

Daniel Ybarra on Working with At Risk Teens in San Diego

San Diego Public Defender Takes Teens on Educational Trips around the World

I take at risk teens on trips to exotic locations throughout the world. But, it's not done for the purpose of taking them to touristy places. The idea started out on a small scale by taking fifteen boys on a three night camping trip to the mountains outside of San Diego. I wanted to take them outside of their "comfort" zones so that they would be able to loosen up and to let down their "guards". Hopefully, they would then be in a position to open up to an exchange



Cao Yang High School, Shanghai, China

of information. We would learn more about what ails them and they would be more willing to hear from us. In the mountains, they became boys again. They laughed and joked, hiked and swam, and experienced Native-American musicians around a large camp fire. The campout was a clear success. Other boys who hadn't wanted to participate came to me to ask how they could get into "that camping stuff".



Stonehenge

Since that first excursion in 2001, we have moved on in a graduated manner to trips to exciting locations that have included Alaska, Hawaii, New Zealand, Fiji, London, Paris, several small towns and villages in Germany, and most recently to Beijing and Shanghai. We have taken drug court kids to four continents and are looking for ways to get

them to the other three. Imagine a collage of photos with our kids on all seven continents, including Antarctica.



Great Wall of China

In between the above-mentioned trips, we have sprinkled in trips to conferences in Los Angeles, St. Louis, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Miami. Our kids have participated in panel discussions where they have spoken about their lives and how drug court and the trips have helped them to improve. They have always been well received.



Eiffel Tower

We have also sponsored field trips to the Museum of Tolerance and to Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, to several activities with the Freedom Writers in Long Beach, and on one occasion took a group of drug court kids on a one day trip to San Francisco. Locally, we have arranged for several speakers to visit with our kids in court and in juvenile hall as well as for an annual party at a private beach on Mission Bay.

All of these activities are provided as a way to inspire and educate the kids as to what is available for them outside of their own small neighborhoods, and to reward them for the improvements in their lives.