

Kids working for peace

For these kids, peace is about friendship, sharing, creativity, and much more.



Peacemakers: Kids for Peace member Hana Craft and her mom, JillMcManigal, who cofounded the group, smile at a Steven Tyler concert forpeace.

(Courtesy of Kids for Peace)

By Yvonne Pesquera

posted April 29, 2008 at 12:00 am EDT

Carlsbad, Calif. —

Hana Craft likes to sing, play the piano, and play sports at school. But at just 9 years old, she's also focused on making the world better. "Peace is important to me because when I grow up, I want my kids to live in a safe and kind world," she says.

Hana is an original member of Kids for Peace, an organization cofounded by her mom, Jill McManigal, and a local teen who's passionate about promoting peace. Kids in the group work to create a culture of peace, both locally and globally.

"Hana inspired me to start Kids for Peace. We were reflecting on the state of our world and all the violence and wanted to be part of the solution," says Ms. McManigal.

What peace means to kids

Several groups use the popular name, "Kids for Peace," but the chapters of this organization follow a mission of performing community service, participating in civic action, and creating art to contribute to a peaceful society at home and abroad.

Kids for Peace developed a peace pledge with six ways kids can create peace on their own. To read it, visit www.kidsforpeaceusa.org. The group also created a book of the children's drawings and statements about peace. It's called "Peace Through Our Eyes."

The original Kids for Peace began in Carlsbad, Calif., in 2006. Since then, the group has grown to 17 chapters across the United States.

One 14-year-old girl in Escondido, Calif., was motivated to start a chapter after her father and cousin were sent to prison for violence. She wanted to break the cycle of violence in her family and become a leader for peace.

Other young members are leading the way toward peace, too. "Everything we do comes from the children," says Ms. McManigal. "They say, 'This is what we want to do to create peace.' It's not adults directing it."

Kids for Peace also has a chapter in Australia and will soon have one in Greece. In all, there are about 400 members worldwide.

Global friendship

Kids for Peace believes that learning about different cultures is an important part of building peace. "Because once you know [people] on

the other side of the world, they are your friend[s] and you won't hurt them," says Ms. McManigal.

The chapters hold sessions to introduce children to other cultures. One time, Peace Corps volunteers attended a Kids for Peace meeting to talk about living abroad. Another time, a family visiting San Diego from Kenya in East Africa was invited to speak.

Kids for Peace also likes to makes friends with children in other countries by sending them "Peace-Packs." These are hand-painted knapsacks filled with school supplies, toiletries, a toy, and a personal note of friendship.

The group hopes to raise money to send its members on trips in the future. But for now, they send Peace-Packs with adult friends who travel to other countries. In the past two years, those travelers have delivered Peace-Packs to children in Albania, Peru, Nicaragua, Kenya, and an Iraqi refugee camp in Jordan.

A few kids did get to share their Peace-Packs in person, though. "Children from the Kids for Peace groups in San Diego went on a car trip to nearby Mexico and hand-delivered their own Peace Packs to children in an orphanage," says Ms. McManigal.

"It's really fun to learn about other cultures and make friends with kids around the world," says Hana.

Speaking out for peace

Children from all the Kids for Peace chapters write and speak to elected officials to encourage them to work for peace. Last year, Hana attended the Peace Alliance Conference in Washington, D.C., as the representative of Kids for Peace. She and her mom also visited the offices of politicians from her area while they were there.

Kids for Peace is a nonpartisan organization, which means it does not endorse any one candidate during an election. Members are excited about whoever is elected so they can work with them for peace.

The kids haven't forgotten the men and women serving in the military, either. During the holidays, different Kids for Peace groups sent cards to US soldiers in Iraq. And every Veteran's Day, those in the San Diego area meet with local veterans for a day of fun activities.

Good and green

Being kind to the earth is also part of building peace, the kids decided. To celebrate Earth Day in April, all the Kids for Peace chapters performed some environmental activity in their own city and country.

One young Kids for Peace member in Solana Beach, Calif., started a "5-a-day" program, which encourages other kids to pick up at least five pieces of trash every day.

Artistic connections

The kids use their creativity to paint, write books, and sing songs as expressions of peace and fun, too.

Last year, groups from Kids for Peace in the San Diego area performed their peace pledge at LiveFeed. This "stop hunger" event was sponsored by a charter school in an impoverished neighborhood of south-central Los Angeles.

The children worked with more than 100 other volunteers to distribute bags of donated groceries to needy families. Afterward, they had the opportunity to hang out and talk with the students from the charter school, making new friends and spreading the idea of peace.

On May 17, Kids for Peace will host an art show called "Daydreams and Dandelions: Making a Wish for Our World." Kids from around the world will contribute art for sale. This is the group's big annual fundraiser.

"In 2008, we see more of our youth coming forward to spread peace, love, and optimism to more people in the world. We're right in alignment with that movement," says Ms. McManigal.

Hana adds, "To other kids I would say: It's lots of fun helping other kids around the world. One kid really can make a difference."

