

► CAMP

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nationally the nonprofit organization has more than 21,000 members in 250 units in 40 states and overseas.

The local group recently participated in a yard clean-up project for a disabled Canyon Lake woman, marched in Temecula's Fourth of July parade and helped out at Murrieta's birthday celebration.

"We'll bring out a group for pretty much anyone who calls us," said Cheryl Kanov, an adult volunteer with two children in the program. "We do a lot in the community."

Youngsters join the group for a variety of reasons.

"Somewhere between 80 and 90 percent of the kids just want to do this," Guiles said. "They like learning the leadership skills, the discipline and wearing the uniform. The rest are kids who may be having some problems at home and their parents are looking for something to provide them with just a bit more discipline."

Debbie Christian of Temecula says she's has noticed a marked change in her daughter, Johnna Sturges, 11, since beginning recruit training.

"She is a very strong-willed child," Christian said. "We've noticed a huge difference in her own self-respect and self-discipline. When she started, Johnna didn't think she would like this, but she really does."

Guiles cautions that the Young Marines program is not for at-risk children or youths with severe discipline problems. Teenagers who fit that profile have been turned away.

"We're not here for them," he said. "We have participants of all ages working together and we don't want the hard core types mixed in with the younger ones."

Greg Moreno, 11, of Temecula said he joined the group "because I want to be just like my father."

Staff Sgt. Kevin Moreno, a Camp Pendleton-based Marine recently returned home from duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom. "It's challenging doing all the PT and not getting yelled at," Moreno said. "But the best part is the marching and getting to act like a real Marine."

A desire for more self-discipline brought Jessica Downey, 11, of Lake Elsinore to the program. "Sometimes I wouldn't do what my mom told me to do," she said.

Downey said her father, a Vietnam veteran and former Marine, encouraged her to sign up. "I'm a squad leader now with more responsibility," she said. "I also listen to my mom now."

For information about the Temecula Valley Young Marines, call Guiles at 587-6002.

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