Camp Redwood Glen gives children of farm workers a week of fun

At The Salvation Army Camp Redwood Glen in Scotts Valley, California, staff and counselors want campers to seek, experience and fully know Jesus. They understand that for many campers, the basic human needs of food, shelter and a sense of belonging must be met to embrace this hope.

At camp, it does not matter what neighborhood campers come from or how they got to camp, they are given a sense of belonging and connection because “Christ says they belong,” said Redwood Glen Camp Director Ed Covert.

For children of farm workers, who, according to Covert, represented nearly 50 percent of Redwood Glen campers in 2024, the week provides belonging. The campers come to the program through Hollister (California) Corps Officer Major Maria Romero, who for years has led Mobile Ministries in the California Central Valley, serving the farming region.

According to Romero, Mobile Ministries reaches up to 1,450 families a month—farm workers living in California’s Central Valley who work long and hard hours. By the time they get off work, most social service offices are closed, preventing them from getting help.

To help meet this need, Romero and her team have built relationships with farming companies that have allowed them to enter the fields for many years. Mobile Ministries comes to the workers during the day or after work to provide meals, fresh produce, utility assistance, diapers and help during unexpected emergencies.

Romero said farm worker families largely speak Spanish, and Mobile Ministries helps them complete social services forms that are often in English. Additionally, the Hollister Corps offers ESL classes for those who want to further their language skills.

Through all of the interactions on and off the field, Romero builds trust with the families of campers who come from farm worker communities. She forms strong relationships with the parents.

Romero’s relationships with agricultural firms have also resulted in the companies providing buses to transport children to and from camp and other support for families.

“The families recognize that the folks they are working for are committed to helping get their kids to camp,” Covert said.

Romero believes the farming companies support the initiative because they know that their workers’ children are going to a safe place where they will be taken care of. She said when parents have greater peace of mind, they can work better.

“It is something positive for the children to engage in, and the farming companies benefit from creating positive relationships with community programs that will make a lasting impact on the community,” Romero said.

The camp has a significant impact on the campers coming from farming communities, too. In the short term, they see it as a magical place where they can have fun away from home without worries about food and shelter, safety and protection as meals and lodging are provided by well-trained, caring staff.

Campers participate in activities, like shooting a bow and arrow, exploring the creek, hiking and experiencing the night sky. The camp incorporates chapel time to present the campers with the gospel.

“They also get to build relationships with peers in a positive environment,” said Romero.

Long term, many of the kids who have attended camp have returned as counselors. They realize they have skills that can lead them to different career paths.

But, for now, the main purpose of camp? To create the conditions for life and growth that will ensure in campers and staff long-term faithfulness, effectiveness and thriving in the communities that they live, work and play.

With reporting by Monica Salazar-Jimenez

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