

PEACEFUL SCHOOL DAYS

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Victoria Elementary School may be in an unincorporated area of San Bernardino, but its efforts to promote peace cannot go unnoticed.

Since 1995, Victoria Elementary has been a PeaceBuilder school. Not only is the school recognized in the state as a PeaceBuilder, but it is also a showcase site for other schools in Southern California.

According to Angela Neuhaus, Victoria Elementary principal, schools throughout Southern California visit Victoria Elementary to learn about its methods of keeping up with peace building.

"It builds characters," Neuhaus said about PeaceBuilder. "It teaches children to get through conflicts by seeking out wise people."

The PeaceBuilder program is offered through Peacepartner Inc. The program teaches members of the school how to create a peaceful environment. Peacepartner does not only work with schools, but many organizations in the community to help create a peaceful environment.

"Peace builder is a violence-prevention and character-education program," said Donna Burcher, Peacepartner communication director. "We're in shelters, hospitals - We teach adults how to create an atmosphere, an environment that actually enables kids to create a peaceful environment."

There's a PeaceBuilder Pledge, which must be implemented by every student and staff member in the PeaceBuilder school.

"I am a PeaceBuilder, I pledge...

To Praise people,

To give up put-downs,

To seek wise people,

To notice and speak up about hurts

I have caused, and

To right wrongs.

I will build peace at home, at school

And in my community each day."

But what makes Victoria Elementary extra ordinary is the 18 languages and cultures its students represent. Victoria Elementary has students that come from many countries.

"Our school is like what the United Nations would like to be," Neuhaus said. "With all these cultures, we're not fighting, we respect each other's differences."

Walking through the school, the murals and posters that emphasize peace by lending a helping hand or even by simply smiling cannot go unnoticed. But the combination of students who sit together, share one table and paint together is even more promising.

Brian Radut, 10, whose family immigrated from Romania helps clean the campus and help other students with class work.

"I feel like an honor to know that I'm helping others and that there are people out there who are learning to do good from seeing us," Brian said.

Pumulo Kasaji said when she grow up she wants to be a writer. The 12-year-old has been a student at Victoria Elementary for almost four years. Before she immigrated to the United States with her family, she lived in Zambia, Africa.

Victoria, which is part of the Redlands Unified School District lies within a bad neighborhood in San Bernardino. There are many cases of gang-related issues near the school and graffiti covers many buildings that surround the school. But, the school's buildings are free of graffiti.

"If I can keep a safe place for the students, then we've done our job," Neuhaus said.

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