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The Most Generous High School in LA?

Is there such a thing as a “Most Generous High School” in all of the Los Angeles metropolitan area? If there is, the title surely goes to Gahr High School in Cerritos, near Anaheim.

Over the past six years, Gahr students have helped build classrooms in Nicaragua, medical clinics in Nepal, preschools in South Africa, latrines in Indonesia, a solar electrical system for a school in Malawi, and more.

Gahr students have helped thousands of the poorest children in the world have a better chance at life. They have done all of this from student donations of one dollar.

The school’s extraordinary philanthropy is led by Student Activities Director Justin Velez. Six years ago, Velez began working with a Palo Alto-based nonprofit, One Dollar For Life (ODFL).

ODFL helps schools organize a fundraiser where every student is invited to donate just one dollar. Those dollars go to build a specific project in the developing world.

Last year, Gahr students helped build a medical clinic in Nepal for expectant mothers. The clinic is helping reduce the number of women dying in childbirth by more than 90%.

This year, Gahr's 1,900 students raised \$5,158.44 to help build a library in Nicaragua. The library will serve more than 1,100 students in five schools in Tipitapa, near Managua. It is the first library the village has ever had.

Wikipedia describes Cerritos, where Gahr is located, as "one of the most ethnically diverse places in America." The school has more than 50 different ethnicities among its students. This was the challenge that led Velez to start working with ODFL.

"We wanted an activity that could unite all of our students in a common purpose, no matter what their ethnicity, or gender, or nationality," said Velez. "Helping children worse off than themselves proved a good choice," he said.

According to Velez, "The projects 'out there' in the developing world are only half of the equation. What we're really building is bigger people here at home—our students."

Gahr principal, Crechena Wise, emphasized that the school focuses on more than just academics. "Our job is to educate the whole child, not just his or her brain. This shows students that they matter as human beings, and that they really *can* change the world," she said.

Velez echoes this idea. "Everybody can help. Anybody can find a dollar. And everybody becomes an owner in the outcome," said Velez. "It's one of the most inspiring things we ever do."

ODFL was founded by a high school teacher in Los Altos in the San Francisco Bay Area. He wanted to show his students what they could actually do in the world.

Robert Freeman, ODFL's founder, believes that the altruism of young people may be one of the greatest forces for good in the world. "There are 16 million high school students in America," Freeman said. If each of them gave just one dollar, we could build more than 1,000 classrooms every year in the developing world."

Since its founding in 2007, ODFL has built 95 small-scale infrastructure projects in nine of the poorest countries in the world, all from student donations of one dollar.

ODFL has raised funds from private foundations to cover its operating expenses—phones, literature, web site, etc. As a result, every dollar donated goes into a school's designated project.

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ODFL is a registered 501c3 nonprofit. To learn more, visit odfl.org.