

News

Children look for summer miracle

Kidsave brings older orphaned and foster children to the United States to find families.

[Print Page](#)

By Veronica Rocha

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To 12-year-old Diego, a Colombia native visiting Glendale this summer, the U.S. is a land of scrumptious bites, endless oceans for swimming and more relaxed attitudes.

Diego and his 14-year-old brother, Alex, have been staying in Glendale with George Feldman and Eudora Loh and their family since the start of July as part of a program through Kidsave International, which helps older orphaned and foster children find homes in the United States.

So far, Diego and Alex, whose last names are being withheld by the Colombian government to protect their privacy, have visited San Francisco, frolicked in the sand at various beaches and have made friends with other teens.



Alex, 14, left, and his younger brother Diego, 12, are staying with a Glendale family while taking part in the Kidsave program. (Alex Collins/ News-Press)

"It's been a cool experience," Diego said. "In Colombia, there isn't the same things. It's cool — the food, the company, the games, everything."

Diego, Alex and their two other siblings, Leidy, 17, and Jennifer, 15, are hoping that by the end of the summer they'll have found local families who want to adopt them as a group.

The boys' sisters have been staying with a host family in Northern California, Feldman said.

Diego enjoys soccer and wants to be an archaeologist when he is older. Alex likes dancing to Cumbia music and plays rock music on his guitar. His favorite band is Guns N' Roses.

Diego said he likes the U.S. so much so that he doesn't want to return to Colombia, where his life is largely tied to school studies and soccer. The environment is much more strict than here in California, he said.

The siblings participated in Kidsave's Summer Miracles program, which allows older orphaned kids to live with a host family in the United States for five weeks and experience life as a family.

"Essentially, the Summer Miracles program gives the kids the opportunity to come here and have a good time, but in addition, it introduces them to families," Feldman said.

"And I think the theory of it is, well I know it is, that people tend not to adopt older children, but when they see them and observe them and get to them know them, then they change their mind."

When the brood is not staying in the United States, they live at an orphanage in Bogota, Colombia.

The orphanage has two locations — a house and apartment — and is responsible for 16 children, Loh said.

The siblings have belonged to the orphanage for six years. Of course, they would rather live in the U.S., and the orphanage, together with the Colombian government, has been looking to place them with a family permanently, Feldman said.

Feldman and Loh volunteered to take the brothers into their home for the summer. The couple met the brothers before taking them in because the boys were staying at the same orphanage as their adoptive children.

Feldman, who is fluent in Spanish, worked as a translator in 2005 with another host family in San Diego. The family had taken in two children, Juan Carlos and Gladys, whom Feldman had grown to love.

He and his wife eventually decided to adopt the children.

The couple already have a 23-year-old son, who left home for college.

But they have devoted themselves to making sure children who need help get the aid they need.

Leidy, the eldest sibling, will be 18 in October, which can jeopardize the siblings' chances of being adopted together.

"It's difficult to get a four-child sibling group adopted," Feldman said. "Most people want younger as opposed to older children . . . Under the law as it stands today, the older girl cannot actually get a U.S. immigration benefit once she is adopted and that's problematic for a family that doesn't want to be separated."

Under the prior regulations, children between 16 and 18 were permitted to be adopted if they were part of a sibling group with younger siblings, he said.

Kidsave, Feldman said, has been pursuing legislation that would restore the past law.

Families that are interested in adopting are asked to attend Kidsave events to observe the children and how they interact with one another.

Regardless, the children must return to Colombia after their five-week visit.

"The U.S. Consulate authorities insist on it being done [this way], and I think the Colombian authorities as well, so from the kids' point of view they are having a nice trip, but many of them are also aware that this is openly about adoption," Feldman said.

Jason Frankel, 14, of Studio City, was visiting Feldman's home Monday and was playing with Diego and Alex.

He was a foster child in Colombia who was adopted by a U.S. family more than two years ago.

"It's really crazy, and I like the craziness," Jason said of the U.S. "I like to have fun, and it's a pretty fun place to be at. I enjoy being here."

Kidsave is scheduled to host a meet-and-greet with the siblings and other orphaned and foster children Aug. 1 at Montrose Bowl, 2334 Honolulu Ave.