



Press Release

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Lynwood Unified High School Students Spread Holiday Joy through Helping Hands Club

Lynwood – Firebaugh High School student Paola Valadez packed gift bags Nov. 21 with items including toothpaste, socks and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches alongside 350 fellow Lynwood Unified students in preparation for delivering holiday cheer.

Valadez, president of Firebaugh's Helping Hands Club, joined the volunteers in creating more than 1,000 gift bags to take to the streets of Los Angeles on Thanksgiving as part of the club's philanthropic efforts.

"Giving back to the community is something I have always been interested in," said Valadez, a sophomore. "My older sister, Patricia, was a part of Helping Hands, and I got involved while I was still in middle school."

Students from Firebaugh, Lynwood, Vista and Pathway high schools, as well as several District middle schools, joined staff, community members and alumni to write unique notes and prepare more than 1,000 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the gift bags, which filled the lobby of the Firebaugh's administrative building.

On Thursday, the group gathered again to deliver the bags to homeless residents of downtown Los Angeles.

"Seeing the kids come together for Helping Hands, especially when they are on vacation from school, is a beautiful thing," Firebaugh High School teacher and club adviser Jeff Ballinger said. "Whether we're spending quality time with the elderly on Valentine's Day or donating to nonprofits that work with victims of domestic violence, our students are creating a narrative that says Lynwood is a caring, loving and compassionate community."

Ballinger said he hopes Helping Hands will grow into a community-wide organization.

"Helping Hands is what happens when enough people come together with a desire to do some good," LUSD Board President Alfonso Morales said. "This club is representative of the type of community that we have here at Lynwood Unified: parents, teachers and students all willing to donate their time to others."

About 140 students are members of Helping Hands, which meets monthly to plan volunteer opportunities. Helping Hands became an official club at Firebaugh three years ago but has operated unofficially for nearly two decades.

"We are all so proud of the students working with Helping Hands during this holiday season and during the rest of the year," LUSD Superintendent Gudiel R. Crosthwaite said. "They are setting an admirable example for the entire District, turning values that we hold dear into remarkable action."

MORE

The **Lynwood Unified School District** is dedicated to offering students a world-class education to prepare them for success in college and career in the 21st century. Under its Achieving Greatness Initiative, the district is realigning all aspects of its organization to strengthen and expand instructional programs, enrichment and extracurricular activities, and support system for students and staff. For more information, visit www.lynwood.k12.ca.us.

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PHOTO CAPTIONS

112718_LUSD_HELPINGHANDS1: Lynwood Unified students joined staff members and volunteers in preparing peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for 1,000 gift bags delivered to homeless community members in Los Angeles on Thanksgiving Day.

112718_LUSD_HELPINGHANDS2: Firebaugh High School senior Tiffany Hernandez, left, and sophomore Adolfo Cienfuegos pack snacks, socks and other items into Thanksgiving gift bags that were delivered to homeless community members in downtown Los Angeles.

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The mission of **Lynwood Unified School District**, the cultivator of innovative thinkers, is to ensure each student fearlessly achieves his or her highest academic and personal aspirations while contributing to the greater society through a unique system distinguished by:

★ People of great character who inspire and lead by example ★ The instilling of courage to be creative ★ The transformative uses of