

Local

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY NEWS

SUMMER, SAND, AND A SPLASH

United Way hosts Fun in the Sun enrichment program for children

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While some South Coast youngsters spend their summers at private camps learning to surf, shoot movies or play guitar riffs, others are in danger of languishing. When school is out, low-income children are sometimes left to fend for themselves, left at home unsupervised, or on the streets, because their families can't afford to send them to summer school or other day programs.

According to a study by Johns Hopkins University researchers, those kids typically lose 2 1/2 months of reading skills during the summer, a phenomenon called "summer learning loss."

To address the gap and serve the needs of these youngsters, United Way of Santa Barbara County for the past 11 years has hosted Fun in the Sun, a seven-week summer enrichment program free to low-income kids in first through sixth grades. Some 300 students are enrolled in this year's program, which runs through Aug. 10 at Franklin and Harding schools in Santa Barbara, Ellwood School in Goleta and, for the first time this year, Canalino School in Carpinteria.

Many of the students come from families that can't afford to pay even nominal or sliding scale fees for local programs, like the Boys & Girls Club or Girls Inc., said Charles Caldwell, special projects director for United Way.

"The challenges that they face are very complex."

As a result, the program is designed to provide not only academic enrichment but cultural experiences and life skills enhancement, including character-building lessons from the Character Counts curriculum.

More than 25 local organizations work together to provide services, free snacks and lunches and supplies for the program. They include local school districts, the Family Service Agency of Santa Barbara, the city of Santa Barbara Parks & Recreation Department, Foodbank of Santa Barbara County and the Assistance League of Santa Barbara.

"It's a collaboration, rather than just one group trying to serve the needs of



STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Gaby Briseno, center, makes a sand wall with friends at Leadbetter Beach during a Fun in the Sun field trip on Friday. Below, from left: Sebastian Fernandez emerges from the surf during the field trip. John Fernandez shows off his sand crab.

of project services for Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara, a lead partner for Fun in the Sun. "We try to provide what an upper middle class family would provide their kids during the summer."

College students lead groups of up to 14 kids throughout the day, aided by counselors in training, usually Fun in the Sun graduates. This year, credentialed teachers are offering academic classes at Franklin and Harding schools in conjunction with the Santa Barbara School Districts.

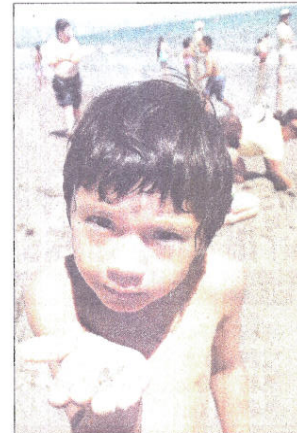
Morning sessions are focused on reading, math and science basics, while afternoons are reserved for recreational activities, from swim lessons, hip-hop, dance and drumming classes to art projects, team building and other physical activities. Kids also go on field trips to such places as the Santa Barbara Zoo, Santa Barbara Natural History



Garden, and beaches and parks.

Another key part of the program is the afternoon Lunch Bunch. More than 500 volunteers from area businesses, nonprofits and agencies devote their lunch hours to spend time with the kids. Adults talk about their jobs and play games with students, providing positive role models.

So far, Fun in the Sun appears to be making a difference, according to



independent study by Miriam Resendez of Claremont Graduate University



Above, Franklin School kids arrive at Leadbetter Beach for an all-school Fun in the Sun field trip on Friday. Left, participants splash around in the surf. About a third of the kids learned how to swim through the free program.

the participants made substantial gains in reading achievement.

"Instead of losing or just maintaining (reading skills), we actually increased their abilities over the summer," said Mr. Caldwell.

In addition, more than 70 percent of the kids either sustained or increased their perceptions of positive self-identity, family support, community support and leadership skills. Building a sense of connection to the community and positive role models is critical at a young age, especially in light of the recent gang-related stabbings in Santa Barbara, said Ms. Miller.

they are hitting junior high and high school, participants are feeling substantially less alienated than what's currently being (reported) by teens," she said.

But, perhaps more importantly to kids, Fun in the Sun lives up to its name, said participant Rene Sanchez. "It's fun," said the 11-year-old. "They take you to a lot of fun places." Playing "knock-out," a game of hoops, with employees from Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort is one of his favorite activities, he added.

Rene said he hopes to return next year as a counselor in training.