

## **Service Connection Stories**

*People think that elders are annoying, a hassle, disruptive, boring, and demanding; but on the contrary, they are gentle, sweet, fun, willing to live, easy to love, and a pleasure to be with. They are a blessing and we should treat them as we would like to be treated when we are older...*

*- Viridiana Ponce, Lawndale High School*

Ask Viridiana Ponce if she got bored volunteering at The Salvation Army Senior Day Care Center and she will get all bubbly and tell you how incredibly rewarding her summer was. In fact, she will make sure you know the contentment you feel deep inside from helping elderly people and making them happy is something money can never buy!

Viri decided to volunteer there as a way of feeling closer to her grandmother and great-grandmother who lived far away. She was surprised when the seniors welcomed her with open arms right away, and even made efforts to learn her name in spite of the fact they all had memory problems due to dementia or Alzheimer's Disease. The sweet things they did genuinely moved her, like the day they sang "Happy Birthday" to her father just because she told them it was his special day, even though he was not there. Through them, she learned the importance of education and using one's time wisely, as well as fascinating, real stories about World War II. There was not a day when they did not make her smile, and after the first time, she knew she would be back even when the summer was over.

*I had arrived nervous, but now I am leaving with a feeling that this camp will not be as boring and uncool as I had previously believed the whole experience would be.*

*- Jaron Lum, South High School*

When Jaron Lum agreed to volunteer at Camp Escapades, he had visions of going on hikes and starting bonfires. He soon found out the camp was a regular day-camp with fun-filled games and activities but with a different twist: it was for children with special needs. In one week, he got to work with a child who amazed him with his "other intelligence", i.e. his knowledge of actors and movies; he empathized and understood the fears of an autistic girl who did not want to go into the Moonbounce, a rubber chamber where kids could bounce around and have a blast; and finally, he had to learn to cope with a severely autistic child who would act out when she did not get her way. As his week ended, Jaron reflected on how much he had "learned from, had fun with, and even gotten to love" those who were less fortunate than him by creating a beautiful drawing of a young man walking hand in hand with a child.