

ORANGE COUNTY EDITION

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School Sheds Heat and Light

Orange County in recent years has made significant progress in developing programs in the law enforcement and educational communities to help troubled youth and reduce gang activity and violence. The Orange County Human Relations Commission deserves credit for encouraging this work through its long-standing practice of honoring schools and police departments that make solid contributions.

One noteworthy school to receive recognition is the county-run alternative Santiago Creek School in Santa Ana.

The school recently won one of the commission's Bridges Award, given--as the name suggests--for programs that build relationships between students from troubled backgrounds and the larger community.

The 50 students at Santiago Creek have been through personal turmoil, having been removed from mainstream middle and high schools for academic or emotional problems. One youngster had spray-painted freeway overpasses with a moniker, Fale, which signaled his feeling of inadequacy. The school's art

program has redirected his energies, inspiring him to produce watercolors and seascapes on canvas, and masks with clay.

The school also has an outreach program, which assigns troubled youngsters to community service projects, such as mentoring disabled teens and serving food to the homeless at a Santa Ana shelter. Students describe the experience as lifting them to a new awareness of their own value and helping them see that they can contribute to society.

Father Gregory Boyle, executive director of Jobs for a Future and Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, has said that troubled youngsters need "heat and light," that is, pressure to change destructive behavior and alternatives. Providing educational opportunity is in the "light" part of the equation. It is a good way to keep youngsters out of trouble so they don't need "heat." It steers them in new directions.

In providing its program for young people in need of new hope, the Santiago Creek School is a leader in Orange County.