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Fresno After-School Program a Story of Success for Children

By Joan Schlesing

Fresno County Child Care Organizer

First Mission Covenant Church is located directly across the street from an elementary school in a neighborhood of ethnically diverse people. There are many Laotian, Hmong and Hispanic children in the community who have parents who don't speak English. Many children at neighboring elementary schools were several grade levels below their actual year in school; so for instance you might find a 3rd grader reading and writing at a 1st grade level. Some members of the congregation were concerned and that concern led them to take action - they started an after-school program and named it, "Fresno Covenant Foundation."

Remarkably, after its first six months of operation, 80% of the participating children increased their reading and writing by one grade level! The program utilizes about 50 college students and senior volunteers who provide one-on-one tutoring for about 120 children. College students are paid through a Federal Work-Study grant overseen by their respective college or university. There is no fee for the after-school program, however the director works closely with the parents and requires that children attend for at least one year.

While 50% of the children attend Monday through Friday, all enrolled must attend at least two times weekly. A recent interview with the program director, Luis Santana, who is also a member of the church, offers some insight

for congregations who may be thinking of starting an after-school program.

Joan: What is the mission of your after-school program?

Luis: To provide high quality tutoring for elementary students identified as being at academic risk by their teachers due to various social factors such as low income and non-English households.

Joan: How long did it take to get your program started and what initial steps did you have to take to get it up and running?

Luis: Three months. We had to build relationships with the schools and with the parents of children who would eventually join the program

Joan: What activities are the children involved in and does the program include religious instruction?

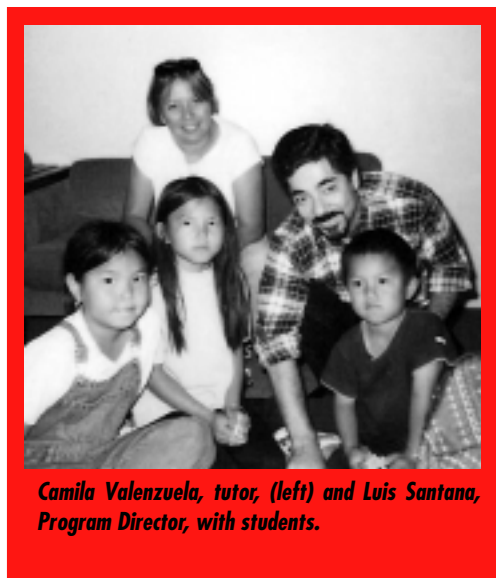
Luis: The program offers one-on-one tutoring, small group, recreation and sports activities. We do not provide any religious activities. Any religious activity is done through separate church involvement.

Joan: What did it take financially to get your center started and where did you find financial assistance?

Luis: First Covenant Church provided the seed grant of \$20,000, then we built an individual list of donors, primarily church members, to support the program until we began to get some grant funding.

Joan: What does the church contribute to the program?

Luis: First Covenant Church provides the entire facil-



Camila Valenzuela, tutor, (left) and Luis Santana, Program Director, with students.

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Ontario Congregation Responds to After-School Needs

By Jennifer Vaughn Blakely

San Bernardino Child Care Organizer

In 1999, when Rev. Glenda Naegele, pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Ontario, looked around at the neighborhood the church had called home since 1926, she observed that a lot of change had occurred. The congregation which had previously consisted of 450 neighborhood members now consisted of 125 members who lived in various parts of the city. The new neighbors in the church's area, located on East "G" Street, were primarily Latino immigrants with young children and who did not speak much English.

Naegele quickly realized it was up to the church to take the first step in serving the community. She presented her plan for an after-school tutorial and homework assistance program to the congregation. Nine volunteers agreed to help and the congregation hired 17 teen mentors from the neighborhood to work with the youth.

Once the church volunteers and mentors were in place, a committee from the church met with the principal and assistant principal at the nearby Central Elementary School to plan the after-school program. The school donated five computers, as well as provided learning materials and library books for the volunteers to use to assist students with their homework.

Executive Director's Column

After-School Programs: Does Your Church Have One?

One of the most effective forms of community ministry for local congregations is to provide a safe place for young people during the critical 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. after-school hours.

With more parents working full time, and with more young people left alone in the afternoon, congregations can play a key role in mentoring young people through tutoring and recreation programs provided by volunteers or part time paid staff at the church.

In this issue of *Justice Seekers*, we highlight three excellent after-school programs in California run by congregations. I encourage you to call any of them for more information, or log on to our website at <http://www.calchurches.org> and click on our child care capacity building project in the menu bar. There you'll find information about faith-based models of after-

school care, funding opportunities, and how to get started.

When invitations had been sent out and opening day scheduled, the congregation expected that about 15 or 20 youth would attend. The first afternoon of the program, 40 elementary students showed up. The after-school program operates two days a week from September through June. Students receive assistance with their homework and are tutored in reading and English. The children who participate in the program are identified as "at risk" to fail and are recommended to the church's program by their teachers. Naegele said, "There are children in every grade who don't speak English."

The after-school mentoring program has been in operation three years and is considered highly successful by the neighborhood, the school and the church. It is an example of how the home, school and church can work together to improve the status of their children. There are 50 elementary school students who participate in this program.

During the summer months the church operates a "Drop In" program for neighborhood children to give them an alternative to playing in the streets. "We provide sports, videos, arts, crafts and reading opportunities. This is a separate program from mentoring, but many of the same children attend," Naegele stated.

First Lutheran Church began its Neighbor-

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school care, funding opportunities, and how to get started.

State and federal funding provides after-school programs on-site at public schools for only about 10% of

the kids who really need these services. Congregations can be excellent partners with the public schools in helping to fill the gap.

If you are currently providing an after-school program that you're particularly proud to share with others around the state, write to me and tell me more at Anderson@calchurches.org.

Scott Anderson
Executive Director



L.I.F.E. After-School Center Provides Nurturing Environment in Salinas

By Shirley Mooney

Monterey Child Care Organizer

“Our congregation and immediate community are made up primarily of Mexican Nationals, immigrants [who] work either in the surrounding agricultural fields or packing plants. For the majority of the people the work is seasonal, causing periodic economic hardships. The seasonal work causes some parents to follow the harvest to Huron and Yuma, resulting in homes without fathers, and in some cases without mothers,” said Pastor Frank Gomez of United Methodist Hispanic Fellowship in Salinas.

Like many communities composed of low-income families, this Salinas neighborhood faces a myriad of social problems. Drug and alcohol use is high among both adults and young people. The community has high gang activity and a high truancy rate. Affordable housing is scarce, contributing to the community’s problems. It is reported that 20,000 people live in a one square mile area of the community, as well as having the city’s highest



Pastor Frank Gomez tutors students at L.I.F.E. After School Center.

crime rate.

Shortly after Pastor Frank and Sandy Gomez arrived in September 1999, they opened the church doors during the afternoon and began attracting young children. They began with five children and in time the number grew to the current number of approximately 40 students.

In May 2000, one young boy asked Sandy Gomez if he

could bring his homework to church so she could help him with it. The answer was a resounding “yes.” Soon, other children were bringing their homework to the church. That was the beginning of their informal after-school program. Soon thereafter, a non-profit organization, Life Is For Everyone (L.I.F.E.) Inc., offered the opportunity to run a “complimentary” after-school tutoring program and also provide a Director mentor.

L.I.F.E. provides funding for the Center Site Director, a Director mentor, and guidance and monitoring of the program to ensure quality. The center operates Tuesday through Thursday from 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The center began with eight students and now has an enrollment of 33 students. They have been blessed with great volunteer tutor support. The tutors are retired schoolteachers, high school students, and other caring adults.

Besides providing tutoring help, the center offers the children a loving and nurturing environment to complete their homework, promotes self-esteem and life skills, and contributes structure and discipline to their lives. The center serves a healthy snack daily and has formed a partnership with the local food bank.

The L.I.F.E. After School Center provides students with school materials, binders, notebook paper, pencils, and erasers. These materials, most of which are donated, help encourage the students to do their homework and stay in school. The students must then earn the refill of supplies by bringing their homework daily, completing reading contracts, being prepared and having back packs organized.

Site Director Sandy Gomez stated, “When the center program ends, the children stay and participate in various activities. The church is providing a safe haven for the kids. We believe that our future lies with our children. If we can reach the children of this community, we believe we can influence the future of this community and beyond.”

For more information, contact Pastor Frank Gomez at (831) 757-6504 or e-mail pastorfrank@astragate.net. **JS**

The California Council of Churches, in partnership with Catholic Charities of California, created the Child Care Capacity Project to support efforts to increase the quality and capacity of child care services through the religious community in low-income areas where the need is greatest.

For more information on child care programs and funding sources, visit our web site at <http://www.calchurches.org> and click on “Child Care Capacity Project.”

Fresno Covenant Foundation

ity including gas and electric, telephone, Xerox and custodial services. They also provide volunteers, board members and some church members who make financial contributions directly to the program.

Joan: What do you see as the program's most noticeable accomplishments?

Luis: The fact that we are getting results in helping children to reach their school grade level in reading and writing; the connections we are building with the parents and the recognition we are getting from different organizations such as Fresno Unified School District.

This program now receives some additional funding through the following: United Way, California Health Collaborative's grant from California Department of Health Service, Fresno Unified School District's grant from the California Department of Education. For more information on the Fresno Covenant Foundation's program, contact Luis Santana at (559) 226-4672. **JS**



Ontario congregation responds

hood Development Program three months ago. This program utilizes a neighborhood outreach worker to go out and make contact with families regarding their needs and concerns. In her contact with families she has found that the greatest needs expressed by parents were: ESL (English as a Second Language) classes and programs for their children.

In addition to providing services to the elementary school students, First Lutheran volunteers are also helping parents and teens in the neighborhood learn responsibility, time management and skills in working with both adults and children. In order to remain in the program, students must maintain a "C" average in their classes.

Naegele noted, "This is a wonderful way for the congregation and the neighborhood to work together... [and] become acquainted."

The next goal for First Lutheran Church is to find funding to expand the after-school program to five days a week year round. For more information regarding First Lutheran's after-school program, contact Pastor Glenda Naegele (909) 986-5178. The church is located at 203 East "G" Street, Ontario, CA 91764. **JS**

To: **Inside:** Faith-Based After School Programs That Work

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