



# THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

FROM MEASURING HOURS  
TO MEASURING IMPACT

by Bailey Shiffler

In 2012, Flintridge Prep's decision to extend the idea of community impact projects as an Idea Lab initiative, while simultaneously doing away with its longstanding community service hour requirement, left some scratching their heads.

Just two years later, the move makes perfect sense.

Says Headmaster Peter Bachmann: "We wanted to create an environment in which students are free to discover and pursue sincere passions in the community."

The evolution from an hours-based community service program to an impact-based one has allowed exactly that. The student body is learning more about compassion, empathy and giving back than ever before. Led by a student-run organization, the Student Community Action Council, or SCAC, the new system encourages students to volunteer with purpose, and as faculty advisor Heather Clark says, "to quantify impact instead of time."

For decades, giving back to the greater community has been a priority at Flintridge Prep. It is ingrained in the fabric of the school: from middle school

community service days to incorporating service in curriculum, on student trips and through peer counseling. Many service-oriented clubs have raised thousands of dollars for charities across the city, country and abroad. The 13 service-oriented clubs on campus were doing great work, but scheduling conflicts and the large number of causes and clubs prevented many students, especially middle schoolers, from fully participating.

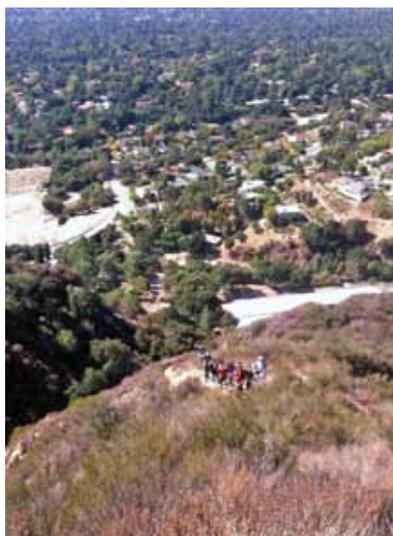
**ENTER SCAC.** In the 2012-2013 school year, Grady Willard '14 was appointed to a new Student Senate post: Commissioner of Community and Culture. The

new position coincided with the school's intent to move toward a passion-driven community service program, and it was no coincidence that Willard had won his 8th grade Science Fair for his community impact project, or CIP. In the inaugural year of CIPs, Willard completed two projects: he tutored students at Don Benito Fundamental School for the Pasadena Unified District spelling bee, and he organized a drive for children in the pediatrics ward at Huntington Hospital. Willard has since been an ambassador for community service, volunteering for an array of causes, from singing at hospitals and senior centers to helping

## PHILANTHROPY

In middle school at Sierra Madre we had a service club that worked all over the community. I liked the overall approach to philanthropy. At Prep, I led the Make a Wish Foundation club, because of its inclusive focus. Working for others makes me happy. I like to give back and help people. I like this position because I can show people how to impact others.

— Kaitlin Liston '14



Students engage in community service throughout the San Gabriel Valley.



send Ugandan women to school.

Says Willard: "I like the power you feel from working hard and knowing you've helped other people."

Throughout the year, Willard, the Senate, faculty members and the student body talked about the meaning of community service, as well as about the best avenues through which students could volunteer. Willard says students wanted easy access to volunteer opportunities and they wanted to be able to complete consistent, recurring service, instead of one-off projects.

It was throughout this yearlong process that SCAC took form. The organization is separated into seven

sections, each with a student leader: philanthropy (Kaitlin Liston '14), education (Sam Reyes '14), homelessness and hunger (Helen Yun '14), animals and nature (Daniel Enzminger '14), elderly and disabled (Lauren Au '15), health, wellness and relief (Bailey Thompson '15) and children (Ellie Taw '14). Each sector holds regular meetings, and the leaders also maintain a database that collates an array of area volunteer opportunities. A student with a passion for animals needs only to visit the SCAC website to find a wealth of ways he or she can volunteer locally.

Enzminger says the new system makes it much easier for students to find

volunteer opportunities. "We're making service more inclusive."

Willard says the sectors have allowed students to really follow their hearts.

"I think the switch has gone as Mr. Bachmann intended," Willard says. "People are really getting to the heart of community service, and they're looking at their passions and seeing community service as an instinct instead of as a reaction to a form."

SCAC also helps facilitate the bigger annual events that used to be overseen by individual clubs, students or faculty members. Events like the Crop Walk, the Club 21 Walkathon, the

## EDUCATION

**Taking on education is the end result of a lot of my experiences tutoring and working with kids in Nicaragua this summer. Teaching kids re-sparked my interest in my own education—and a career in teaching. Helping others really brought that out in me, and I'd like to re-ignite other Prep students' passion for learning through helping others.**

— Sam Reyes '14

## HOMELESSNESS AND HUNGER

**Community service is simply about helping others. People say that life is unfair, but why can't life be about opportunities? By aiding the hungry and homeless, we are providing people the basic needs of life. A single can of food can save someone's life and create their hope for the future.**

— Helen Yun '14

## ANIMALS AND NATURE

**As a kid my favorite station was Animal Planet. Nature, animals and the environment have always been a focus for me; I'm a boy scout and spend a lot of time outdoors. I saw that Prep had a lot of potential to grow and expand our awareness of the environment around us and to be a more environmentally conscious school.**

— Daniel Enzminger '14



Turkey Drive and the Special Olympics were once managed by small groups or individuals. Now, with SCAC serving as a voice for all community service, the invitations to participate are consistent and constant—the message is the same, but it’s being heard from a louder megaphone.

Librarian Reggie Ursettie, who served as the advisor of the service-focused Leo Club for 17 years, says she has been impressed with how the SCAC leaders have publicized events and, overall, with the transition from the club model to the SCAC-led system.

This year, both the Crop Walk and the Special Olympics events on campus

involved twice as many student volunteers as in years past. Reyes attributes the shift to communication—SCAC has done a great job communicating events to the whole student body, and the effects are noticeable.

SCAC also exists as a resource for any campus group looking to incorporate community service. It works regularly with groups like the Athletic Council on Leadership, or ACL, Peer Counselors, the Student Senate and faculty, all of which regularly plan service-related events. The group is also a resource for 8th graders working on their CIPs, aiming to help students find projects that they can work on throughout their high school careers.

“We talked a lot about our Community Impact Projects, and how sometimes it’s a ‘You do it, then lose it,’ situation,” Willard says. “One of the goals of SCAC is to help students continue with their projects throughout high school.”

This model, Ursettie says, “creates a more altruistic participant.”

After two years without community service hour requirements, Liston says she feels like volunteering is no longer an item on a checklist. And the true takeaway: she’s doing as much, if not more, service in the community now than she was when she was counting hours.

## ELDERLY AND DISABLED

**I have a soft spot for the disabled, elderly and children. Volunteering and service are, for me, so important. I like the idea of doing something for others rather than just concentrating on myself. Helping other people just puts a smile on your face. And I like to volunteer with friends. It creates a real bond among us when we can talk about our experiences and really do something for the community outside Prep.**

— Lauren Au '15



## HEALTH, WELLNESS AND RELIEF

**As students, we are constantly working, but working in service gives us an opportunity to see the meaningful impact we create. It is a way to help those who are not as fortunate and get involved in the community.**

— Bailey Thompson '15



## CHILDREN

**While community service is extremely important, I chose to lead the children’s sector because I believe service becomes more meaningful and enjoyable when incorporated with personal passion. When service is integrated with an individual’s passion, it begins to feel less like another extracurricular activity and more like an exciting opportunity for exploration.**

— Ellie Taw '15



# FROM LA CAÑADA TO MANAGUA

Nicaragua partnership grows into thriving, two-way collaboration



by Mel Malmberg

“When we started taking students to Nicaragua four years ago, we had no idea what direction it might take,” Spanish teacher Manuel Nuñez says. “What started as a simple cultural exchange—our students went there, Nicaraguan students came here—has evolved into a program that creates meaningful connections for students and faculty.”

With the backing of the E.E. Ford Foundation, Flintridge Prep’s Nicaragua Initiative has blossomed into a robust, school-wide program that allows

students to follow a passion and make a difference. It allows faculty to learn, teach and exchange ideas. Backboned by a student trip to the country each summer, the program now encompasses athletics, mentoring, language and cultural immersion and community service.

“Each year we have extended our connection and involvement with the community,” Nuñez says. “It’s no longer a visit; it’s an investment. It’s a two-way street that continues throughout the year.”

The tone for the relationship was set in part by Naomi Hatanaka ‘11. As a junior, Naomi was sincerely touched by the plight of the families at La Mascota,

the country’s only pediatric cancer hospital, which students had visited on their trip to Nicaragua. Hatanaka went on to use her senior year independent study project to create a nonprofit fundraising organization, A World of One’s Own, or AWOOO, for the La Mascota patients and their families, growing what was a short visit into a lasting connection. Three years later, her continued advocacy and fundraising involves former classmates (notably Kyle Eschen ‘11 and Roy Yu ‘12), as well as current students. Not surprisingly, she is majoring in social entrepreneurship at UC Berkeley.



Now, working with La Mascota is a vital part of the work Prep students do in Nicaragua.

On the 2013 trip, history teacher Ingrid Herskind says she was inspired by the students' connection to the patients at La Mascota.

"I could see a generosity and sweetness, watching them engage with these kids who were really sick," she says. "They were there in the afternoons, hanging out, playing cards, taking pictures and basically just loving these kids. It was absolutely genuine interaction and support, impassioned and from the heart."

In addition to the work at La Mascota, students and teachers work and learn at St. Mary's School, a K-8 institution in Managua. St. Mary's has a mission and ambition similar to Prep's, and the relationship includes both countries' students and faculty in an

exchange of mentoring, learning and teaching.

This year, the students lived with families from St. Mary's and spent mornings at the school. Founded just five years ago, St. Mary's has already grown to 500 students and is known for its inclusivity and outreach programs. Prep students were encouraged to learn as much as to teach, as they worked in a classroom with elementary students and took a Spanish and dance class.

Michael Weinstein '14 says, "It was great to learn along with the kids we taught. I was in a 1st grade classroom with one of my 'younger brothers.' The kids spoke so fast, we had to step up—and we learned a lot of slang."

Julia Shaw '14 says, "It was cool how much they wanted to learn. Their energy was really high."

Alex Khalsa '15 reflects, "I didn't realize how much Spanish I had learned until after the trip."

Prep science teacher Heather Clark taught environmental studies (in Spanish) for 1st through 8th graders while St. Mary's teachers observed her technique. Spanish teacher Fabian Bejarano worked with St. Mary's Spanish teacher Ximena Gonzalez. This year, students at both schools will use iPads to connect Prep's Spanish I classes to 7th and 8th grade English classrooms at St. Mary's.

Athletic Director Alex Rivera visited Nicaragua for the first time in 2013 and taught sports clinics for coaches and players, working with St. Mary's PE and Athletic Director Allan Mercado. Rivera was putting building blocks in place to help St. Mary's President, Jorge Luis Ayestas, realize his vision of making Nicaragua a basketball powerhouse—all the way to the Olympic level. It's a



challenge in a country whose main passion is *el béisbol* and where courts—let alone basketballs and shoes—can be tough to find. But according to Rivera, that’s just par for the course with St. Mary’s dynamic director.

“He has a vision,” Rivera says. “I told him it reminds me of working with Peter Bachmann. There’s just no stopping him.”

The experience has made a lasting impact on Rivera.

“The whole experience was beautiful—the people, coaches, teachers, students and kids, the families,” says Rivera, who was interviewed by the Nicaraguan equivalent of ESPN about the trip. “I got more out of it than I could have dreamed. I walked out of there with the gratifying feeling that the kids and the coaches were hungry for knowledge.”

A little piece of Prep remains at St. Mary’s permanently. This summer, when Prep underwent a major classroom and lab renovation, the school packed up its original lab stations, chairs and tables into a giant container and shipped them to the Nicaraguan school. Now, St. Mary’s boasts one of Nicaragua’s finest science labs.

The connections continue. In September, Ayestas and Karla Obregon, St. Mary’s academic coordinator, came to La Cañada to observe many facets of Prep in action. They observed classrooms, interviewed teachers and administrators and absorbed the day-to-day workings of the school.

During the visit, Ayestas kept clasping his fingers together, illustrating how intertwined Prep and St. Mary’s are: through their missions, honor codes and continuing student and faculty exchange. In December, he was

back to learn more about the physical education program from Rivera and the whole PE staff. Rivera and soccer coach Esteban Chavez visited Nicaragua in January to start working on next year’s exchange program.

“It’s a real two-way street,” Nuñez says. “St. Mary’s is excited to be mentored by Prep, one of the top schools in the US. They want to expand to high school, to be one of the best schools in their country and to offer an excellent education to people in the lower and lower-middle classes. They are aiming for nothing less than developing the educational well-being of their entire country, to help their country prosper.

“Yet I believe we are receiving more than we are giving. Our kids come home with profound understanding, they are more self-assured and they can handle things better across the board. They have been transformed.”