



“Happiness is the birthright of all. It is our essential nature. We don't have to teach anyone how to be happy. We just clear away obstacles so they can claim their birthright.”

Dr. Carol Weyland Conner
Founder Following Francis



PROGRAMS

- Francis in the Schools
- Francis in the Dunes
- Francis on the Hill
- Francis and Los Angeles

Programs Founded by
Dr. Carol Weyland Conner

FOLLOWINGFRANCIS.ORG



Founded by Dr. Carol Weyland Conner, Following Francis is a non-religious, all volunteer, service organization that offers free programs and activities and looks for new, spontaneous and effective ways to solve our nation's problem of poverty and marginalization.

Our goal is to end marginalization of all kinds, including, but not limited to, that associated with hunger and poverty. We are entirely responsive to the needs of the community, so our two east coast and two west coast programs differ slightly.



Enjoying the waterfall at Yards Park in Washington, DC

“Our model is very simple. It is rooted in the message of our program's namesake, Francis of Assisi. It is not a religious message; it is a universal message: If we see someone in need, we serve them as members of our own family.”

Terry Johnson
Executive Director



FRANCIS IN THE SCHOOLS

"A DAY OF PERFECT JOY"

- Programs have been given in San Francisco, New York, Baltimore, Washington, DC, and the California East Bay, and soon, in Los Angeles.
- More than 60 schools have attended our 26 field trips.
- Everything is free. We cover the bus transportation, lunches, the activities, and more. Each event is held at a beautiful site, so the children experience that these places are for all of us.
- We aim to lift the children's horizons, while teaching relevant historic events and about inspiring historical figures important to their community. This is done primarily through the delightful medium of live theater.
- It is our intention to demonstrate the attributes the students witnessed in the morning's play and reaffirm those values in action, without words.



Children delight in taking part in relay races.



At day's end, Dr. Conner takes joy in giving each child a special gift and saying, "Thank you for coming!"



Practically every child wants to have his or her face painted, and artists are standing by to fulfill their wish.

THE PLAY

- Learning history through live, musical theater is rich and memorable. Schoolchildren enjoy the animated storytelling, the colorful costumes, the dances, and our two, 10-foot puppets who usually portray forceful and powerful people whom the central figure must stand up to, knowing that truth and love are more powerful than fear.
- Several of these programs featured the celebrated international recording artist tenor Friar Alessandro, a Franciscan friar who traveled from Assisi, Italy, to America to sing for the children.

THE FAIRE

- After the play, children have an opportunity to meet and greet the actors, learn how the puppet was made, and join in a range of fun and educational activities including cooperative relay games, arts and crafts, dancing, face and hand painting, and they receive a special gift treat. Flower arranging was a popular activity, and over 30,000 fresh flowers were donated from vendors to make this possible. Some children said they never knew they loved flowers.

Many children told us:

“This was the best field trip of my life. I was treated like royalty.”



Both boys and girls love decorating flower baskets and taking them home to their parents.



A large puppet represents the father of Francis of Assisi who tried to block his wish to live a life of service to others.



Costumed troubadours sing for the children throughout the afternoon.



Dr. Conner welcomes children to the performance.

- Frederica von Stade, the international opera singer, volunteered at two of our field trips. She wrote, "That was the most beautiful day ever, and I don't think the kids will ever forget it. The love and care and gentle generosity were like a gift from heaven! Thank you for giving everyone so much joy."

GIFTS FROM THE HEART

- Our “Gifts from the Heart” initiative was created in 2017 to provide more direct help to alleviate poverty for families living in low-income areas. With help from school administrators we identified families with the most need and assembled gift bags for the children filled with books, educational toys, art supplies, blankets, and clothing.
- More than 2,500 individualized gift bags have been distributed to children.

The gifts soon included groceries for the children’s families, provided in collaboration with our sister organization, White Pony Express, and nearly a thousand items of new clothing provided by Macy’s.



Francis volunteer, Alex White, delivers children’s gifts in costume at one of our spring celebrations.



Gleefully this young boy receives his gift from one of the principal performers from the play.

A SPECIAL HOLIDAY

In December 2017, we purchased 65,000 pounds of high-quality meat, dairy, produce, etc. to provide two-week’s worth of food for 750 children and their families. White Pony Express helped us store and transport it to the school where families could “shop for free”.

“December is the most difficult time for our families. Francis in the Schools transformed our playground into a free, after school grocery market. That morning, the actors from the play delivered a gift bag to each child in their classroom. The gifts included games, toys, a fleece Columbia jacket and a plush blanket in the child’s favorite color, and a stuffy of their favorite animal. Our children (and our staff!) were bursting with joy.”

Principal Crystal Berry

A PANDEMIC PIVOT

In 2020 when the pandemic closed schools, we changed our mode of serving children and their families. Francis in the Schools began staging parades to celebrate holidays that feature live animals, dancers, actors, and musicians who walk through our neighborhoods. Characters dressed as angels or fairies knock on doors and give children gift bags filled with treats.

- We expanded these parade programs to take place on the grounds of schools in the most impoverished areas of the San Francisco Bay Area. During these events children pet live animals and watch dancers perform. Each child is treated to a clothing outfit and a gift bag filled with nutritional foods, special sweet treats, and educational toys. The popular flower basket activity was again possible due to generous donations of fresh flowers. We will stage our third parade and gift giving program in late April, 2021.
- Following Francis learned that many people who received government stimulus checks, or had surplus cash funds during the pandemic, wished to give the funds to families who were in dire need. Through the Stimulus Fund Gift Project, Following Francis and its sister White Pony Express have been able to gift over \$500,000 in cash in the amount of a stimulus check, directly to families identified by school administrators, non-profit service providers and local churches.



Cuddles with a new friend offers comfort and joy during the pandemic.



Walking with Kuzco, our llama, was a highpoint of this young guest's experience at the spring event.



Guests parade through a canopy of colorful flags on their way to the buses which will return them to their schools.

VIDEO

Clips from a performance and a Faire

LENGTH

2 minutes

LINK

<https://youtu.be/HGO7VRiNik4>

New York City Fox 5 News report on a Francis event for city schoolchildren

3 minutes

<https://youtu.be/uptgNTKHBpA>

KGO-TV News report on a Francis event for San Francisco area children on Cinco de Mayo

3+ minutes

<https://youtu.be/CSqDXmgSTFc>



FRANCIS IN THE DUNES

A CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT

Founded 2017, designed to give children and their families possibilities of life beyond their immediate life circumstances.

Volunteers for Francis in the Dunes serve continuously throughout the year families living in a 32-family federal housing complex in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. We provide weekly summer field trips for the 85 children, weekly grocery deliveries, beds, bikes, and other educational supplies, as well as quarterly gifts of household supplies and new clothing for each member of the house—in their style, size, and favorite colors.

Informed by her background in child psychology, our founder was keenly aware that children can't learn well when they have to sleep on the floor, and they can't concentrate well in class wearing ill-fitting clothing. So Dr. Conner directed us to be sure each child had a bed and new sheets and a fresh wardrobe including socks and underwear and comfortably fitting athletic shoes for school.



Volunteers install new bunk beds in the apartments of low income Myrtle Beach families who had no beds for their children.



Volunteers assemble bags of fresh groceries with meats, eggs, vegetables, fruit, and more. Each week one of the bags includes a tasty recipe and the ingredients for that dish.



A professional barber cuts a child's hair so he looks good for school.

SUMMER OUTINGS

Each summer, children are hosted at weekly summer camp-like outings at a beautiful, oceanfront beach house where rotating activities are specifically tailored to the age and interest of the children: swimming lessons, cooking, theater arts, cooperative sports and games, science projects, technical and VR classes, face and hand painting, yoga, dancing, kite flying, and more.

We have arranged special free educational trips for the entire family such as a five-day trip to Washington, DC. Families were hosted in beautiful homes near Rock Creek Park and took their meals together at another residence within walking distance of their residences. In Washington, the children learned to use the public transportation systems, and they toured many points of interest – especially honoring their African American heritage. A special visit to Howard University, hosted by a HU graduate and Following Francis board member was arranged.



Children get training on safe use of their new bicycles.



As part of their outing, the children were able to swim and surf in the ocean.



A camper enjoys a yoga class during her group's outing at a beachfront home.



Two of the 34 children from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, taken on a tour of Washington, D.C. Here they enjoy their time at the Lincoln Memorial.

VIDEO

Day camp outings for Carver Apartment children

LENGTH

7 minutes

LINK

[Click Here>](#)

Our South Carolina to Washington, DC field trip

7 minutes

[Click Here>](#)



FRANCIS ON THE HILL

Founded 2019, Francis on the Hill volunteers initially started picking up trash every day to clean and beautify Meridian Hill Park and surrounding the area. The park serves as the “living room” for area residents living on the margins.

In 2020, due to the pandemic, we learned that many families needed food. By replicating the **White Pony Express** model, we started addressing that need at one site and quickly expanded to another. Donations of food came in from regional food distributors and local markets with surplus food they wanted to give us to serve our community.



Volunteers plant new flowers in Meridian Hill Park urns to brighten the setting. They also pick up trash each day.



Volunteer prepares food before giving it away to hungry residents in the Meridian Hill Park area.

- In one year, we have grown to serve 450 families each week. We have delivered a total of 880,000 pounds of food, estimated to be the equivalent of 740,000 meals valued at \$1,500,000. We have now leased a 17-foot refrigerated truck, purchased an electric pallet jack, use two neighbors’ garages as distribution space, and rely on an energetic team of dedicated volunteers!
- Macy’s and other clothing donations have allowed us to set up free clothing boutiques, replicating the White Pony Express General Store model so that families could receive and shop for free warm winter coats, children’s daycare clothing, top-of-the-line athletic shoes, and even beautiful prom gowns for teens.



400 families line up at safe social distances to receive free food from Francis on the Hill volunteers.



Area residents load their shopping bags from the 20,000 pounds of food made available.

- Francis on the Hill program recently initiated a Diaper Project. Our project provides up to 150 diapers for infants, and approximately 100 a month for toddlers. Currently we are distributing 47,000 diapers every month through collaboration with Columbia Heights Educational Campus and the greater DC Diaper Bank.
- Francis on the Hill has received local TV coverage and newspaper coverage celebrating the model of their work in the community.

“ I’m glad we are able to help these people. It helps me as a person ... It is beautiful to see their faces when they are accepting our gift ... Fear of disappointment turned to tears of joy when they saw the gift ... Laughter and relief that someone cared. ”

A Volunteer



Volunteers pick up and deliver diapers to the community.

VIDEO

Channel 7 surprise visit to our distribution garages in DC to present a surprise gift.

LENGTH

3+ minutes

LINK

[Click Here>](#)

Francis on the Hill distribution in December.

1+ minutes

[Click Here>](#)



FRANCIS AND LOS ANGELES

Following Francis recently invited **AllROne** to expand their efforts by becoming Following Francis's newest program. Re-named Francis and Los Angeles we deliver gifts of cash as emergency relief, as well as children's gift bags. We are working with the Los Angeles Unified School District to provide immediately needed groceries, meals, and clothing for the 40% of their families who are homeless or near homelessness.

The need is great because hundreds of their families relied on Farmers to Families boxes, but those have discontinued at that site as of April 9, 2021. This work is now shared with our sister program The White Pony Express.



Families identified as being in great need line up to receive their gift. At this point, the contents are still unknown to them.



"Once you get home, please open this gift with your family and enjoy it together."



Each gift box is beautifully wrapped with a ribbon and card and contains \$1,400 in new \$20 dollar bills.

“WOW!!! What a Surprise!!! How generous! What a Blessing!
It has been a difficult year for so many of us.
My family is so appreciative of this and it is so needed right now.”



"This for your family with love"



"This is how all of us are helping all of us."



Some recipients could not get transportation to the gift site and walked there.



The four Hollywood figures who are the core team for Francis and Los Angeles are actor Annie Potts of Young Sheldon, Toy Story, Designing Women, and Ghostbusters, Jim Hayman, producer of NCIS New Orleans, Andy Schneider and Diane Frolov, producers of Chicago Med.

“My son is blind and autistic. He loved the gift and has named the llama, Oscar, and my daughter loves the sweater. She says it is the softest one she has ever had. I have no words to say how much I appreciate your generosity. I am speechless and very thankful.”