

Homestead - South Dade MAY 18, 2015

MDC students mentor children through literacy program



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Inside the Miami Dade College Homestead Campus library, a tall glass display case exhibits about a dozen new books each semester — all authored by children from the surrounding migrant and agricultural community with the help of college students.

One of the authors, 7-year-old Diana Arellano, wrote about someday reuniting with her sister, who lives in Mexico.

“It was a huge deal for her because she’s very introverted,” said Pamela Espinal, a sociology student at Miami Dade and Diana’s mentor. “She got it off her chest.”

The hardbound books, hand-written with colored drawings on the cover, are the creative product of the Pages for All Ages program, a literacy-based project created and run by two faculty members.

“I had a dream of finding a meaningful way to help my developmental reading students. They were not engaged,” said Yanely Cordero, assistant professor of reading and writing.

The program pairs college students with children attending the after school program run by Enfamilia, a local non-profit that provides educational programs for a large population of migrant farm workers and low-income families living South Miami Dade.

“We run about 24 art and education programs,” said Carlos Salgado, who founded Enfamilia 15 years ago with his wife, Rocio Tafur-Salgado. “Pages for All Ages is one of the most successful.”

Perez and Cordero take their students each semester to mentor the children at either the Redland Migrant Housing or the Everglades Community Association in Homestead. The children live within the community that houses farm workers and their families.

“We go out into the community and, through literacy, we empower our students,” said Jessyca Perez, assistant professor in psychology and service-learning faculty facilitator on campus. “After a few weeks of professors believing in them and kids looking up to them, it creates a mindset of ‘I can do this’.”

At the Redland Migrant Housing community center, 10-year-old Joan Espinosa met graphic design student Stephen Delgado and the two hit it off immediately, bonding over superheroes and video games.

“Typically, I’m not good with kids, but he made it so easy,” Delgado said as he bumped fists with Joan.

Over the course of eight weeks, Delgado help Joan write out an action-packed story about superheroes, and they drew sketches of each scene to resemble a comic book.

About 200 college students have participated in the program since it launched in 2012, sometimes mentoring more than one child per semester. While the program is only available in the Homestead campus, Corder and Perez hope to expand into other communities and get more faculty involved.

“This is a wonderful program. We are educating an external community and an internal community,” said Jeanne Jacobs, Miami Dade College Homestead Campus president.