

# Students Learn Black History Year Round

By Dianne Anderson  
Staff Writer

School's out, but a group of local kids are turning right back around and heading to class.

The bait? Pizza, barbecue, games and prizes.

A local nonprofit educational program, Children's Resources, has teamed up with the Family Resource Center for the week of July 13-17 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. where kids will get fed in both mind and body with a week-long history cram session.

"It won't hurt to stimulate their brains a little bit," said Shannon O'Brien, who heads the nonprofit, Children's Resources. "But we're going to make it fun."

The class will show Disney films, such as the biography of Ruby Bridges, the six-year-old who was the first African American student to integrate an all-white New Orleans school after the judge ruled on *Brown versus the Board of Education*.

Debate includes guest speakers, and covers the struggle of the South and strides that young people accomplished over the decades, including some of the harshest realities, like the murder of Emmett Till.

Students will get an idea of where they came from to know

better where they're going to.

"Come in, let's talk," O'Brien said. "The students are always riveted, and astounded to learn the truth because they had no idea."

O'Brien, who is African American, has been holding her Afrocentric workshops ever since she realized that her young son and her community needed something more to fill the educational gap in Black history.

Her program runs year round in public schools, where she goes into classrooms, and provides after school projects. This year, with so many programs taking program cuts, she said more kids will be sitting at home doing nothing.

She's hoping to get them involved on a program of self-exploration. O'Brien, a political science major from Howard University, said African Americans have contributed so much through the vast space of history and social change. It's always amazing to see the kids' faces when they learn their historical contributions to society.

When she first started the class, she was trying to fill the void. She and her husband were concerned that their son wasn't getting enough education, and

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decided to start a class in their neighborhood.

"If they hear these stories when they're going to school, when they see what other people have done to pave their way, maybe they'll actually rise to the occasion, and not waste opportunities or drop out," she said.

Children need to know what their ancestors accomplished so they can feel good about what they can accomplish, she said.

"[Teachers] not teaching the students perpetuates the prejudice and ignorance," she said. "If the teachers don't know the history, they have low expectations."

Mars Serna, parent and family involvement officer for the Family Resource Center, said O'Brien's class is one of several positive activities planned at the center during the state's crippling economy.

On August 29, a family summit is set tentatively for August 29 at Arroyo Valley High

School, where a variety of workshops will be held for parents, from high school information on A-G requirements to college readiness, to advocacy pieces and a resource fair. The program is in partnership with San Bernardino Valley College, County Superintendent of Schools, COPE, Dina Walker with Blu Education Foundation, Children Resources, and other agencies.

The center also recently partnered with the county's Children's Fund to help provide families with food vouchers and temporary provisions.

"It's not long term, that's where I see a weakness in our community. When are we going to see employment in our community, and in surrounding communities that will keep people self-sustained and self-sufficient for a period of time?" he asks.

Serna said that the center is providing free programs, which are vital as state libraries and

museums buckle under budget cuts.

Recently he has also seen more parents come in to access homeless services.

"We're seeing a lot more traditional families that are homeowners or renters that have gone into foreclosure. It has displaced a number of homeowners and renters," he said.

Families are doubled or tripled up, living with relatives, with grandparents, friends, uncles, and just having a hard time. To help, the center offers free computer lab for family members to come in and search jobs and post resumes.

"We provide resume writing workshops, and we have one-on-one resume writing. We also send folks to SBETA (San Bernardino Employment Training Agency) for work there. We're partnering them to bring some of their services here to the center," he said.

For more information, on the African American History Day Camp, call 909-900-5513

or call the Family Resource Center, at (909) 880-4057.