

Published January, 9th 2019

## American Red Cross teaches kids disaster safety with Pillowcase Project

By Vera Kochan

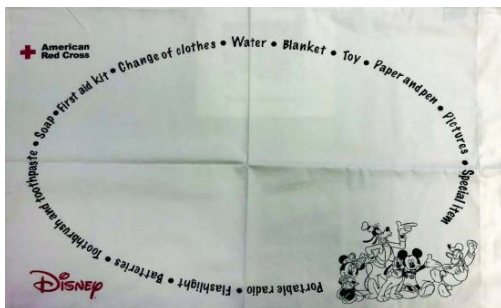


Photo Suzanne Garrett

Does your child know what to do in the event of a natural disaster? The American Red Cross has implemented a program called The Pillowcase Project aimed at teaching children how to get through this type of situation with a modicum of awareness.

The Pillowcase Project was created in 2005 by the American Red Cross in Southeastern Louisiana and first put into effect in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Kay Wilkins, the region's executive, discovered that Loyola University students put all of their valuables into pillowcases when evacuating for Katrina. Wilkins worked with an art therapist to design a pillowcase that children living in post hurricane shelters could personalize and use as an emergency kit.

The New Orleans-based program grew into local elementary school demonstrations and became fine-tuned through time. By 2016, it was so successful it became offered to schools nationwide.

Red Cross Concord representative Suzanne Garrett is the Pillowcase Project lead for Contra Costa County Disaster Services. She explained, "We started out going to schools, but now we also visit Scout troops, summer camps and anywhere that we can to spread the message to kids." Garrett has been running presentations for five years, and in August she took over the Contra Costa area.

It is the Red Cross' vision to empower children in understanding the science of hazards and to share with their family and friends the lessons they've learned. Garrett's most recent demonstration in November was to Springhill Elementary's fourth-graders in Lafayette. "I try to make it very participatory and have them ask questions. Typically the programs throughout the United States are tailored toward regional hazards. In California that usually involves earthquake preparedness." She added, "While at Springhill, the Camp Fire was still burning. It made the home fire safety part of the presentation pertinent. The kids knew about the fires and asked a lot of good questions."

The Pillowcase Project presentation is geared for grades 3-5 (ages 8-11) and lasts about 40-60 minutes. The program meets many performance expectations for the common core math and language arts standards and next generation science standards for grades 3-5.

Some of the learning objectives are to identify the best ways to stay safe during community emergencies; identify the best ways to prevent and stay safe during a home fire; use coping skills; gain confidence and use their knowledge to help in their homes and communities.

Each child receives a My Preparedness Workbook, a pillowcase to personalize and use as a preparedness kit, and earns a certificate of accomplishment. Each teacher receives a Science of Safety Teaching Kit with additional lesson plans, three classroom posters, an education standards report to match curriculum to common core and next generation science standards and a copy of the students' My Preparedness Workbook.

The Red Cross is also offering free smoke detectors with free installations to homes nationwide. According to Garrett, "It's called the Sound the Alarm, Save a Life Program. The service is ongoing and indefinite at this point." To sign up for an appointment visit [www.redcross.org/sound-the-alarm](http://www.redcross.org/sound-the-alarm) or call (510) 595-4573.

Garrett acknowledged, "The Red Cross doesn't know how many lives have been saved by these and other efforts to prepare people when disasters happen. Unfortunately, you can only compile statistics from worst-case scenarios. We can only hope that we've saved lives through teaching awareness."

To schedule a Pillowcase Project presentation for your school, after-school program, scout troop, summer camp or any other youth-serving site contact Garrett at [suzanne.garrett@redcross.org](mailto:suzanne.garrett@redcross.org) or call (925) 771-8705 or (925) 216-7667.

Reach the reporter at: [vera@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:vera@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA