



Kids' Community

Youth Explore Cultures Through Drum And Dance

(NAPSA)—Sixteen-year-old Lizette used to avoid the white kids in her Sonoma County, Calif., school. Then the Latina teen joined the 4-H Windsor Bloco Drum and Dance Ensemble. “Now when some of my friends make comments to the white girls I know through Bloco, I introduce them and try to get them all to be friends,” she said.

4-H Bloco’s young members share their love of music by performing energetic dance and drum routines to intense rhythms from the United States, Africa, Brazil and the Caribbean. The ensemble’s youths work together and with adult mentors to build self-esteem, learn to appreciate other cultures, gain performance skills and build a community of friends.

“I met more kids in my school and found out some of them are pretty nice even if they aren’t from my neighborhood. We learned respect for each other,” Lizette said.

Originally part of San Francisco’s Loco Bloco performing arts group, the 4-H Windsor Bloco Drum and Dance Ensemble was started six years ago with a \$5,000 donation from popular musician Carlos Santana. The ensemble has performed at half-time for an NFL football game and at a Santana concert, as well as at parades and festivals across the country.

Bloco members practice in the afternoons throughout the school year, giving members a safe place to go after school. They also learn about healthy eating habits and avoiding risky behaviors. JCPenney Afterschool is the national presenting sponsor of 4-H Afterschool.



Youths drum and dance to multicultural beats with their 4-H Afterschool program.

“To be in Bloco means to stay off drugs, stay out of gangs and stay in school,” said Sonoma County 4-H Extension Agent Evelyn Conklin-Ginop.

Many Bloco members have improved their grades and stayed in school because of their participation in 4-H Bloco. Some have even gone on to college. “Being part of Bloco makes me important at school. You see, the younger kids look up to me,” said Manuel, a high school senior and Bloco drummer for five years.

Members have also learned that there is more to communication than just talking. “You are telling a story through the drum and acting it out with the dancing,” Lizette said. “It is really beautiful.”

The 4-H Windsor Bloco Drum and Dance Ensemble is part of the 4-H community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. Learn about 4-H at www.4husa.org.