

ICAN offers children programs to teach valuable life skills

BY STORMY LIGHT

ICAN is a local organization that has a long-term commitment to helping children succeed in every aspect of their lives. The organization offers unique programs for students and volunteers to become positive role models and stresses the importance of being kind, accountable and respectful. Since Henry Salinas founded ICAN, the organization has grown to serve 1,300 youths per year and an average of 250 youths per day from Chandler. By offering amazing after-school programs like art, tutoring, or recreation activities, ICAN is helping kids reach their goals and teaching them valuable life lessons.

It all begins when the familiar ICAN buses slowly pull up to the new youth center in downtown Chandler and excited students are greeted by friendly volunteers. Once students walk through the doors, they are able to participate in a multitude of programs that teach them important and necessary skills to be the best students, friends and citizens.

Healthy Living is a fun and important program that ICAN offers to its students. Just take a look at the garden, complete with bright pastel pots and gardening tools for youths, to learn about the environment. This program focuses on balanced nutrition, eating your oranges and celery at dinner, and playing outside in the fresh air with

friends. Students may be learning the importance of teamwork and effort by playing a game with volunteers and friends or learning the positive effects of composting.

A program that specifically targets teens who are becoming involved in the workforce is a program called ICAN Start Working. This program teaches teenagers about life beyond high school and specific skills needed to be successful in a job. Along with the job skills programs are the life skills programs, which teach students about goal-setting and decision-making. This is essential to the ICAN organization because at a very young age, these students understand how to be accountable for their actions and how their actions and words can affect others. Lastly, giving back to the community is a way that ICAN students are able to show support for Chandler residents, veterans, and volunteers.

From my own experience volunteering at the ICAN organization, I am always excited to come in and help the kids because they are enthusiastic about learning and are always eager to tell you about their day or their personal experience in a program. In art class, the students' imaginations would run wild with colorful crochet creations and crazy charm bracelet patterns. Seeing their faces light up



Kids learn how to become positive role models in Chandler-based ICAN programs. (Photo special to SanTan Sun News)

after finishing a new masterpiece or finishing an outdoor scavenger hunt is always a memorable moment.

Tysha Wrightman, 10, gives her personal experience and states, "ICAN gives us a safe place to be after school, teaches us how to make positive life choices, gives us great opportunities, and helps us with our homework. ICAN also lets kids know that it cares

about us." For kids like Tysha, ICAN is a welcoming and fun place that teaches them how to make a difference in their school and community so that one day they can have the visions and tools to help others, just like Mr. Salinas.

Stormy Light is a 14-year-old Hamilton High School student who writes an occasional column for the SanTan Sun News.