

San Marcos students assist foster community

By ANNA TIMMIS, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

July 10, 2018 5:51 AM

Frank Koroshec, teacher of English composition, builds trust and community in his classroom.

At San Marcos High School, Mr. Koroshec's juniors and seniors work to understand the conversation or meaning of a given book and write an argument on the text.

But learning doesn't end there. His students learn to act on the truths they learn from books. For instance, the students studied health and obesity, then spent 10 days fasting from processed food, and then discussed their experiences - their successes and failures.

Mr. Koroshec asked: What good is learning if they then don't apply the lessons to their lives?

A foster parent for almost 14 years, Mr. Koroshec would also tell his students about the needs of the foster community.

"My involvement and philosophy on teaching prompted my students to ask me 'What can we do?' " he said.

The question planted the roots for the Resource Family Association Student Support Team.

Mr. Koroshec said when they asked the question, he considered how his students could help resource families in the area. He himself had experienced the difficulty of caring for children with traumatic histories. Resource parents have a lot of work to do and sometimes don't get out of the house, leading to exhaustion and confusion. Sometimes resources are scarce. The group of students could offer something valuable: time.

"What foster families need is respite," he said. "They just need a break."

Parents in Progress is a program that offers monthly training to resource parents, who must complete eight hours per year to keep their licenses. Mr. Koroshec noticed that the meetings needed someone to watch the kids who accompanied their resource parents.

About 15 or 20 students from San Marcos began showing up at training sessions to provide child care. Soon, they hired two therapists from Child Abuse Listening and Mediation to equip the students with a curriculum to help the foster kids with communication and growth.

"My students were learning about the needs of their community, and it was opening their eyes to potentially becoming foster parents," Mr. Koroshec said.

Emily Bott, a 2018 San Marcos graduate, said she was able watch kids who didn't talk at first move past their discomfort and join in games and crafts. She also saw kids only once or twice before they moved to a different home, getting a glimpse of the life of resource families.

"There are so many things you can do to help out the kids and families and parents," she said.

Share Story

facebook

Tweet



Frank Koroshec and his wife, Adrienne, pose with two adopted children, Luciani, 12, and Eloisa, 10.

COURTESY PHOTO

Ms. Bott, a student of Mr. Koroshec, became club president as a senior, the second year she participated. While she wasn't making the decisions exclusively, she was able to express the students' ideas, she said.

Over the course of a year, she saw 90 to 100 students show interest by asking the question that started it all:

"What can we do?"

Some of the students involved were in the foster care system themselves, bringing a unique and understanding perspective to their volunteering.

Both the overwhelming reaction from students and a grant of \$10,000 from local nonprofit Kids Helping Kids have allowed the program to continue growing.

The club hosts a speaker series so kids in the foster system, resource parents, and others share their stories about foster care. Donna Barker, the head of the culinary program at San Marcos High School, leads a group of students in cooking food for the monthly educational meetings.

"It's really good food. I'm so grateful for Donna," Mr. Koroshec said.

The influence of RFASSST is reaching beyond San Marcos and the Santa Barbara community. Mr. Koroshec hopes that others replicate the program in North County, which has more need while the South Coast has more resources. More families would have access to the support of RFASSST without the inconvenience of travel.

Students now in college have called Mr. Koroshec asking if they can start a chapter of the club at their university. His reply: They didn't have to ask permission.

Ms. Bott hopes to teach young children in the future, and work in the foster system. She says it's common for students in the club to realize they want to be involved in foster care or adoption in their adult lives. The club is a way for students to help at an age that limits their options for involvement.

"Having teens be able to get into it earlier makes a difference for how they view the foster care system, and those people that get involved want to stay involved," she said.

Ms. Moreno said she is now considering adopting in the future.

"It's awesome because we're gaining a new generation of people who are willing to be a part of this community," she said.

Mr. Koroshec said he hopes to make a meaningful imprint on these students' lives.

"A lot will adopt or do foster care in their life," he said. "Maybe I'm dreaming a bit, but I'm hopeful because the students inspire me."

<http://www.newspress.com/Top/Article/article.jsp?Section=LOCAL&ID=568145365711323154>