



# PALS HANG AROUND

COMMUNITY SERVICE AT HEART OF ORGANIZATION

**CLIMBING BARRIERS /** On the playground of O.H. Stowe elementary school, junior Teresa Vu aids her PAL in crossing the monkey bars Feb. 25. She gave him a pep talk and assured the kid she would not let go as he stood on the edge of the jungle gym, scared to move across alone. "He always likes it outside," Vu said. "But he never wanted to do the monkey bars, by me helping him it really assured him that he could trust me and that I am always there for him." Photo by Marissa Valdez

Tubs of green and blue Playdoh were passed around the cafeteria of Grace E. Hardeman Elementary. The kids distracted themselves with the different animal shaped utensils while the PALS sat next to them and complimented their creations. The students talked to them about their day and left with a hug before the PALS boarded the bus and returned back to high school life.

Three times a week PALS visited nine elementary schools and developed friendships with their assigned students. At the schools, they helped the kids read and mentored them throughout the year.

"As soon as I step through the elementary school doors I feel young again," senior Richard Gardere said. "I can tell by the way they run up and hug me that I am having some sort of impact on them, and we both give each other an escape."

Back on campus, the diverse group of newcomers came from countries such as Mexico and The Republic of the Congo. Every Thursday, PALS members interacted with the students and taught them English, even if they did not speak the same language.

"It is really hard sometimes," senior Kathy Alan said. "They come from different countries in the middle of their lives, and I can tell the adjustment is

hard on them."

While half of the members of PALS visited newcomers, the others spent their Thursdays with special education students. They often occupied their time drawing and making bracelets.

For the holidays PALS hosted a Christmas party in the Omni Room with the all of students Dec. 19. While the students decorated Christmas tree shaped cookies, they watched "Elf" together.

"I've been in the PALS organization for two years," senior Cristina Bravo said. "Both years I had Kaitlynn as a pal, so I really developed a relationship with her. The day of the party she brought me a bag with candy, made me card and gave me the biggest hug."

The PALS also participated in Christmas Providers where they adopted a local family of five. The gifts donated included a new bike, dolls, clothes and a gift card. Then they gathered on a bus and personally delivered the presents to the mother along with food for a Christmas dinner.

"When we delivered the presents, the mother did not speak much English, but you could tell by her face how grateful she was," senior Jason Degroote said. "We found out later that her husband passed away earlier this year, and it just made the gesture even more special." Story by Marissa Valdez



**CRAFTY GIFTS /** A smile spreads across the face of junior Lester Bonilla as senior Krystal Weir hands him a sketch she drew for him Feb. 17. Bonilla was intrigued with the drawings after Weir handed out the photos for the special education students when they sat down at the cafeteria table with markers and paper. "I really enjoy the PALS visits," Bonilla said. "They are always so sweet, sometimes we draw pictures or write letters and just exchange them." Photo by Marissa Valdez



**LIFE IN COLOR /** Taking turns, Krystal Weir watches as junior Nicolas Ray draws after gaining inspiration from his Superman shirt. Weir sketched an early birthday present for her pal Feb. 17 and presented the photo to Ray. She took a picture of him with the art so he could use it to update his Facebook profile. "She's really cool," Ray said. "She was my pal last year too, and I'm really going to miss her next year." Photo by Marissa Valdez



**1 / AHEAD OF THE FUN /** Playing Fun Run on senior Matthew Mendoza's iPad, freshman Johnathan Martinez demonstrates his skills to Mendoza and freshman Tanner Polston while eating breakfast tacos. PALS had a Christmas party with the special education students where they made gingerbread cookies on the half day, Dec. 19. "Being with the special ed pals is the highlight of my day," Mendoza said. "They always give me a hug everytime I see them and are so appreciative no matter how hard life is." Photo by Marissa Valdez



**2 / CHARITABLE WRAPS /** After wrapping a pair of Nike shoes, seniors Cody Mantakul and Jason DeGroote finish up the final gift to donate to a local family Dec. 8. The present was for a 16-year-old boy who requested shoes and headphones for the holidays. "It was really nice to take them time to go get the presents," Mantakul said. "I'm so used to getting Nike shoes for myself, but I'm glad to see it go to someone who really needs shoes." Photo by Marissa Valdez  
**3 / HELPING HANDS /** Walking on the playground, senior Jasmyn Carr stops with her pal Kenneth to enjoy the wind and sound of children running around. At the school Carr provided a friendship to a visually impaired student and visited him weekly. "He told me everytime we go outside he loves to hear the sound of everyone having fun around him," Carr said. "He is just always so positive, it's an honor to get to know him."  
**4 / SHINY SMILES /** Carefully writing down words to be recited back, seniors Kimberly Nguyen and Kathy Alan help freshman Maria Sanchez learn English since she lived in Mexico for 15 years. PALS assisted the newcomers' transition after they arrived from a foreign country. "It is always difficult trying to communicate with them, but I know it is even more difficult for them to not be able to talk to anyone in the school besides one another," Nguyen said. Photo by Marissa Valdez