COMMUNITY

Multicultural Center looks for new friends

MVMC brings Amigos to Amiguitos mentorship program back from hiatus

by Crystal Muzik
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[Courtesy of MVMC]
The Moab Valley Multicultural Center will wrap up its seventh season of Amigos to Amiguitos, the center’s mentorship program, at the end of May. The program took a long hiatus due to Covid in 2021 but returned in force in 2023.

“The program is a huge success, and the kids get some much-needed one-on-one attention from their big buddies,” said Bradia Holmes, the education coordinator for MVMC.

In the beginning, MVMC recognized a need for elementary children to have a safe place to connect with other children and learn life skills such as reading and teaching manners.

The program aims to provide mentorship, recreation, education, and a regular healthy meal with friends. The program is capped at 25 students are involved, and an average of 18 are dedicated to the program.

Children from first to sixth grade are the “little buddies” and are matched up with a “big buddy” and gain a new friend, role model, and someone to look up to.

The “big buddy” volunteers are the program’s backbone and vary in age, with students from 9th grade up to 40-year-old adults. This year, eight high honor students from Grand County High School have been mentors in the program.

The program meets weekly from January through May and may continue in the fall if capacity allows.
Ideally, the program can support 18 or 20 pairs based on the shuttle bus size, meals, and program dynamics. There is now a waitlist for others to join.

“MVMC would be open to taking more kids into the program,” said Holmes, if more adult mentors would volunteer.

MVMC partners with the BEACON Afterschool program at Helen Knight Elementary School.

“It is a team effort based on planning and making decisions,” Holmes said.

The whole staff of MVMC is involved in the program and looks forward to every Wednesday with the club as they ask themselves: “What’s going to happen this week?”

Kids meet at the school cafeteria at 3:15 p.m. every Wednesday to socialize and eat a snack provided by BEACON.

At 4 p.m., everyone hops on the bus and heads to St. Francis Episcopal Church. The children socialize and play or meet one-on-one with their big buddy for the next hour.

St. Francis provides the bus shuttle, program space, and games and sports equipment storage. Many children in the program stay for the entire length of their education from kindergarten until they graduate by evolving into a big buddy.

Paloma Lemus, a current ninth-grade student at Grand County High School has been involved in the program since she was in first grade.

“It’s a great opportunity to speak and teach a new language, build connections, and have fun,” she said.

Support from the community comes in many forms, as local restaurants and organizations provide donations such as meal sponsorship to support the program. The Grand County Library also received a grant this year and was able to provide new soccer nets.

Other partnerships include the BEACON Afterschool Program, Youth Garden Project, Friends of Canyonlands and Arches, and many more. Activities include crafts, a garden focus group activity, and a dinner provided by YGP.

Sofia Nicholson, outreach & volunteer assistant coordinator of the National Park Service, also joins the group several times a year to give programs on nature and wildlife. She engages the children with animal skulls, crafts, and various subjects, such as bees and pollen.

Friends of Arches and Canyonlands hope to host a summer event, such as a hike or picnic in the local parks, for all to enjoy.

Holmes noted how much the MVMC staff “looks forward to each Wednesday…it totally makes it worth it.”

To learn more about the Moab Valley Multicultural Center, visit their website at www.moabmc.org or contact them directly at 435-259-5444.