

KXIRMA

INSTANT

WANT A REWARDING WAY TO SPEND YOUR NEXT DAY OFF?
TRY PLAYING BASKETBALL WITH GRADE-SCHOOLERS, THROWING
A FRISBEE FOR AN ABUSED DOG, DISHING OUT DINNER IN THE HAIGHT
OR TENDING SF'S OWN URBAN GARDEN.
WE SEND FOUR VOLUNTEERS TO TEST THE WATERS.

HOOP *Dreams* BY CERISE HENZES

The familiar squeak of Nikes on parquet coupled with laughter bouncing off the painted concrete walls of a gymnasium sends me directly back to recess, the highlight of my elementary-school days. But I'm not in my third-grade gym. I'm at the Visitacion Valley Middle School, participating in a weekend program run by Real Options for City Kids. ROCK, as it's known, helps children aged 6 to 14 develop social skills and healthy habits such as exercise and studying. "Because of the neighborhood and the violence that occurs here, we are trying to give positive opportunities for the kids who live in this area," says Curt Yagi, ROCK's program director.

This Saturday, I'm here as a volunteer to play basketball with the kids. As much as I love the game, it's not exactly my strong suit. After two lattes, though, I'm hoping I'll have enough energy to at least run around a lot, which might distract everyone from my complete lack of on-court skills. Yagi briefs me on the day's activities as we head toward the gym. When we get there, he leaves me to make myself a name tag at a table piled with markers and stickers with smiley-faced insects and hearts. Then the kids file in. Some skip the name-tag table and head straight toward their friends. Others hang out at the table with the volunteers (there are about 20 of us today) making small talk and perfecting their Crayola masterpieces.

After everyone has been properly labeled and warmed up with a little hoop-shooting, a sharp whistle silences the crowd. I follow the tide of kids rushing to midcourt and sit down.

"Hey, ROCKers!"

"Hey, what!" the kids answer, and then get incredibly quiet. Justin R. Johnson, ROCK's elementary school program director, starts the morning powwow. "Who remembers what language we

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