



Bienestar

Building housing, hope and futures

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Aloha, Oregon..... This Thursday afternoon at Reedville Apartments in Aloha, Oregon, children of farmworkers and high school students from Catlin Gabel School in Portland will celebrate a year of unique partnership in a Homework Club. Reedville Apartments is home to 48 farmworker families and is owned by nonprofit Bienestar. With most parents working dawn to dusk in local farms, nurseries and wineries, Bienestar executive director Karen Shawcross began to worry about the children on the property. “Our mission is to build housing, hope and futures for the well-being of working families”, says Shawcross, “and for us that means not only providing quality affordable housing, but educational programs and resources for the residents.”

As part of a suite of youth initiatives called LISTOS PARA VIDA (Ready for Life), Bienestar piloted a Homework Club program at Montebello Apartments in Hillsboro in 2008. The outcomes were dramatic in improved school performance. “We so badly wanted to run another Homework Club at Reedville Apts.”, says Program Services Manager Gracie Garcia, “but we simply didn’t have enough staff to be able to run two intensive afterschool programs at the same time.”

Enter Roberto Villa and Mark Lawton, high school teachers at Catlin Gabel School in Portland. They invited Bienestar leaders to meet in August, 2008 to see if there might be some potential to offer community services opportunities at Bienestar. “We immediately asked for help from them to launch the Homework Club at Reedville”, says Garcia, “since we knew we did not have the staff capacity or resources to begin it without some extra help.”

Villa and Lawton arranged for four little girls from Reedville Apts., two moms and staff to make a plea for volunteers at the Catlin Gabel High School assembly in the fall. They were swamped with students who wanted to volunteer, and structured a program for their students to commit to 2 days a week for 6 weeks at a time at Homework Club.

Twice a week all year the little yellow school bus arrives at Reedville Apts. from Catlin Gabel with a teacher volunteer and 8-20 high school student volunteers to work with 20 children in grades 1-6. They help with homework, reading, math, computer research, and educational games. The outcomes are tracked through pre and post analysis of the children's school performance on report cards. With the individual attention that the high school volunteers are able to give each child, we have seen dramatic improvements in reading skills, homework submissions, and overall academic performance. We post the outcome reports on our website at www.bienestar-or.org.

The students all attend Reedville Elementary School, whose principal Gina Baez wrote recently: "All of these students' progress reports have indicated an increase in homework completion and academic growth. I asked teachers to comment on how they felt these students performed this year. The answers included, "All of the students in my class that have been involved in this have benefited. It's been a great tool for these kiddoes to receive additional help on their homework."

Principal Baez adds: "Reedville elementary is a Title-1 school with 70% of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Many of our students have limited resources to support them academically at home. The Bienestar Homework Club provided our students with the resources that would otherwise not have been available to them. Each year, Reedville staff strives to assist every student in meeting grade level objectives and to reach for excellence. I believe for these students, the Bienestar Homework Club was an integral part of their academic success this year."

The success of this partnership will be celebrated Thursday, May 21, 2009 at Reedville Apartments Community Room at 21141 SW Alexander in Aloha with a party for the students and the volunteers. To honor this unique partnership, the Bienestar kids and the Catlin Gabel kids painted wooden fish for a Fish Friendship Fence that will be dedicated on Thursday. This project was coordinated by Bienestar's visiting artist, internationally renowned Christopher Jahncke. The Friendship Fence will serve as a permanent reminder of this first year of working together to build a brighter future for the children of Reedville Apartments.

For more information about the event, the program, or to arrange for photos or interviews, please contact Karen Shawcross at Bienestar, 503.693.2937,x104 or kshawcross@hdcnwo.org.