



San Francisco

Experience Corps Volunteer Raul Castañeda Honored as California Senior Leader

An active member of Experience Corps for the past three years, 66-year-old Raul Castañeda has spent more than 600 hours tutoring and mentoring young students at San Francisco's Hillcrest Elementary School. On February 27, 2010, the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health honored Castañeda as a California Senior Leader. Castañeda was among a diverse group of 31 men and women aged 60 and older recognized at the event for their outstanding contributions to community building, healthy aging, and social justice in the state. Over the next 15 months, Castañeda's involvement with the Senior Leader program will include organizing senior advocacy efforts and collaborating with public health graduate students.

An El Salvadorian who came to the United States more than two decades ago, Castañeda has provided tutoring and mentoring to numerous Latino immigrant children at Hillcrest who need help learning English and American curriculum. An integral part of the Hillcrest school community, Castañeda works in three classrooms at the school for a total of 15 hours per week. Currently, Castañeda is providing one-on-one tutoring support to a fourth grader who recently emigrated from Mexico. Last year, Castañeda regularly tutored a young Honduran boy. Sadly, the boy and his family were deported during the school year. However, the relationship that Castañeda cultivated with the child was so strong that later in the year, Castañeda made time on a pre-planned visit to El Salvador to visit the boy in Honduras and bring him art materials that Hillcrest students had raised funds for. This spring, Castañeda is visiting the boy once again and is bringing him school supplies.

Castañeda explains that many seniors in San Francisco's Mission neighborhood "have a lot of potential to do something for their community and yet, they are not. The more mentally and physically active you are, the longer you live and the more fulfilled your life is. Rather than playing bingo and watching television," Castañeda encourages his fellow seniors to "join Experience Corps and help students succeed." In addition to his work with Experience Corps, Castañeda is an active volunteer with CARECEN, the Central American Resource Center in San Francisco, where he has fought for immigrant rights on the local, state, and national levels.

Experience Corps is a national program that offers new adventures in service for Americans over age 55. Now in 22 cities, Experience Corps works to solve serious social problems, beginning with literacy. Today, more than 2,000 Corps members nationally serve as tutors and mentors to children in urban public schools and after-school programs, where the volunteers help teach children to read and develop the confidence and skills to succeed in school and in life.

Research shows that Experience Corps boosts student academic performance, helps schools and youth-serving organizations become more successful, strengthens ties between these institutions and surrounding neighborhoods, and enhances the well-being of the volunteers in the process. In February, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), an initiative of the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education, gave “highest honors” to a 2009 Washington University in St. Louis study of Experience Corps that indicated that Experience Corps has a positive effect on school children.

Experience Corps San Francisco is currently recruiting more volunteers to tutor students at Hillcrest and at other Excelsior and Mission neighborhood schools. Experience Corps supports teams of older adult volunteers at 13 schools across San Francisco. No tutoring experience is needed, and training is provided. Small monthly stipends are available to volunteers who serve over 10 hours per week. To get an application packet, contact Lisa Davidson at (415) 759-3690 or ldavidson@aspiranet.org.

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