City Youth Meet Sea Life

In July, “Project Sea Urchin,” organized by Connecticut Sea Grant Communications, brought happiness to 20 children who are living temporarily in shelters for battered, runaway, displaced, and homeless youth. Educators from Connecticut Sea Grant, Mystic Aquarium, Project Oceanology, and Emily Maung, a UConn Marine Sciences graduate student, teamed up with JRW Design Studio and the Women’s Center of Southeastern Connecticut, to bring the beach indoors. A fun-filled, educational afternoon was devoted to meeting sea creatures and seaweed up close, and to creating arts and crafts projects on an ocean theme.

Sea urchins, starfish, crabs, clams, sea cucumber, and a skate were some of the animals that the children were able to touch and talk about. “I like it!” summarized one beaming youngster. Nearby a clothesline art gallery held paper plate jellyfish and paper bag octopi with Cheerios® suckers on their tentacles, while a painted fish and echinoderm mural covered a table.

The afternoon project was one event included in Camp Sunrise, a collaborative week-long series coordinated by the Women’s Center of Southeastern Connecticut. The youngsters, who ranged in age from four to teens, are in protective custody and do not attend public schools or take many trips outdoors. However, Camp Sunrise also included a bus trip to Ocean Beach at a later day. The children were well-prepared to observe marinelife, thanks to Project Sea Urchin.