Super Saturday…a day of community outreach

(written by a Santa Catalina School student)

On an overcast Saturday before the start of classes, nine Santa Catalina School students spent their morning playing games and making crafts with dozens of at-risk children in Salinas.

In the first service project of the year, the students led groups of girls in making back-to-school bookmarks and pencils, playing a version of musical chairs using bandanas, and racing to pass a hula-hoop from one person to another while holding hands.

It was the third time Santa Catalina had teamed up with the Family Resource Center of the Salinas City Elementary School District, where 35 percent of the roughly 9,000 students are homeless. That means over 3,100 students are homeless in this district!

The relationship started last year with a coat drive in the Santa Catalina Lower and Middle School that benefitted the district's Homeless Education Family Resource Center. The drive inspired Upper School math teacher Jennifer Duncan to want to do more.

After throwing some ideas around, Duncan and a group of students headed to Salinas around Easter to share snacks and make crafts with the kids. The effect was immediate.

"It was such a huge day that by the end of it our girls were in tears, the kids were in tears, everyone was in tears, they were so moved," Duncan said. "It was very powerful."

So they wanted to keep things going. Lara Devlin, chair of the Performing Arts Department, suggested they bring the Salinas kids to Monterey to watch a performance of Catalina's "Guys and Dolls." **About 65 girls came to see the show and explore campus.**

When it came time to plan the most recent event, Duncan said they wanted to do three things: make the kids excited about being back at school, promote healthy eating, and get outdoors.

Duncan said she had some doubts about whether the Salinas kids would come out on a Saturday morning, but Cheryl Camany, Homeless Liaison with the Family Resource Center, reassured her.

Cheryl said, "If they know Santa Catalina is coming, they will be here," …Duncan recalled.

"I think it had a big impact on them but also on us, more than we know," said Lina, class of 2018. "The way they live their lives is very different from the way we live ours. But these kids are very intelligent and eager to learn."

"Our girls are just having the greatest time building relationships and understanding these little girls are not that different," Duncan said. "We're looking forward to spending more time with these girls as the years go by."

In the end, the day saw a total of about 140 boys and girls led by volunteers from Catalina (who worked with about 70 girls), CSU Monterey Bay Social Work interns, Salinas High School, Notre Dame High School, and Shoreline Community Church.