

## Youth Philanthropists Tour Pasadena Special Education School

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(PASADENA, CA)—For Jeremy Ramirez, a student who was unable to find a comfortable learning environment to achieve academic successes, Hillsides Education Center was the perfect fit. Over the course of two years, Ramirez delved into the vocational program at the special education school in Pasadena and worked on projects he enjoyed, which gave him, for the first time, the confidence to be successful in school.

This confidence crossed over to his other classes and soon Ramirez was successful in his academic classes as well. During his senior year, Ramirez was a teacher's aide and mentor student to the younger students in the vocational program at the special education center, which helped him build self-confidence, increase self-expression, and form lasting connections with adults. He assisted the students in building the school's vocational technical center.

“Jeremy had much insecurity about trusting himself in an unstructured environment,” said vocational teacher Tony Carson of Jeremy's past learning experiences. “Hillsides gave him time and space to regain self-control by providing structure and really guiding him.”

With a purpose to learn about the vocational program, student members of Pasadena Independent Schools Foundation toured and visited Hillsides, a foster care children's charity, and Hillsides Education Center, which is located on the 17-acre campus nestled in the rolling hills of San Rafael in Pasadena.

Welcomed by John Hitchcock, the children's charity executive director, students heard an overview of Hillsides. Carson, provided a PowerPoint presentation of the vocational educational program, while Tom Johnson, director of program services facilitated a discussion with one of the residents at Hillsides who benefits from the vocational educational program just like Ramirez did.

Students visiting learned about teacher-centered lessons, project-based learning. Carson is doing just that—giving students hands-on projects in three vocational classes that will offer them survival skills to obtain and retain a job. Some HEC students who suffer from severe emotional disturbances may not be college bound, but have the potential to succeed in the real world by learning one of three vocational trades offered at the school.

“Students learn what it means to work and solve problems with others,” Carson said. “Students are also encouraged to explore careers by identifying and strengthening weaknesses and develop their interests.”

Pasadena Independent Schools Foundation, an innovative youth philanthropy initiative, gives middle to high school-aged students from six area schools hands-on experience on how to establish and operate a private foundation, ultimately making grants to charitable organizations in their local and surrounding areas. This foundation parallels the hands-on work that is also taking place at HillSides Education Center, giving students real life experience with the purpose to make a difference in people's lives.

As a Pasadena foster care charity founded in 1913, HillSides creates safe places for children at risk and their families by providing residential care, mental health services to break the cycle of domestic violence, special education, and advocacy. To learn more about HillSides, visit [www.HillSides.org](http://www.HillSides.org).

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