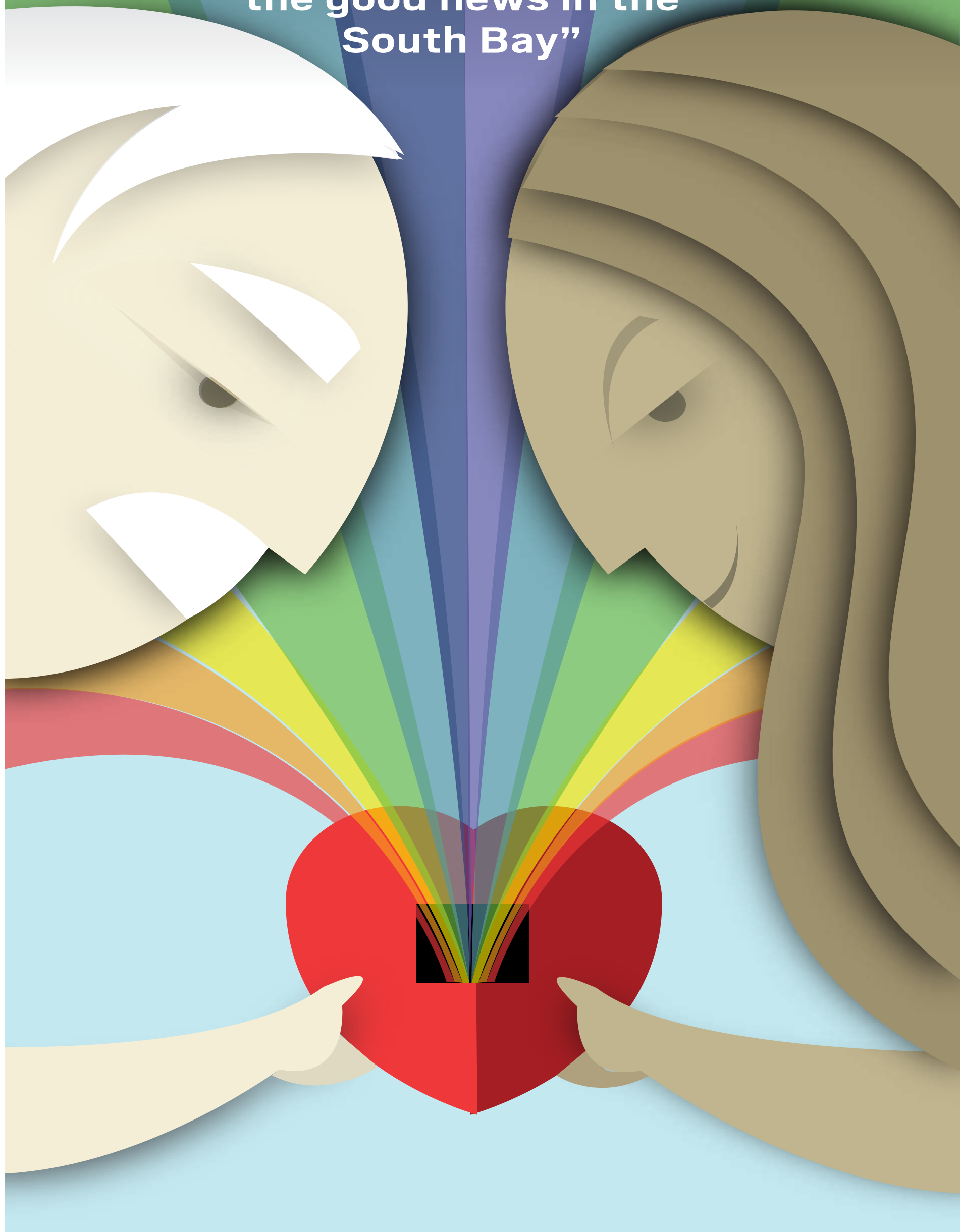


KINDNESS

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“Opening our hearts to
the good news in the
South Bay”



Helping students attend STEM camp for free gives them the ‘Code to Grow’

By Tyler Shaun Evains
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Teenager Jack Segil spent many of his nights this summer making turkey and cheese, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for other kids.

But the children who are eating the lunches are doing much more than attending a typical summer camp—and Segil is doing more than providing them a mid-day meal.

They’re spending two weeks learning how to code for free through Segil’s Code to Grow, a program the 17-year-old Manhattan Beach resident started three years ago to send students ages 8 to 14 to Planet Bravo summer STEM camp.

Segil has grown up building a passion for programming letters and numbers into visuals. But not everyone, he said, had the access to the resources he did. There must be, he thought, kids out there who may not have yet discovered their love for coding.

While attending Manhattan Beach Middle School, Segil spent summers at coding camp Planet Bravo. He took a look around and noticed something important.

“One year at Planet Bravo, I stopped and looked around; I said, every kid here is rich, and White,” Segil said. “It’s all people who could pay for camp, get here and be in this affluent area; there’s probably so many kids out there who can’t discover if they like coding or not,” Segil said.

“I can’t imagine,” he said, “If I’d never been able to do it.”

This summer, Code to Grow had its biggest cohort yet, Segil said, with 40 students learning to code at respective Planet Bravo locations across Los Angeles County, like Pasadena, Westchester and Burbank.

Segil, who wants to major in computer science in college, lends a hand to students at the Manhattan Beach location.

The very first coding camp in 2021 saw a cohort of six kids, which Segil with his father, James, funded out-of-pocket and with donations from family members.

Since the first go-round, they’ve raised



PHOTOS BY AXEL KOESTER

Jack Segil, a Manhattan Beach high schooler and the founder of the nonprofit Code To Grow Foundation — which has raised \$250,000 from corporate sponsors to allow 40 kids to learn coding, helps Tamia Knox, 9, during coding camp at Manhattan Beach Middle School on June 27.

more than \$250,000 from corporate sponsors and personal donations, which will send groups of 40 kids to camp each year for three years. It covers the two-week tuition at Planet Bravo, daily lunch and transportation to and from camp by Hop Skip Drive—an Uber-like rideshare service for children.

At camp, students start by learning how to make games—something they may be familiar with to get their brains geared toward the lesson. Instead of writing lines of code, campers start by stitching together pre-written code to initially get the hang of things, and see if coding even sparks their interest.

Code to Grow, which became a nonprofit about a year ago, opens up the door for them to figure out their interests, Segil said, in coding or otherwise.

But for those who stick to the skill, the learning doesn’t have to stop in the summer.

After camp ends, students can enroll

in Code to Grow’s self-guided coding curriculum that teaches them how to code on their own in Python throughout the school year, with mentors to help them along the way.

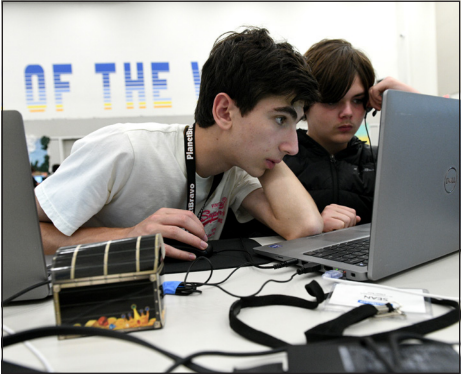
Attending Planet Bravo, Segil said, was the spark that lit his own fire for coding. The fuel, though, he added, was taking coding classes as early as 4th grade at Chadwick School, where he’s now a high school senior.

“I had that incredible opportunity at such a young age,” Jack Segil said. “Then I went to camp after camp; I was off to the races.”

He’d always felt lucky and privileged to have gotten coding skills under his belt when he did, he added.

“The thing I love about coding is problem solving,” Segil said, and the plethora of tools coding gives him to solve those problems.

Coding, he said, is like a language that, when spoken, gets straight to the solu-



Segil helps Sean Corbett, 12, during Planet Bravo summer STEM camp at Manhattan Beach Middle School on June 27.

tion. Tools that are simple to learn, Segil added, but hard to master.

Segil has partnered with organizations like Culture Club South Bay, Happy Trails Camp, Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters, Camp Bob Waldorf and the Court Appointed Special Advocates, a national association that supports and promotes court-appointed advocates for children who are victims of abuse and neglect.

The Manhattan Beach City Council recognized Segil and his efforts at its Aug. 20 meeting

Segil is also an intern at Planet Bravo, and works part time at a video game company. He’s already working in his dream industry.

In college, he wants to explore his passions, find out what else he’s into and hopefully come out on the other side with “a really fun job.”

All that takes “for me (is) I get to code, and bring my dog into the office.”

As for the future of Code to Grow, “I can see this going nationwide,” Segil said, adding that its an asynchronous, scalable model that can be done anywhere.

The biggest motivator in coding, Segil said, is the endless creative possibilities. And he’s thankful to see Code to Grow campers get lost in it the way he does.

“The more technical it gets, the more invested I see them get,” Segil said. “When I see these kids, it makes me really happy; I feel fulfilled.”

“I stopped and looked around; I said, every kid here is rich, and White. It’s all people who could pay for camp ... there’s probably so many kids out there who can’t discover if they like coding or not.”

— Jack Segil, founder of Code to Grow

Blankets of Love South Bay and the Good+ Foundation stitch together a plan

By Hillary Ma
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Blankets of Love South Bay is on a mission: To increase awareness of substance abuse by knitting one baby blanket at a time.

And, so far, since its inception in 2016, the nonprofit has done just that. To the tune of about 4,700 blankets.

BOL was started by Manhattan Beach resident Cyndi Strand who wanted to educate others after losing her only son, Justin, to drug abuse.

“Substance abuse doesn’t just occur in dark alleys in poverty stricken areas,” Strand said in her blog. “It also happens in affluent communities with involved parents and intact families, such as in our case.”

Strand provides a space of healing for moms across Manhattan Beach to grieve for their lost loved ones due to substance abuse. Strand’s nonprofit memorializes her son and she extends that opportunity to her local community through knitting.

Like clockwork, Strand meets at the Joslyn Center every Thursday, from 3 to 5 p.m., inviting the community to help provide those in need with a crocheted or knitted blanket — all made with tender care and hope for a baby-in-need’s future.

Each blanket creator spends their own money to purchase yarn and supplies and gives freely of their time to make each blanket, said Strand. About 24 hours goes into each handmade creation, she added.

“Babies are on loan from God — love them, raise them and release them,” Strand



Cyndi Strand is the founder of Blankets of Love. Since its inception in 2016, the nonprofit has donated nearly 4,700 baby blankets to call attention to the perils of substance abuse.

said, “our blankets cover babies with warmth, love and blessings.”

Those tiny baby blankets get distributed through the the L.A. chapter of Good+Foundation, a national non-profit that helps to pair tangible goods with innovative services for underserved individuals and families.

The two have been partnering for the last 7 years, said Strand.

Since the beginning of their partnership in 2017, Blankets of Love South Bay



PHOTOS COURTESY CYNDI STRAND

Blankets of Love meets every Thursday from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Manhattan Beach Joslyn Center. The nonprofit makes baby blankets for needy families to call attention to the perils of substance abuse.

has donated more than 2,500 blankets for Good+Foundation to distribute to grantee partners across Los Angeles. So far, this year, Blankets of Love South Bay has already donated 300 blankets.

Often, the blankets are handed out at baby showers where expectant parents are given other new-parent essentials.

“For more than 7 years, these volunteers have generously crafted baby blankets for our families providing more than 300 blankets annually,” said Kathleen Harrigan, LA Senior Program Coordinator of

Good+Foundation, in an email.

Families who receive the hand-knit or crocheted blankets are always delighted, Harrigan said.

“And (they) can clearly see the time and effort that went into making each one,” Harrigan said.

“We cannot say thank you enough to Cyndi Strand and the Blankets of Love South Bay volunteers.”

For more information about Blankets of Love South Bay, go to blanketsoflovessouthbay.com.