

Miss L.A. Chinatown Fashion Show offers support for Reading to Kids

By EdMoy , Asian Pacific Entertainment Examiner, January 9, 2011

This year's Miss Chinatown Fashion Show was more than just a showcase for clothing and shoe designers. It was also a community awareness fundraiser and volunteer sign-up event for the grassroots organization Reading to Kids. "We are looking for donations as well as volunteers to come and read," said Reading to Kids volunteer Andrea Ramcke. "It's a totally volunteer organization. There are only two paid employees."

According to Reading to Kids, the organization is "dedicated to inspiring underserved children with a love of reading, thereby enriching their lives and opportunities for success in the future."

"It's primarily for children who don't have a lot of reading in the home, whose parents are proficient in a second language or they're proficient in a second language," Ramcke said. "So we have a lot immigrants from everywhere and lot of first generation kids who don't have a lot of books in the home."

Currently, Reading to Kids gathers on average 901 children and 388 volunteers at reading clubs on the second Saturday of every month at eight Los Angeles elementary schools.

At the monthly reading clubs, pairs of volunteers read aloud to groups of children divided up by age groups, while the parents receive training on how to encourage their children to read at home.

"We read books on a variety of subjects from the first moon landing to the anatomy of snowflakes to how Jazz came about," Ramcke said.

Ramcke also added that the kids are be asked to participate by asking questions and reviewing the material along with doing a "craft project in relation to the book".

Every child also gets a book to take home and books are donated to school libraries through the program.

"The kids find a love of reading. They find an alternative to the streets," Ramcke said. "Studying doesn't become as hard to them when they learn how to interpret it a little bit better. They learn how to critically think about their words. They learn communication skills and their grades go up."

Ramcke emphasized that many kids stay in the program from Kindergarten through fifth grade. "It has a huge impact on them," she said.

According to Reading to Kids, nearly 60 percent of low-income homes do not have age-appropriate reading materials for children.

Since its inception in 1999, Reading to Kids has given more than 92,387 books to children who attended the reading clubs, donated more than 16,503 hardcover books to school libraries, and volunteers have spend over 105,978 hours reading to kids.

Although the program is currently only in eight schools (mostly in the Pico-Union School District), Ramcke stated that Reading to Kids has a lot of Asian American volunteers and would like to expand into Castelar Elementary School in Los Angeles' Chinatown.

"The more we can get donations and volunteers, the more we can buy books and expand into more schools," Ramcke said.

For more information about Reading to Kids, please visit: www.readingtokids.org