

FACE IN THE CROWD

Unusual job links schools to neighbors

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Consider a five-minute slice of Fran Andrade's life:

A Spanish-speaking woman shows up at Andrade's office at Oak View School in Huntington Beach with an apartment-rental form written in English. Andrade drops what she is doing and helps the woman fill out the application.

A teacher brings in a young girl who on this blustery day is wearing only a lightweight pull-over shirt. Andrade rummages through a pile of clothes in her office and comes up with a pink windbreaker. It's a couple of sizes too small, "but it's better than nothing," Andrade sighs.

Finally, a middle-aged man drops by with a plastic garbage sack full of men's clothing that he wants to donate. Andrade fills out a letter of receipt that will



Paul Kuroda/The Register

Fran Andrade is a liaison between Oak View School and residents of the nearby neighborhood, among the poorest in Huntington Beach.

allow him to take a tax deduction.

As Oak View School's human link to the area it serves, Andrade has spent the past 20 years doling out clothing, food and advice.

The Oak View neighborhood is one of Huntington Beach's poorest — and most diverse. Seventy percent of its 3,000 residents are Hispanic, 20 percent are Viet-

namese and most of the remainder are Russian, Iranian, Cambodian and Laotian. About 35 percent of the elementary school's 525 pupils do not speak English.

Andrade's job is to foster communication between home and school to create a better environment for learning.

"I was to work within the school, but I soon realized that

to get a change you had to work with the city, the county, the state," said Andrade, 54. "I became — dare I say it — a politician. But HUD (Housing and Urban Development) monies pour in here now."

An accounting major in college, Andrade had no formal training in social work. She learned on the job. She has started a hot-breakfast and lunch program at the school and helped bring in a day-care program and a community center.

Much of her work is directly with the parents, whom she counsels on income taxes, nutrition, fire prevention, parenting, child abuse, literacy, home protection and use of government resources.

Although Andrade loves her job, she said, her greatest desire is to work herself out of it.

"I would like to think that if we could educate the children who are here and give them good skills, then they would not need me."

— Frank Mickadeit/The Register

