

**Desert District, Tempe, Ariz.**  
**It Takes a District**  
**By Diana Decker, Phoenix Correspondent**

**A mother/daughter team make their district kid-friendly for 10 Boys and Girls Group members.**

Desert District in newly formed Tempe Headquarters experienced a population explosion recently. The number of toddlers attending monthly district meetings increased suddenly from one child to 10 youngsters under age 5, including four babies.

“All the parents were watching the kids and missing the meeting,” Tiffany Horne remembered. “I went to a meeting knowing I would miss most of it, but I did not mind. I wanted my kids to have fun so they eventually will practice.” Her three children range in age from 10 months to 4 years.

Tiffany pondered the district’s situation for four months, then with her mom, Paulette Aasen, district leader, came up with a plan of action. The goal was for the children to have fun and develop friendships but also feel the atmosphere of the meeting.

The mother/daughter team brought some experience to their efforts: They had been working with the Boys and Girls Group at world peace gongyo meetings for 18 months. In addition, Tiffany called on her college degree in psychology and several preschool development courses — expertise coupled with experience helped her develop a plan that works.

A few nights before each meeting she makes a schedule for the children, checking with the regular meeting schedule first to avoid conflicts. Activities for the youngsters include working with play dough or doing crafts, playing outside, having snacks, story time and free play. Tiffany calls members to ask what they would like to help with.

She does gongyo before the meeting so that she’s free to supervise the youngsters while the others do gongyo. After gongyo, teams of two take turns for 15 minutes at a time.

Although Tiffany’s plan was developed to help the children, it benefits everyone. She pairs those experienced with children with those less experienced. And sometimes she pairs a leader with a member who is dealing with a problem. At least the door gets opened, and they can talk later. Now even those who don’t have children want to help.

During a recent Friday night meeting, the strong sounds of gongyo blended with tunes from a child’s xylophone. After gongyo, children played Ring Around the Rosie outside in the yard before moving on to make tambourines and necklaces. After the meeting, several commented on the play group formula.

“It is definitely an evolving situation, starting from ground zero,” Paulette said. “We knew we had to create something to get the kids’ attention, not [just] some place where they have to go and behave.”

Tiffany is now the district’s Boys and Girls Group representative. “We had a need for such a person,” Paulette said. “It’s in line with the idea that it takes a village to raise a child. We talked about the play group idea at meetings. Those who don’t have children were eager to help with the kids. [It seems] selfless the way people are all willing to do this. It was a test deal, pure necessity.”

Maurizio Cristiani enjoys helping with the children. “Parents are much more relaxed at meetings now, not chasing the kids, and that’s a benefit for the kids,” Maurizio said. “I feel like I am helping people who have to put up with kids all day long. I love kids. I have a 13-year-old daughter, and I don’t mind.”

Kayoko Hamajima, a student at Arizona State University, also enjoys working with the

children. She is one of the non-parents who help out. “SGI President Ikeda says kids are so precious because they are the future,” she said. “Every time I play with the kids, I really enjoy it. English is not my first language. The kids want to know what I am speaking. They are creative and teach me a lot. They are so smart.” And she adds: “There is no problem with the 15-minute break from the meeting. I can still listen to others talking. The set up is good.... I support Tiffany.”

“I think Tiffany has done wonders,” district leader Sally McKee said. “We have unity in the district. It’s working out really well. These kids will be great leaders some day.”

“We are investing in the future,” Tiffany said, “making a cause for kids so they will want to practice when they get older. The kids seem to get along with each other and they are busy the whole time. In my view they are practicing already by playing.”

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