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## For students in at-risk program, change comes in form of pennies

By Julie Farren

FONTANA - Sean Taylor had been working for a half-hour Wednesday afternoon and was close to laying all 1,600 pennies in his box on the track at the Auto Club Speedway.

Sean, 12, a student at Clement Middle School in Redlands, was among 2,000 children with THINK Together, an academically focused after-school program, trying to set a Guinness World Record by laying down a 100-mile-long chain of pennies.

That's 8.5 million pennies.

Sean was ready to call it a day.

"Yes, it's fun, but it's tiring," he said.

The students, who attend the program for at-risk children in San Bernardino, Riverside, Los Angeles and Orange counties, were hoping to beat the Guinness World Record achieved in Fort Scott, Kan., where a 40-mile chain of pennies was created in July 2008.



Terry Pierson / The Press-Enterprise  
Students at Mission Middle School spread pennies with hundreds of school-children and volunteers in an attempt to surpass a world record 40-mile chain.

The students Wednesday didn't make their goal of 8.5 million pennies -- but they still set a record with 65 miles of pennies.

That's about 5.5 million.

They had chosen 100 miles as a goal to honor of the bicentennial of President Abraham Lincoln's birth and the centennial of the Lincoln penny.

Randy Barth, founder and CEO of THINK Together, said the children can see from participating in the event that they can make a difference in the world.

"It teaches them that everyone doing their own small part collectively can make a change," said Barth, who founded the program in 1994.

Inland students participating were from San Bernardino City, Jurupa, Lake Elsinore and Redlands unified school districts.

Three Brinks trucks delivered the pennies to the Speedway early Wednesday, said Nadia Flores, outreach manager for THINK Together's Santa Ana site.

To qualify for the Guinness record, the pennies must touch, said Flores.



Joysha Webster, 13, a student at Moore Middle School in Redlands, counted out \$30 worth of pennies for the event. She said she wasn't nervous about putting down the pennies.

"I've been doing this ever since before I came here," Joysha said.

Brianna Saldana and Brittany Jones, both 12-year-old students at Terra Cotta Middle School in Lake Elsinore, said they were in charge of counting more than 100 pennies.

"We've been working really hard to count the pennies," Brianna said. "We've counted them over and over till we got the right amount."

Flores is a graduate of THINK Together, which she attended for four years as a teen in Costa Mesa.

She said she was happy to return as an employee in January to the program that helped her grow.

"The volunteers were able to mentor me and help me do my day-to-day homework," she said.

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