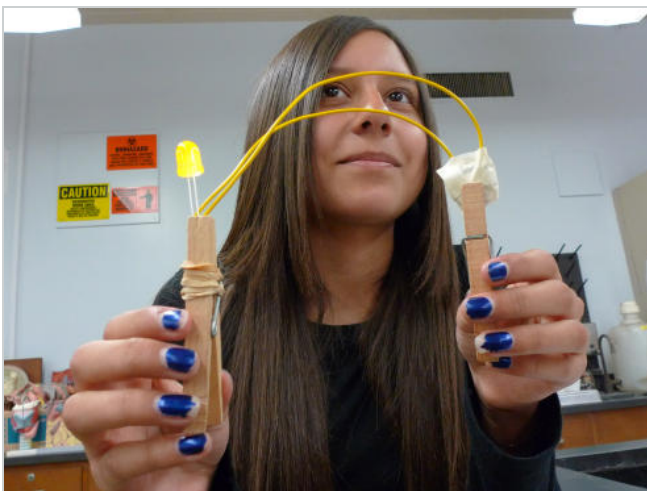


Students give educational summer camp glowing reviews

By Melissa Evans Staff Writer

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Brenda Elizarraras, 13, of Wilmington, shows off her battery-powered LED light she made at the ShareFest summer program. (Brad Graverson/Staff Photographer)

With just a stick, a straw, some metal clips and wiring, Brenda Elizarraras managed to assemble a no frills, functioning LED light.

All in a morning's work for the Wilmington Middle School student, who is taking part in a summer science and educational camp.

"It's pretty cool," she said, fidgeting with her hand-made device. "It's better than sitting at home doing nothing."

Organizers of the Youth Development Camp, taking place at California State University, Dominguez Hills, doubled their enrollment this summer to more than 200 students. The expansion was due partly to cuts in summer school and enrichment programs at area schools.

"It's really a shame," said Chad Mayer, manager director of



Instructor Lillian Valadez-Rodela helps Jose Lopez-Martinez understand the electronic circuit for the LED light project at the Sharefest summer program at CSUDH. (Brad Graverson/Staff Photographer)

ShareFest Community Development, a nonprofit involved in organizing the camp. "Kids need something to do in the summer, and that's a big part of what we wanted to provide."

The program, which lasts four weeks, is the

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result of a collaboration among the Los Angeles Unified School District, CSU Dominguez Hills, and the Torrance-based nonprofit, which consists of businesses, churches, schools and local leaders.

"We've got a lot of momentum going on this, and we'd like to see it grow even more," Mayer said.

The program focuses on kids from underprivileged areas, such as Wilmington, San Pedro and Carson. All of them are middle-school aged, or in the beginning years of high school. Organizers say that is a critical

time to get youngsters on the right track in life - particularly in the summer, when there's more potential for getting into trouble.

Leony Mijares, who will be in eighth grade this fall at Carnegie Middle School in Carson, said she may want to be a scientist some day.

"We've learned a lot so far," she said. "I never knew you could make a light. It's pretty cool."

The science portion of the four-week camp is coordinated through LAUSD's Gear Up program. Funded by a

federal grant, the program provides extra support to a class of students in Carson, and also for summer enrichment programs.



In a science lab at CSUDH, Sharefest kids work on an LED light project. Shown is Charles Eddings, 11, from Gardena. (Brad Graverson/Staff Photographer)

Teachers throughout the district on summer break are leading the classes, housed in CSU Dominguez Hills' high tech laboratories. The students learn about everything from robotics, to solar power to fixing electronics.

Other counselors with the camp are college students on break and other volunteers.

"This is such a opportunity for the kids, to be able to learn in this kind of environment," said Jeanette Kolar, coordinator for the Gear Up program.

The program isn't just about academics, however. Part of the goal is to restore some of the extra-curricular activities, such as art and athletics, that kids are doing without due to budget cuts and class size expansions.

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On Wednesday, the kids even got to take a tour of the nearby Home Depot Center and watch the professional Galaxy soccer team practice. In the afternoon, they got to play a game of their own.

Other sessions include career development, leadership training and team building.

The program is free, including transportation. Buses pick the students up before 8 a.m., and take them back at 1 p.m., Monday through Friday.

This is only the second year of the program, but Mayer said it has so far managed to make an impact.

"We really want these kids to succeed, to go to college someday," Mayer said. "Just getting them onto a campus like this I think is inspirational for them."

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Find out more

For information about the Youth Development Camp, visit www.sharefestinc.org, or call 310-626-8106.

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