

All the news that's fun to print

By Teresa Lara

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USC Kids News, a program that combines mentorship and peer-learning, has been launched by the USC Family of Schools and the community service group PressFriends to help make writing fun for children at 14 elementary schools.

More than 60 high school students gave up part of their weekend on Feb. 9 to work with a group of aspiring young reporters, who listened to presentations on writing techniques from Oliver Mayer, playwright and USC professor, and Lisa Richardson, senior deputy for communications for Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas.

USC football offensive guard Marcus Martin, Cabrillo Marine Aquarium educator Joey Pallares and Barbara Saltzman, executive director of The Jester & Pharley Phund, were among the mentors.

Students also spoke with teenagers who are giving back to the community: Krystin Schilling, who coaches a youth basketball team; Kai George, who started a knitting club that donates its creations to cancer patients; Luke Southwell, who founded PressFriends; Orang Utan Republik Foundation Youth Ambassador Sarah Collins; and Tessa Southwell and Tyler Barnett, co-founders of a student-run theater program.

Isabel Dueñas '10, a graduate of the USC Neighborhood Academic Initiative, explained what the day meant to her as a mentor.

“For me, the highlight of the event was interacting with students from the USC Family of Schools,” she said. “It’s awesome to help motivate the children.”



Fourth and fifth graders practice their mock press conference skills by interviewing USC football offensive guard Marcus Martin. (Photo/Courtesy of Neighborhood Academic Initiative)

As part of their literary exercises, each of the cub reporters was asked to write two articles — one related to a USC-related experience and the other featured an interview with a participant at the event.

“The kids asked question after question — far beyond the questions in the profiles form,” said Luke Southwell, president of PressFriends and a junior at Palos Verdes Peninsula High School. “They’re off to a good start.”

The reporters are currently writing stories on school news, sports, communities, movies, books, video games and profiles that will appear in a USC Kids News publication to be printed at their schools.

At the end of the day, an enthusiastic student from Norwood Street Elementary School, proclaimed, “I can’t wait to write!”

For more information about USC Kids News, contact Kim Thomas-Barrios, executive director of the Neighborhood Academic Initiative, at thomasba@usc.edu or visit communities.usc.edu