has improved in all areas of schoolwork! He is a delightful student, as you may well know. His reading has improved and he does very well with math. He will be promoted to first grade ready to learn more. Thanks again." ♦



Tutoring student Joranny Garcia looks forward to seeing tutor Lindsay Sullivan each week.

Saticoy Tutoring Fills Saticoy Library to Overflowing

Our Saticoy Tutoring Center continues to fill up the Saticoy Public Library to overflowing on weekday afternoons.

The librarian, Evelyn Cuevas, has created a warm and welcoming place where adults

look for books while students do homework and explore the use of computers. The tutoring center has been fortunate to share this busy space, and this has benefited both the library and tutoring. With 71 students and 57 tutors, Saticoy is the largest of the tutoring centers, and site coordinator, Ofelia Cervantez, does a wonderful job of nurturing her students and tutors.

The library has recently offered a new free service for students. Tutor.com, an online service that connects students with a live tutor, is available for students in the fourth grade and up. A representative of tutor.com recently spent a week at the library, demonstrating to students and tutors the use of this exciting new learning tool.

This year, a student was referred to the center, with the teacher noting that she needed a "gentle tutor." Not long afterward, the phone rang and it was Lynn Nelson, founder of the Project Understanding tutoring program. She was back in Ventura County for several months, on sabbatical from her current work as a missionary in the Congo, and she wanted to tutor at the Saticoy center while she was here. What a perfect tutor for our new student, and it was wonderful to have her back for a while.

Two brothers who had recently arrived from Mexico were referred for tutoring. They had very little English, but amazingly, two bilingual tutors soon appeared. These tutors, both Buena High School students, have been patient and encouraging, and the boys are learning English and making progress in school.

It has happened often that a helping person has miraculously appeared when needed. We have been blessed with wonderful, caring tutors and great students, and we are thankful. ♦

Eastminster Tutoring Shines With Positive Comments

The Eastminster Center celebrated the year of tutoring on June 1 with an ice cream social. The "Sunday for Sundaes" was a big hit, and site coordinator, Betty Whitney, thanked Eastminster Presbyterian Church for all the help provided by the congregation.

Betty asked parents and tutors to express their feelings about the tutoring center. Here are some of the tutors' replies:

"It is fun seeing the 'high' of recognition come on in the eyes of our kids. Truthfully we think we get as much out of our tutoring experience as the students do." (Gary and Shary Carr)

"The tutoring center is a place where a shy child who spoke little can learn to read in a loud, clear voice and speak and write in complete sentences." (Dolores Powell)

"Seeing the growth in an individual child is exciting. This is especially satisfying when I've worked with a student for more than one year." (Fannie Hutchison)

"The tutoring center is a fun, safe place to be, with a great organization for improving education." (Sally Narkevic)

Saticoy

Continued From Page 2

“I think it’s a wonderful way to interact with people in the neighborhood. Everyone has a story and yet each child and their family are so unique.” (Marilyn van Leeuwen)

This is what a mother and a grandmother said: “I feel gratitude and awe at your generosity and also at your positive attitude.” (Susan Birch)

“Bradley has made incredible progress with the center’s help. He is doing so much better in every subject. The tutors are excellent in what they do with the children, and I’m so grateful for the time and the care they give to each child. Thank you!!” (Carol Ferguson)

But the last word comes from a student, a second grader at Serra School. “It is the best. I like reading.” (Kenton Klucker)

Thank you Betty, tutors, students, parents and teachers for a great year! ♦

Lincoln Teachers and Tutors Work Together

A small neighborhood school, Lincoln is the only one of our tutoring sites where tutoring is done in the classroom, immediately after school. This has made it easy for tutors and teachers to work together. This year Lincoln was happy to welcome a number of high school students as tutors.

Site coordinator, Eunice Koch, has found that tutoring younger children (kindergarten and first grade) when they just begin to slide back is a very

effective way of helping, rather than waiting until the child has reached the middle grades and is well below grade level. She plans to encourage the primary grade teachers to refer their students sooner next year. ♦

Oxnard Tutoring Proud of Excellent Student Progress

By Joyce Clark
Oxnard Site Coordinator

When Charlie Tubbs started and coordinated this tutoring center, it seemed so easy. He was there every day and things seemed to always run smoothly. But when he retired and I took over, I found out real fast that was not the situation at all. I’d have students with no tutor, and tutors with no student. Tutors forgot what day it was, and so did students. It took quite some time to figure out not to panic when things did not go as scheduled. I have learned to tutor a first grader, a third grader and a sixth grader, all at the same time, when necessary. I don’t like that situation, but things sometimes just happen and we adjust.

One of my first adjustments came early on in my coordinating career. At one time we had more tutors than students. (Not now. We currently have 42 students in tutoring and 10 more on the waiting list.)

A little guy named Sebastian came in with his mother. She told us that the teacher wanted to retain him in first grade. She promised the teacher she’d get extra help for him if he could go on to second

grade. Since we had few students, we shared Sebastian. He came every day and stayed for the whole two hours.

Second grade is now over and we are happy to report that Sebastian is reading from a third-grade book, has become an excellent math student and no longer whines when he has to do his spelling. He still bargains with me about how much work he has to do before he gets to “play” on the computer. Which, by the way, is the reason he is so good in math. He has to do math problems before he gets to “play” on the computer.

We are very proud of his progress, and of his jump in self-confidence and self-esteem. He still loves to come to the center, but he is a totally different person from that whiny little boy who started with us at the beginning of his second grade. He told me yesterday that his birthday is at the end of the month and he’ll be eight years old.

We’re hoping we have given him a small start in making his years of education more rewarding and beneficial. We wish him good luck in all he hopes to achieve. ♦



Tutor Doris Williams helps student Teresa Ortega on a math assignment.

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“What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Micah 6:8

Our Mission and Programs

Mission

Project Understanding is a faith-based agency founded and established on the principles and ideals of Judaism and Christianity whose mission is twofold: To do justice by serving the poor, hungry and oppressed with compassion and mercy, and to provide avenues for those who wish to serve others.

Programs

Project Understanding initiates, develops, and maintains special projects pulling together the efforts of individual local churches and groups to meet the needs of the less fortunate. The programs are:

Reception Center

A program that utilizes an intake process with skilled, supportive listeners to minister to and assess the needs of individuals and families in order to make appropriate referrals.

Focus on Food Emergency Food Pantry

A pantry program designed to help homeless and hungry people through times of crisis. The Pantry provides recipients with a three-day supply of food.

SARAH (Simply Arranging Real Assistance Here)

A source of basic services for homeless people. Services include shower and laundry facilities, a mail and message center for job seekers, and assistance in attaining food and shelter.

Ventura County Hunger Coalition

A network of church and community-based groups and individuals committed to eliminating domestic and world hunger through communications, advocacy, networking, education, and action.

Tutoring Station

To assist economically disadvantaged children, this program provides one hour per week of extra classroom instruction with volunteer tutors in one-to-one interaction at five locations in Ventura and Oxnard.

Religious Coalition for the Homeless

Churches and synagogues joining in faith-based action to provide transitional shelter and a voice for the homeless of Ventura County.

Emergency Shelter

Project Understanding is working with a coalition of interested agencies and individuals to provide year-round emergency shelter for homeless people.

Project Understanding Home Improvement Auction Needs Your Help

As we told you last month, the Project Understanding Home Improvement Auction has been scheduled for Saturday, October 11, 2003.

As the name implies, the theme of the auction will be home improvement with all of the auction items for sale relating to that motif.

This is going to be an exciting event but it will take many volunteers to make it a success.

We estimate that it will take at least 75 volunteers doing such things as security, food service and sales, check out (cash and computers), registration, set up, and clean up. There are tasks suited to the interests and abilities of everyone.

We also need donations of goods or services related to the home improvement theme. Some examples of possible donations are handyman services, gardening, painting, landscaping, cement work, and home improvement tools and supplies. Just let your imagination run wild—as long as it relates to home improvement.

So save the date—October 11th—and plan to be a part of the excitement. Whether you volunteer, donate or come to buy, we need you to help make this event a success.

If you can donate or volunteer, or would like more information, please call Kendra at 652-1326. ♦

Phone Number

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never developed and the industry asked the phone company to set them aside permanently so that they could be used in movies and television without fear of giving out a working phone number.

This system has worked so well that we are all aware as soon as we hear a phone number “555-XXXX” in a movie that the number is phony.

Recently, the makers of the movie *Bruce Almighty* decided that they didn’t want this distraction among viewers of their movie. The plot called for God to give a mortal a phone number that would reach God’s pager. Instead of giving a “555” number they gave a real seven-digit phone number.

To their credit, they did check that the phone number was not in service in the Buffalo area code where the movie takes place. What did not seem to occur to them was that their movie would be seen in other area codes.

When the movie opened, people with that phone number all over the country began to receive calls asking to speak to God. At first people thought these were random prank calls but slowly they discovered the connection. Some then simply recorded an answering machine message explaining that this was not God’s phone number and please hang up, but some of the callers ignored the message and left their phone numbers for God to call back. I heard several interviews on National Public Radio with people who have this number in various area codes. (It occurred to me that

NPR was just adding to the number of calls these people were receiving.)

My first thought as I listened to the interviews was, “What kind of a person would think that a phone number given in a comedy movie was somehow really God’s phone number?” But as I listened the people explained that most of the callers were serious people with real problems who really needed to hear from God. They needed and wanted real and serious answers to real and serious questions.

And I began to think, if I believed that I had a phone number that would connect me directly to God, what would I want to ask? Would I ask deep theological questions that have troubled humanity throughout the millennia? Or would I want special favors for the world or for someone near to me (like world peace or a cure for cancer).

And then I remembered another interview I had heard about. The person being interviewed was Mother Teresa and the interviewer asked her, “When you pray, what do you say to God?” To which she replied, “Oh, I don’t say anything, I just listen.” So the interviewer asked, “Then what does God say to you?”

“God doesn’t say anything. He just listens,” was her answer. And for that kind of conversation, we don’t need a phone number. ♦

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed cash during the month of May:

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Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed food and other items to our program in May:

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 Vons Grocery, Thompson
 Blvd.

Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

Cars 4 Causes

We have gotten some calls concerning Cars 4 Causes after an article appeared in the *Ventura County Star* reporting on a lawsuit filed by the State of California against Cars 4 Causes.

The lawsuit contends that Cars 4 Causes has not been following California law concerning smog checks on some of the vehicles the nonprofit sells. Cars 4 Causes could be levied substantial fines if the allegations are found to be correct. Cars 4 Causes has denied any wrongdoing.

We have no information or comment about the validity of these charges. However, we want to point out that there are no charges of mishandling funds intended for other nonprofits such as Project Understanding. We believe that every dollar that was intended for us was given to us.

Until the issues under investigation are resolved, we encourage our supporters to use their own discretion in making a donation to Cars 4 Causes.



Rheto-Rick

No Phone Number Is Needed to Talk to God

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

A federal court recently ruled that cell phone users have the right to take their phone number with them if they change service providers. Up to now, if customers changed companies, they had to get a new number, but the court said that this was an inhibition to free trade because it made people reluctant to change.

Business people in particular were reluctant. Changing a cell phone number might mean a great expense in new stationery and business cards to reflect the new number, not to mention all of the business that might be lost when people inadvertently called the wrong number.

But it is not just business people who have strong ties to their phone numbers. Our phone

number is an important part of our identity. When I go into my dry cleaners, they greet me warmly but they ask me not for my name but for my phone number.

When thinking about this I realized that I can easily recite my phone number when I was a child. I learned that number so long ago that it began with a two letter prefix rather than being all numbers. I had that phone number for the first 22 years of my life. In fact, two phone numbers account for 37 years—more than two-thirds of my life. But that pales in comparison to my parents who have changed their phone number only once in the last 62 years.

The movie and television industry early realized how important it was not to use real phone numbers in entertainment programs. If someone thought that the number given in a movie was the real number for that actor, some innocent bystander who happened to have that number might be harassed. Fortunately, numbers with the prefix “555” had been set aside for a purpose that

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Highlights

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Oxnard Tutoring is proud of excellent student progress.

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