

OJAI VALLEY NEWS

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Home, schools linked by library

After-school homework program flourishes with volunteer aides

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When people speak about getting involved in rebuilding America and contributing to their community they could be talking about Schoolinks, and the volunteers who make it work.

Schoolinks, an after-school homework program, has been serving Ojai Valley students and their families for more than 12 years. According to Anne Shrage, program coordinator, it offers children that extra help that parents sometimes aren't able to provide.

The homework centers operate at the Ojai, Meiners

Oaks, and Oak View libraries on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3 to 5 p.m., and Wednesdays from 2 to 5 p.m.

"There aren't many things I feel this strongly about," said Shrage, who was hired to run the program after she became active in the Ojai Valley Library Friends and Foundation, volunteering in the reading program at Topa Topa Elementary School.

Many students come from homes where parents speak English as a second language. Sometimes mothers bring in their children, often with younger siblings, and wait



Photo by Linda Harmon

The homework workshop group includes Valeria Luperico, left, Anne Shrage, Julie Albright, Eric Quezedi, Martha Schaffer, Jocelyn Villanueva and Yulisa Quezedi.

while their older children Shrage, whose salary get help. Other times and budget, including parents are working and supplies, comes from an aren't available to help their kids after school.

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OVLFF yearly allowance of \$13,000, coordinates the volunteer staff at all three libraries.

"I have a marvelous staff of volunteers," said Shrage, who currently has 13 volunteers at the Ojai Library. "Some of them have been volunteering almost the whole time the program has been in existence. If people are reluctant to commit to a certain day they can even sign up for our substitute list."

According to Shrage, the libraries see an average of 200 to 300 students a month, from kindergarten to high school.

"I'm happy to say I've seen some great success stories," said Shrage. "We've worked with students from the earliest grades on to graduation."

Shrage had the mother of a former student run into her on the street and tell her that her son had graduated and was enrolled at Ventura College.

"At first he was struggling, but he just grew so much. It was just so wonderful working with him," said Shrage. "His understanding just grew so much it was so rewarding. Every year we have those kinds of success stories and that keeps me working."

Students come directly from school with their

homework, sign in, and then receive help in completing their day's assignments. It could be reading or math work sheets, a book report or research on one of the two laptop computers supplied by OVLFF.

Today the room is filled with nine students, although Shrage says this is not their busiest day of the week. Shrage has three teachers besides herself today plus the help of Julie Albright, children's librarian.

"I don't know what to do at my house because I don't know how to do my math," said 8-year-old Jocelyn Villanueva, as she works on her third-grade division.

That's OK because today she is reading the problems to Martha Schaffer, who helps her talk them out. Schaffer is 94 and has been volunteering with Schoolinks for 10 years, despite developing macular degeneration and losing much of her vision.

According to Shrage, the program desperately needs volunteers. The Meiners Oaks and Oak View libraries are especially in need as students greatly outnumber available volunteers.

Anyone interested in volunteering can contact Marion Leeman at the Oak View Library, 649-1523, or Barbara Lightfast at Meiners Oaks Library, 646-4804.