

Victoria builds peace, by peace

DAVID JAMES HEISS , Staff Writer
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SAN BERNARDINO - PeaceBuilders is a way of life at Victoria Elementary School. It's evident in everything the students and staff practice; its principles are recited after every Pledge of Allegiance and during every school assembly.

The comprehensive PeaceBuilders program is an anti-violence youth program sponsored by the federally funded Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act, designed to create a community environment of peace, safety and productivity for students, staff and parents.

On Wednesday morning, Victoria School opened its doors to the community to promote their PeaceBuilders success. Students under the supervision of second- and third-grade teacher Liz Westbrook recited the PeaceBuilders Pledge and sang a PeaceBuilders song, as well as Victoria's school song.

The PeaceBuilders Pledge conditions it's students to "praise people, give up put-downs, seek wise people, notice and speak up about hurts I have caused, right wrongs, help others" and "build peace at home, at school, and in my community each day."

PeaceBuilders "causes less fights and more people don't get hurt," explained fifth-grader Teri Uyovbievbo.

Karina Na, a fourth-grader, claimed that, "If you don't be a PeaceBuilder, you can get in trouble more often."

"I enjoy helping others. It's helped me respect others," said fifth-grader Vesakha Sim.

Victoria PTA member and former president Regina Duran, said during a showcasing ceremony in the multipurpose room, "We all have the same goal, to raise bright, responsible young people," and recited the characteristics found in the PeaceBuilders Pledge that is expected of everyone in their school.

Duran said that she interviewed a couple of the school's alumni to determine how much of an impact the PeaceBuilders program had on them after their life at Victoria.

"The high school student said that it helped her to remember to be nice to others, and that words do hurt more than you think," Duran reported. "The middle school student remembered and recited the

pledge, and said that it's actually helping her in every day activities."

"How wonderful that such a small choice of words can impact you through life, and not just as children," Duran said. "The morals you learn as a child never go away."

School board members and others from the community came to celebrate Victoria's celebration as a showcase PeaceBuilders school. San Bernardino city councilman Gordon McGinnis and Redlands school district superintendent Bob Hodges were among the dignitaries at the event.

While other schools in Redlands participate in PeaceBuilders, Carrie Ahonen, director of Long Beach-based PeacePartners Inc. felt that Victoria School stood out.

"Victoria has been using the program since the mid-90s and really has integrated it: they live it, they breathe it," said Ahonen. "It's not just something you do that's extra. At Victoria, you see it, you feel it, you hear it. That's what makes it a showcase site."

Principal Angela Neuhaus said, "We have so many different cultures at Victoria, but they all get along peacefully. They create positive successful individuals who want to be here. Teachers, parents, organizations like Trinity Church - are all here to make sure they're successful."

Most important to Neuhaus: the students practice the PeaceBuilders characteristics without expecting to be rewarded.

E-mail Staff Writer David James Heiss at dheiss@redlandsdailyfacts.com