



LOS ANGELES COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT

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Leaders of Tomorrow: Eco-Ranger Camp Inspires Next Generation

Traveling many miles from the neighborhoods in which they live, dozens of Whittier teenagers arrived at Lake Castaic for a summer camp of a much different kind. At the L.A. County's Eco-Ranger Camp for Youth, young men and women learn to be the leaders of tomorrow, while at the same time gain a new understanding and appreciation for the environment.

"When I saw that teens were helping, I wanted to do that as well," said 13-year-old Alex Vasquez. Alex credits the Eco-Ranger camp for getting himself and others off the street and onto a positive life path.

"It's helped me because it made me get more skills as a leader, as a person. It gave me better morals about life, and it helped me make new friends, which now I consider my family."

Program Coordinator Joseph Matthews explores the goals of the camp "They're going to be doing some service projects, working on improving the environment here, doing some clean up. They're going to be having some fun too—they're going to do some hikes, they're gonna learn about the flora and the fauna here, they are also going to do some night kayaking, and they're just going to connect with each other."

Ranging in age from 13 to 18, this particular Eco-Ranger group of which Alex is a part is training to be Eco-Ranger Camp Counselors for hundreds of younger children. These youth will be taking the skills and lessons learned about developing a deeper appreciation of the natural world, and then passing them down.

Seventeen-year-old Kendall Salazar is excited to learn "how different things work, and how we can use different resources, and put it in our lives. And just go out to different areas and experience different things in life."

The County's Commission of Human Relations is also involved with the Camp, helping children deal with prejudice and to build peace. Robert Sowell, a representative of that commission explains, "We engage them in activities where they're learning about how we have stereotypes, how we react to people who are different from us. And we raise what's subconscious into their conscious awareness, so that they can then think about that, and talk about, 'Well, how can we do that different?'"