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Service-Learning Camp offers teens a diverse experience

By Adam Blake



Isabella Chechele, Tyler Gough, Joshua McCooey. Photos provided

Hidden behind towering shelves of canned goods and fresh produce, a group of 15 cheerful Lamorinda day-campers diligently bagged juicy plums into bright green bags.

These young volunteers were helping the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano package food for the 190,000 individuals its able to serve every month, thanks to the help of altruistic community members.

The Concord warehouse was merely one stop on a busy schedule of diverse hands-on service activities campers engaged in as a part of Lafayette United Methodist Church's Day Camp from June 26-29.

"Through the service projects effort, we hope to teach teens that people come from different economic levels and circumstances, and help teens to reach out and help others in their wider community," said Sue Renno, who has served LUMC's Day Camp director for the past 17 years.

From playing board games with special needs adults at Futures Explored in Lafayette to assembling snack bags for homeless clients at the Trinity Center in Walnut Creek, each day camper was introduced to new, tangible ways to make a positive impact right in their own backyard.

Pat Hershey, head of the service-learning program, has been a regular volunteer at the food bank for seven years, acting as somewhat of a liaison to the church by organizing food drives and ushering in new volunteers. She prides herself as a member of the "Food for Children Boxing Team," though clarified that the only bruises inflicted were to overripe fruit.

These efforts reflect Hershey's firm belief that being of service to the community is a key aspect of church life. She is hopeful that the camper's experience will translate into a lifelong desire to be of service to others in their communities.

"I find that most people want to make a contribution and be of help to others, but sometimes they don't really know how to do that," Hershey said. "I try to make it easy for them by showing them ways that they can help make life better for people in the community."

Back in Lafayette, LUMC's campus was bustling throughout the week with 70 preschoolers through fifth graders engaging in fun activities that teach basic values. Energetic campers rotated through lively stations, including a petting zoo in the spirit of this years' harvest theme.

"We wish our program to complement the efforts of local parents in teaching good values to their children, specifically this year: love, joy, peace, patience and kindness, through stories, music, skits, games, crafts and fun," Renno said.

Renno introduced the service-learning component for older campers 10 years ago in an effort to instill the importance of understanding and serving those that come from less fortunate economic backgrounds, a sentiment Hershey also underscored.

"Sometimes living in Lafayette and our Lamorinda area, we don't always see the face of hunger, even though there are hungry people right here," Hershey said. "I'd like for the campers to come away understanding that we can make their lives better."

