

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

CSUF students from all majors learn how their fields can help local children

By [ANGIE MARCOS](#)

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Ten-year-old Jesus Ocejo leaned over the shoe box, his face mere inches from it.

He delicately placed the paper creation he had spent the last 10 minutes folding from Christmas construction paper on top of the box.

He stood back, examined his work and exclaimed, "Look! It's a boat!" The top of his box had been decorated to resemble water, with small boats seemingly floating throughout.

Ocejo, a fourth-grader at Gordon H. Beatty Elementary School in Buena Park, is one of about 80 students at the school who have created care packages that will be donated to [HomeAid Orange County](#) this month. The nonprofit assists the county's homeless population.

The children are a part of Cal State Fullerton's Titan After School Education and Safety Program, or ASES.

ASES is unique because unlike a teacher training program aimed toward college students with aspirations of teaching, this initiative is open to students from all fields, with the intention of exposing them to the impact their fields have on children's lives.

The free after-school program offers specialized homework help, academic workshops and community outreach projects for elementary and junior high school students.

University students, in turn, are able to acquire hands-on experience working with children in the field they have chosen to specialize in.

The California Department of Education program is the result of 2002's Proposition 49, which called for an expansion and renaming of the former Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnerships Program.

ASES, a collaboration between CSUF's Center for Internships and Community Engagement and the Buena Park School District (BPSD), is made possible due to a nearly \$500,000 state grant awarded to BPSD.

This academic year, the after-school program has about 500 participants at six BPSD schools, ranging from 1st to 8th grade.

Chris Perez serves as the CSUF ASES director.

"For the students we service in Buena Park, our goal is to help them academically and provide a safe environment for them," Perez said. "For staffing, my goal is to professionally enhance them in any way that I can. Our goal is to give them a first-hand experience."

More than an after-school program

ASES fits each CSUF student into an area that fits their expertise. For example, a kinesiology student might

lead a physical education activity; an engineering or science student could lead a STEM activity; a health education student could lead a segment on healthy habits; and so on.

A number of CSUF students have remained employed by the program post-graduation.

"It is through this program that our college students get to learn how to not only care for others, but learn how to foster the growth of another human being and invest in them and see firsthand how their investment pays off as their students develop not just academically, but also socially and emotionally," Perez said.

ASES also runs a sub-program titled "Future Titans," which calls on Buena Park High School and Buena Park Junior High School students to volunteer and develop leadership skills.

This semester the program has 26 Future Titans volunteers.

Besides academic success, ASES promotes community engagement and outreach in the classroom, as is the case with the homeless care packages the children have been working on since November.

But it's more than just decorating the care packages – the students have learned about homelessness in Orange County; they've discussed the topic, watched and read educational material and shared their thoughts.

"We are really trying to get the students to realize they can have a powerful impact and they can reach out to their community," said Kandyce Segovia, a CSUF site coordinator at Beatty Elementary who graduated from the university in May with a bachelor's degree in psychology.

Segovia's passion lies in community outreach and at Beatty Elementary, she has found her niche.

Through ASES she found that she enjoys working alongside young children, so much so that she took on a childhood and adolescent development minor after joining the program last year.

"I feel like my life has a bigger purpose now," she said. "(Through ASES) I have learned that I can take on more than I thought I could ever take on. It's the most rewarding job."

"This is a highly academic program; we're not just a daycare," said Segovia, who aspires to become involved in education management at the university level.

Community outreach is key

In their care packages, along with items like granola bars, socks, shaving cream, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrush and disposable razors, the children included a handwritten letter to the box recipient.

The box will also include a pen, paper and posted envelope for the recipient to write back to the school children. Pending teacher revision and approval, any letters received will be read to the students.

The items included in the care packages were purchased through community donations and a [Go Fund Me page](#) set up by Segovia, another example in which she was able to promote community outreach and engagement to the ASES students.

"They are so empathetic," Segovia said of the children. "And what I think is so beautiful is they're already thinking about what they can do next year."

In a sea of paper cutouts, tape, scissors, glue, pencils, markers and origami, each child carefully decorated and placed the donated items into their care packages on a recent Tuesday afternoon.

Dayanara Ramirez, 8, included a handmade paper fortune teller in her purple and green-decorated box; she wanted to pack something that would provide the box's recipient with some entertainment, she said.

"I think this will make them happy, that they know they have someone who helps them," Ramirez said.

"I like to help people who need help," she said. "Because when you help somebody else, it makes you feel good."

Ramirez added that her family has always been supportive of the needy, so she was happy to help out at school as well.

Joseph Gomez, 10, included a note written on a leaf: "I hope you have a great day."

"I feel like I'm doing the right thing, like I should be doing it," Gomez said. "We are treating them like we want to be treated."

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Duing CSUF's Titan After School Education and Safety Program, CSUF alumna Stephanie Velazquez hands out shoe boxes to students to be filled with items for the homeless.

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Jesus Ocejo, 10, focuses on a tape dispenser while decorating a shoe box as a holiday care package for the homeless community. The ASES after-school program at Gordon H. Beatty Elementary in Buena Park is run by CSUF.

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Dalila Alvernga, 10, helps Alex Gomez, 9, apply some glue to the side of his shoebox while making holiday care packages at Gordon H. Beatty Elementary in Buena Park on Nov. 17.

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CSUF student Alicia Curran, left, hands a pair of new socks to Michelle Cruz, 9, to place in her holiday care package box while Ziggy Eastland, 9, center, works on his box.

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Gordon H. Beatty Elementary students in Buena Park show off their written letters to be included in holiday care packages for the homeless as part of the Cal State Fullerton after-school ASES program.

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CSUF alumna Stephanie Velazquez hands out granola bars to be included in holiday care packages for the homeless.

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ASES site coordinator Kandyce Segovia, a CSUF alumna, leads ASES students through a critical thinking session after watching a playlist of YouTube videos about homelessness at Gordon H. Beatty Elementary in Buena Park on Nov. 17.

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Gordon H. Beatty Elementary students in Buena Park show off their written letters to be included in holiday care packages for the homeless as part of the Cal State Fullerton after-school ASES program, which has a strong focus on community outreach and engagement.

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CSUF alumna Stephanie Velazquez has plenty of students to choose from as she asks for a volunteer during the after-school ASES program at Gordon H. Beatty Elementary in Buena Park on Nov. 17.

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Alex Gomez, 9, applies some glue to his holiday care package.

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Students at Gordon H. Beatty Elementary participate in the after-school ASES program run by CSUF. Students in the program prepared holiday care packages for the community's homeless in Buena Park on Nov. 17.

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