Ivonne Valentin – Camp Fire’s 2007 Volunteer of the Year

For the past year, Ivonne Valentin has spent time each week with the kids at Camp Fire’s After School program at Jackson Elementary. In this time, she has not only given of herself, but encouraged Creighton University’s Soccer Team, which she coaches, to do so as well. It is because of her time and dedication that the kids at Jackson have had the opportunity to attend Creighton soccer games, receive jerseys, and have positive role models in their lives while at Camp Fire.

Thank you, Ivonne, for all that you continue to give to Camp Fire and the kids we serve.

From Ivonne Valentin, Camp Fire’s 2007 Volunteer of the Year

“I almost don’t even know where to start…

Last February, I came to Camp Fire at Jackson as a requirement for one of my classes. It is only required for us to do 15 hours of community service and then write reflections over that experience. From the moment I walked in I knew I couldn’t just limit myself to 15 hours and be done. Within a few minutes of being at the program I already was attached and made friends with kids. They were not aware of who I was or where I was from but trusted me with helping them with their homework and just talking about their day.

When they found out I was a former soccer player/current coach their faces lit up. If I wasn’t inside playing board games, I was on the black top kicking the ball around with kids. It’s so special to have the soccer connection with them and play for hours outside. I realized that after my first visit I had a purpose here in two ways: my purpose as a volunteer to spend quality time with the kids during activity and help them in any way that they need me to and my purpose as a role model in helping develop them into becoming young adults.

I feel very blessed with the opportunity of going to college and getting a magnificent education. In addition, I also have been given the opportunity to show my talents on the soccer field for Creighton’s University team and the Puerto Rican National Team. My experience with these teams has left me with great stories and memories to last a lifetime. And I want these kids to see they can have these same opportunities too. Nothing is impossible. If those kids want to get an education, they can. If they want to play a sport for their school or at a higher level, they can. Or if they just pursue whatever it is that makes them happy in life, they should. I don’t ever want them to feel that they are below or different from others in our community. In fact, they are so special in my eyes. And they are fortunate to have a program like Camp Fire USA that has a great staff who cares and believes in them. With that alone, they are a step ahead of some who do not have that support.

I try and do my best to remember names but sometimes it is a bit hard. However, I always remember their smiles and hugs. Seeing their happy faces and knowing that they’re having fun is my reward. It is so unreal how taking two or three hours of my time can mean to someone. But that is what keeps me coming back. It means a lot knowing that I am a part of an organization that is making a difference in our youth. I hope to continue working with Camp Fire and expand to their other programs as well.

For me, this is something that I just cannot walk away from. Those kids mean too much to me and there is still so much more that we can do. I feel very honored to have received the Volunteer of the Year Award. Out of any award I have received this is my favorite and most important. I would definitely like to thank all of those involved in Camp Fire USA for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this organization. And I can’t wait for future visits at Jackson Camp Fire!”