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Students Look to the World, Not Just Across the Street

By Chris Lavin



Global Student Embassy members in the Campolindo school garden. Front row, from left: Sarah Firth and Ashley Yu; back row: Annie Loose, Shelby Bock, Chrissy Orangio and Chloe Bouchy Photo Chris Lavin

And the relationships that students form can become reciprocal. Last year seven students from Central America visited the students they met on visits to their own countries.

That means a lot of fundraising. Central Americans can seldom afford travel to Northern California, and Lamorinda students spend a lot of time fundraising for their own expenses.

"After traveling with GSE to Nicaragua my freshman year I saw the impact that such a small group can have on a community and the impact the community there could have on us," said Shelly Block of Campolindo. "The best part of Global Student Embassy's exchange program in my opinion is that we collaborate with students from other countries rather than act as if the United States has everything figured out perfectly."

Chloe Bouchy's biggest take-home was seeing that they could grow food at the school garden and have White Pony Express - the local nonprofit that collects food for area food banks - come and pick up the produce for people who can't afford it.

"Being part of GSE has changed the way I look at life," Bouchy said. "Working in the Campolindo Garden has been an especially eye-opening experience for me because I get to see actual food being grown before my eyes. We go to the super market to buy fruits and vegetables; it isn't common for people to take a moment to wonder how this produce came to be, already grown and ready to purchase."

Orangia expects the program at all three high schools to continue to grow this year.

"It's a deep cultural experience," said Firth, who just headed for Boston University. "It's giving students a different perspective."

Teenagers sometimes wear blinders. It's easy to do: There are social events, homework, learning to drive, figuring out college applications, part-time jobs. But there is an expanding group of students who have cast their eyes more globally. They are participating in Global Student Embassy (GSE), a high school club at all three Lamorinda high schools that encourages travel to what is still the Third World.

Kind of a mini-Peace Corps.

"We mainly focus on eco-action and environmentally sustainable agriculture," said Sarah Firth, who participates in the program at Campolindo High School. That sounds like a mouthful coming from a teen. But Firth quickly launches into fine details. "The goal is to develop a relationship with the environment, gardens, and learning sustainable gardening techniques."

In GSE, students meet other students their own age in countries like Nicaragua and learn how the families they visit grow or get their own food, then they bring what they learn back home.

"The program is getting bigger and bigger," said Chrissy Orangio, who is based in Contra Costa County and is the program coordinator for Northern



Campo students Justine Bonn and, in the background, Chloe Bouchy, at work in Central America. Photo provided

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