

Service Learning Reflections

The entrees below were provided by CSULB service-learning students.



This week I learned "that just me being there for two



weeks I have already made a difference in [my mentee's] life. She has improved in math since I have seen her and is more fluid in her reading. She also has vocalized that

she missed me...it made me feel good to know that I was having a positive impact on her life. I look forward to growing closer to her over the course of the next few months."

~ *BLAST Mentor, Jessica Herman, Spring 2007*
(*BLAST Mentor, Jessica Herman and BLAST mentee pictured above*)

Leisure Philosophy Laboratory
Carmelitos Housing Development After-School Programs
Journal Entry Day 4: Friday, April 28, 2006

This was our final week at Carmelitos and it was a memorable experience that I will never forget. The children made an impact on my life and helped me realize how many kids there are in the world that need support. When I first arrived I was excited knowing that we had a really fun

day planned. As a celebration of our time together, we decided to bring a carnival to the Enrichment Center. I could not wait to see their faces when they saw the activities which included bowling, two real carnival games, an arts and crafts journal corner, and finally a delicious "Worms in Mud" dessert. The other leaders were also enthusiastic about the events scheduled but shared the bitter sweet emotion of that being our final day with the children. When the kids came in they expressed right away how much they were going to miss us and that they hoped we would be able to come back sometime to visit. Their faces were not quite as lit up as usual because they knew we were leaving soon. Despite the fact the children were sad we had to say good bye, they enjoyed all of the activities we had prepared, which was clear by their expressions.

At the close of the day, each child came up, gave a big hug, and thanked us repeatedly for spending our Fridays with them for the past two months. They were clearly sad to see us go but we knew that they would continue to do well and have goals and dreams in life. Each leader had a moment to thank the students and offer words of encouragement which was special not only for us, but for them. It was our chance to remind them that they have so much potential in life and that they are capable of anything.

The last day at Carmelitos impacted everyone there, including the wonderful staff that had been so kind to us. The children left feeling sad but hopeful that sometime in the future they would have great life experiences

like going to college and making lifelong friends. Furthermore, they realized that if they study hard and continue to be responsible, they have the choice to apply for scholarships and go to any college they wish, and become what ever they want. In the first week I do not think I could have said this because after having had many conversations with the students, I learned that they have great goals in life but unfortunately do not have the support system that is necessary for such dreams. In other words, many of their own families do not have the faith in them, that they hold for themselves. I know now that can succeed in life because of the numerous mentors that have dedicated hours to improving their lives. Saying good bye to the children impacted my life because I am aware now that I am capable of being a mentor and providing support to those in need. Furthermore, I have learned that there is so much more I can be doing to help in my neighborhood. I live less than ten minutes from Carmelitos and it is amazing me how neighborhoods can differ in a one mile radius. These kids may not be living next door, but they truly are part of my community and it is a goal of mine to go back some day, and see how my mentees have changed and improved their lives.

When thinking about the children at Carmelitos I can relate it to Nietzsche's philosophy. He believed that "happiness is promoted by the lie that God exists and that He has decreed that it is better to be poor, weak, and humble than to be wealthy, powerful, and proud" (Dare, 231).

Furthermore, be thought that everything we do lacks meaning. I felt as though many of the children at Carmelitos at first would say that their existence in life is meaningless because they will not have the experiences and opportunities that many other people with more money in a better school may have. I know now however that the children do believe they have a bright future and would certainly say their existence is meaningful. I also believe that the children at Carmelitos would say that they would rather be poor, weak, and humble than to be rich and powerful because they have such strong ties to their families and would not take all the money in the world to leave their loved ones. I realize that for many of the children, that money would change their lives forever. However, I have to believe that after spending so much time with them, most of the children live right next to their aunts, uncles, cousins, and grand parents. Carmelitos is a family community where people live and thrive on the love they provide one another.

I loved each week spent at Carmelitos and would not replace anything for this experience. Never in my life have I been accepted for who I am and not judged for what I look like or who I am as a person. This has been the most meaningful college experience and one that will not be forgotten. I hope that someday I will return to Carmelitos and see my new friends a little older, with new goals and aspirations in life. My mother was born in Carmelitos, and now I am mentoring children who were in her position.

Although things have changed since the 1940s, many things have remained the same including the wonderful children and the dreams of someday making a better life for those living in the projects. I thank the children at the Enrichment Center for providing me with a priceless experience.