

Boy Scout project evolves into friendship

Christopher DeVries searched the sea of blue Cub Scout shirts in the 5K run/walk portion of Sunday's Los Angeles Marathon, looking for his buddy Sam Bashe.

The 12-year-old Boy Scout from Thousand Oaks had promised the 10-year-old Cub Scout with cerebral palsy that he would push him across the finish line in his wheelchair.

But he was having trouble finding Sam in the crowd, and the finish line was only a mile away.

A few months ago, the 14 Cub Scouts in Woodland Hills Pack 88 — all physically disabled — were only a project to Christopher — a way for him to earn his Boy Scout merit badge in disability awareness.

Two Saturdays a month, he met with them at the AbilityFirst/Paul Weston Center in Woodland Hills.

Spend a few hours helping them with their Cub Scout projects and earn the credits he needed for his merit badge. At least that was the plan.

"We knew something special was happening when Christopher kept

coming home every Saturday telling us he was really having a great time with them," said his dad, Peter.

"He wound up volunteering to be their den chief, their Boy Scout mentor, which is a big commitment. He's also starting to bring Scouts from other troops to meet them.

"It's gone well beyond trying to earn a merit badge."

This is exactly what he was hoping would happen when he started Troop 88 in January, says Jeff Richards, director of the Woodland Hills center that helps people with disabilities reach their full potential.

It's all about inclusion, he says, getting able-bodied and disabled Scouts mingling and learning from each other.

Knocking down some of those stupid stereotypes and fears.

"We have 14 boys now, but next year I'm sure we'll have 30 or 40 as word spreads in the disabilities community that we're here waiting for them with open arms," Richards said.

For more information on the

Weston Centers programs, call Richards at (818) 884-6612, Ext. 102.

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Christopher found Sam with less than a mile to go Sunday, taking over pushing his wheelchair from Sam's mom, Jo. Her son had been up since 4:30 a.m., dressed and ready to go, she said.

She hadn't seen him this excited since the day he got his Cub Scout shirt and cap a few months ago.

"He wore them to bed, refusing to take them off," she said, laughing. "You just don't know how important something like this is, to be included.

"Normal kids don't like being around Sam because he can't do what they can. He gets left out of everything.

"Now he's so happy, and has something to look forward to — his Cub Scout meetings and being with Chris, his best buddy."

That was them a hundred yards ahead, smiling as they crossed the finish line and had a gold medal placed around their necks.

Dennis McCarthy's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

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Boy Scout Christopher DeVries, 12, pushes 10-year-old Cub Scout Sam Bashe across the finish line of the 5K walk at the Los Angeles Marathon on Sunday.