



PHOTOS BY TROY HARVEY/THE STAR

Children from Camp Helping Hands are shown what an artichoke looks like in bloom while taking a tour last Thursday morning of the Community Roots Garden at Oxnard United Methodist Church.

# Learning to make a difference

**Day camp shows youths to give back**

By Alicia Doyle  
Special to The Star

Emmi Ysais learned the value of volunteering and helping others in need during a field trip last Thursday to Community Roots Garden in Oxnard, where she harvested carrots for delivery to the Oxnard Rescue Mission.

"This garden changed my perspective," said Emmi, 13, of Camarillo. "I didn't know these volunteers took time out of their day to plant stuff for people who don't have food." The teen also discovered what it's like giving back.

"It's fun," Emmi said. "We're showing we care

by taking the time out of our summer to do this."

Emmi is among 25 youths ages 6-13 enrolled in Camp Helping Hands, a service-learning summer day camp that inspires children to support their community through projects and field trips, said Meredith Madnick Cornelius, of Thousand Oaks, the camp's founder and CEO.

The camp dedicates a week each to Earth, people and animals.

The kids were focused last week on fighting hunger in the community, Cornelius said.

Campers last Thursday learned about container gardening, organic farming and native plants, as well as how to thresh and winnow wheat. They also discovered drip watering conserves water and the mugwort plant can help ease the itch from



Aixa Velador pitches in by helping to pull up carrots while taking a tour.



Jacob Steiner helps pick carrots.

poison oak.

The children also learned how to make fertile soil using food scraps, newspaper and worms.

"We hope the experience leaves a lasting impression, and we hope the campers learn they can make a difference," Cornelius said. "Hopefully, they will understand

there are others who are maybe not as fortunate as they are, and we all can work together for the greater good."

During the campers' visit, Angela Schultz, the garden's volunteer coordinator, led a tour while talking about how the effort began.

"This is on a church

property, and they used to run a food pantry ... for people who need food but can't afford it," said Schultz, of Santa Paula.

When the food pantry closed, people in need kept showing up, Schultz said.

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“So in this whole yard, volunteers kept planting food,” she said.

The volunteer coordinator then told children a familiar adage: “If you give a person a fish, they can eat for one day; but if you teach them how to fish, they can eat for a lifetime.”

“That’s what we’re trying to do here,” Schultz said.

The children walked through an area with fig, apple and peach trees and were given the chance to taste an edible flower called nasturtium.

“It’s spicy ... like a radish,” Schultz told the children.

Jacob Steiner, 6, of Camarillo, had another observation: “It doesn’t taste as spicy if you eat one petal at a time.”

Nadiya Duncan, 7, especially enjoyed harvesting carrots to take to the mission.

“I like pulling them out of the ground,” said Nadiya, of Ventura. “It makes me feel excited ‘cause I get to give them to homeless people and people who are hungry.”

Melody Valencia, a volunteer camp counselor, said she chose Camp Helping Hands because it teaches children to give back to their community.

“This is a really positive thing that they’re doing, and every field trip we take has a good meaning to it,” the Oxnard 16-year-old said. “It’s important they know there’s other people who don’t have the opportunities and advantages they have.”



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Angela Schultz, left, of Community Roots garden teaches a group of children from Camp Helping Hands how to thresh wheat during their visit.