

# Gleaning new skills

■ Camp helps teach youths to assist others

By Alicia Doyle  
Special to The Star

Wearing gardening gloves and with a clipper in hand, Alyssa Nicholls, 9, gathered tangerines Thursday in a Moorpark-area orchard, knowing the fruit soon would be headed to food pantries that feed people in need.

"They're going to go to people who don't have enough money to buy food or don't have the privileges to buy food," the Thousand Oaks girl said of Thursday's "gleaning" effort to gather fruit that won't be going to the market and instead provide it to the hungry. "It makes me feel really good because we know we're helping people



Tara Wykert, a camper at Camp Helping Hands in Thousand Oaks, gleans a tangerine from an orchard near Moorpark. It will be donated to Food Forward and distributed to those in need.

See **CAMP, 3B**



live and survive."

Alyssa was among 27 children ages 6 to 10 who are participating in Camp Helping Hands, a Thousand Oaks group that has spent the week learning how local organizations get food to people in need.

The gleaning event was organized by Food Forward, which rescues fresh local produce that otherwise would go to waste, said Ally Gialketsis, Ventura County branch coordinator for Food Forward.

"The ones that are on the trees, they're not selling at the grocery stores because maybe they're a little bit too small, or a little bit too big, or they have an extra little lump, but the fruit is perfectly good," Gialketsis, of Ventura, told the children. "So because of our grocery stores and the way we want things to look exactly perfect, there's a lot of food that goes to waste. So today we're going to save that waste and give it to people who are hungry."

Camp Director Marie Orechoff said the goal is to teach youngsters how to create an environment that's more beneficial and sustainable.

"We talk a lot about food waste and helping others," she said. "It's a really important skill to know, especially in this affluent area."

Camp counselor Gage Peterson said some of the children in Camp Helping Hands are growing up in "fancy environments" and "haven't really gotten the exposure that is required to understand that there's more to life than just having money."

They're learning, he said, that by helping people, "there's a greater accomplishment."

"It's exposing these kids to these new ideals and opening their eyes," she said.

Because of their age, the children are learning skills that are intended to stick for a lifetime, said Nicolas Ebert, of Thousand Oaks, a junior counselor with Camp Helping Hands.

"If you instill this now, it's more of a foundation, and they'll remember it for a while because

their brain is still in the learning process," said

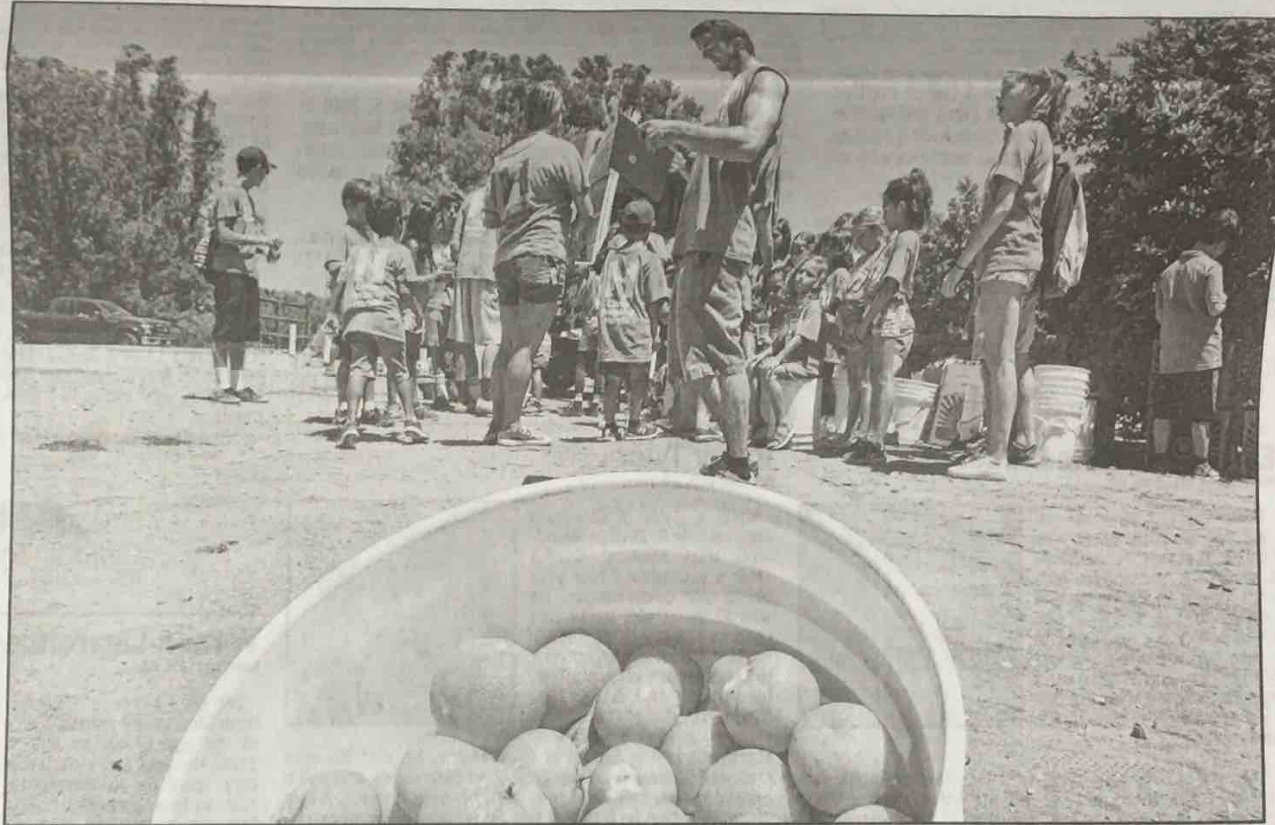
Nicholas, 14. "Once you get this as a habit, they'll help the community later on in life."

The fruit picked Thursday was delivered to

food pantries operated by Moorpark Catholic Charities, Ruben Castro Charities in Moorpark, United Methodist Church in Thousand Oaks, Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village and the Santa Clara Neighborhood for Learning, which serves Santa Paula and Fillmore.

"Hopefully, the children are going to retain the idea that there's food waste," said Jill Santos, Ventura branch manager of Food Forward. "More and more people are waking up to the realization that our agricultural system, just by nature, has a lot of waste."

"The great thing about Food Forward is they've figured out a way to get fresh produce to people who need it. Some of these people don't get to eat fresh produce because they're on a food program from a pantry, and fresh produce is the hot commodity ... so this is a great program because we're getting fresh produce to people."



ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR

Campers from Camp Helping Hands in Thousand Oaks gather after collecting fruit at an orchard near Moorpark during a field trip Thursday. The fruit will be donated to Food Forward, which provides gleaned produce to low-income households.



Milo Richard carries a bucket filled with tangerines during a Thursday field trip with Camp Helping Hands.