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Contact: Ed Barker

850.452.4858
(DSN) 922.4858
(FAX) 850.452.4900

Center for Information Dominance Unit (CIDU) Monterey helps local elementary school break language barrier

MONTEREY, Calif. – As part of their Partner in Education (PIE) Program, Sailors attached to the Center for Information Dominance Unit (CIDU) Monterey meet with students from La Mesa Elementary School on Saturday mornings to help improve the children's English language skills.

The PIE program is a Commander, Navy Region Southwest (CNRSW) program that pairs local schools with Navy commands to satisfy a need for support. These partnerships offer an educational experience for the students and allow Sailors to give back to the community.

The La Mesa Elementary partnership began when Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jeremy Merrill, the CIDU Monterey operations officer, was told by his wife that there were kids in his daughter's class that were having a challenging time speaking English.

According to Leslie Flynn, the School Liaison Officer at the Fleet and Family Support Center Monterey, the students would normally have the English as a Second Language (ESL) program offered through their school, but the La Mesa ESL program had been cut due to funding.

"Many of the La Mesa students are children of foreign service members who have a parent attending the Naval Post Graduate School," said Flynn. "As a

result, students at La Mesa are native speakers of more than 20 different languages.”

Flynn recommended to Merrill that CIDU Monterey partner with the school and since Feb. 7, CIDU Sailors have been tutoring students every Saturday morning.

“On Saturdays, we have 24 kids join us for tutoring,” said Merrill. “The program is growing and shaping up well.”

Merrill added that the tutoring program has had a huge impact on Rouz Alwajaan, an 8-year-old at La Mesa Elementary that he is mentoring.

“Before we started this program, she was struggling in class because she couldn’t understand what was being taught,” said Merrill. “She was scared and felt lost.”

But on Saturday morning March 14, she greeted Merrill by running up to him with a huge smile and excitedly said “hi!”

“It may not seem like much, but seeing Rouz’s confidence grow so quickly has been very heartwarming,” said Merrill. “Rouz’s parents have also noticed the impact the program has had on their daughter; they attribute her increased confidence to the time she spends with her tutors on Saturdays.”

Seaman Stephen Leidner, a student at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), has been the tutor for two La Mesa Elementary students who were born in Estonia.

“It has been challenging to interact and communicate with them, considering such a massive language barrier,” said Leidner.

In order to break up the monotony of book study, the children and tutors will engage in a game or activity outside, Leidner added. “It has been incredibly

humbling to have my 6-year-old Estonian student ask me if we can go back to studying instead of playing games.”

Merrill noted that the students, teachers and parents have all expressed how their children’s level of confidence has increased because of the tutoring.

“The kids are interacting more between classes and their morale has greatly improved,” said Merrill. “The biggest benefit I have seen is the kids meeting other foreign kids and learning that they aren’t the only ones that need a little help.”

The Center for Information Dominance Unit (CIDU), based in Monterey, Calif., is the Navy’s learning center that trains cryptologic linguists, special operators, as well as Intelligence, Foreign Area and Exchange program officers serving in every theater and area of operation. CID Unit Monterey provides language skills critical to overseas contingency operations and intelligence and global engagements around the world.

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Story by Mass Communications Specialist 2nd Class Matthew Perrault, CID Unit Monterey Public Affairs