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MAKING WAVES IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

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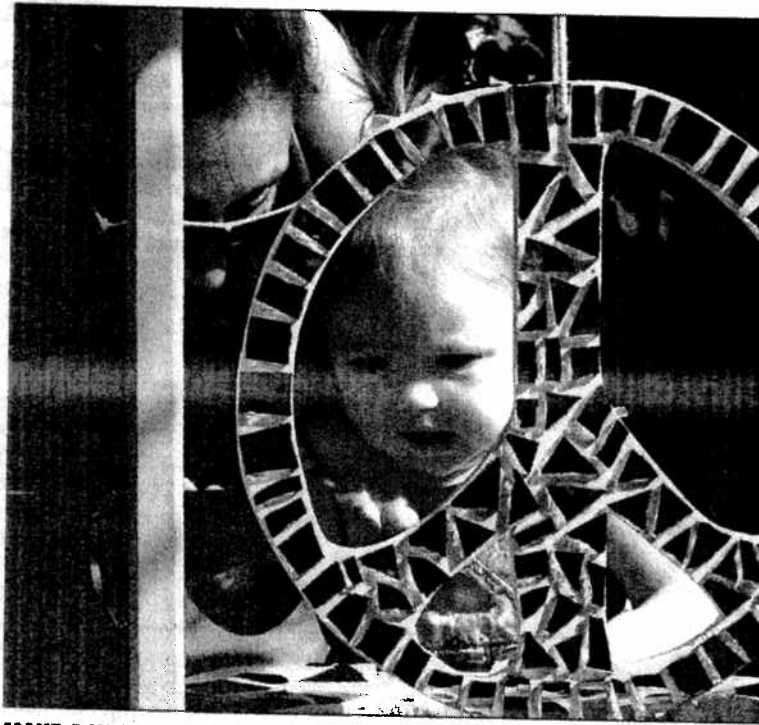
Local children act as champions for peace

By Wehtahnah Tucker

ENCINITAS — A grassroots community organization comprised mostly of children gathered June 27 to celebrate the proactive steps they take each day to promote peace. During an open house held at It's a Luv Thing in Leucadia, children and their families embodied the philosophy of the group — peace is possible through everyday actions.

Carlsbad resident Jill McManigal co-founded Kids for Peace with Danielle Gram, 17, in June 2006. Members throughout the county meet monthly to discuss ways to make the world a more peaceful place. "Kids are the true peacemakers," McManigal said as she watched children writing "wishes" they placed in the group's wishing well. The structure is currently on display in various locations while the group looks for a permanent home to place the well.

Each month the group performs a "peace challenge." In February, the topic of love and kindness was discussed with each child given the task to perform 15 random acts of kindness throughout the month. "One month the challenge was to hug five new people," McManigal said. "It really works at this age to help instill the principles of peace through



MAKE A WISH Encinitas resident Julie White shows her daughter Amy, 11 months, the Kids for Peace "Wishing Well," where children are encouraged to write down a wish for peace and deposit it into the well. The organization held an open house at It's a Luv Thing in Leucadia on June 27 as a method of engaging more children in promoting peace. Photo by Wehtahnah Tucker

action." McManigal's daughter, Hana Craft, 9, said that the most enjoyable activity is making the "Peace-Packs" for other children. The hand-painted knapsacks are filled with school supplies, toys, personal hygiene items, a copy of

the group's book "Peace Through Our Eyes" and a personal note from the members. "I think it's cool that I get to send things to kids in other countries," Hana said.

Children in Uganda and Nicaragua, as well as the

Coachella Valley, have been delighted to receive the thoughtful gifts. "What they love the most are the notes from the kids," McManigal said.

Gram, who serves as the youth liaison on the board of directors, agreed that the personal connection made through the Peace-Packs serves as a bridge of understanding between cultures.

"What the kids write is the most symbolic act of building ties internationally. It's giving a child in another country a different side of the U.S. that may not be covered in the media," said Gram, a recent Carlsbad High School graduate who will be attending Harvard in the fall and plans to join the Peace Corps after college. "The group places an emphasis on the real world through finding similarities and differences with other cultures and learning tolerance and appreciation for each."

The group has also lobbied congressional representatives on behalf of two bills that would create a Cabinet-level Department of Peace. Hana joined her mother and several others on Capitol Hill in February to explain to policymakers the reasons why an institutionalized effort to promote peace is paramount in creating a more harmonious world. "I was a little nervous but everyone was

really nice," Hana said.

The group met with Congressmen Darrell Issa-R-49th district, Brian Bilbray-R-50th district and Bob Filner-D-51st district. "In the presence of the kids, the policymakers' hearts really opened up," McManigal said. Bilbray also met with the group in October 2006 to discuss peaceful solutions to conflict.

In response to the well-attended open house at It's a Luv Thing, McManigal said the group is forming new chapters to accommodate the demand to create more organizations for children interested in promoting peace. "We have people from all over the county who come to the meetings and this will make it easier for them to keep the groups in their own communities," she said.

Kids for Peace is forming chapters in Kansas and Colorado with a goal of assisting at least 10 new groups over the next three years. "I'm hoping to start a group at an inner city elementary school when I go to Boston," Gram said.

Next month, the group will deliver another round of Peace-Packs to children in an orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico. New members are encouraged to attend the July 14 meeting. For more information, contact the group at (760) 730-3320 or edlida4peace@aol.com