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Miley Cyrus helps O.C. homeless kids celebrate the holidays

By PETER LARSEN

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COSTA MESA – Mayela Carrillo didn't hesitate when asked what she liked most at the Sharing the Spirit Holiday Party thrown for 450 underprivileged kids at South Coast Plaza on Friday night.

"Seeing a movie star," said the shy 6-year-old from Long Beach, beaming as she described her unbelievable luck at meeting singer-actress Miley Cyrus at the event.

And not just meeting her either: "She put makeup on me," Mayela said, pointing to the dusting of glittery gold eye shadow that Miley had brushed onto her at a makeup station sponsored by the mall's

Sephora store.

The Christmas party took over the Carousel Court wing of South Coast Plaza from 9 p.m. to midnight, filling it with party-goers, even more volunteers, and activities from visits to take photos with Santa – who loaded each child down with large red shopping bags full of gifts – to arts-and-crafts stations, Lego and Hello Kitty projects, a DJ and plenty of free food and snacks from restaurants such as Z Pizza and Wahoo's Fish Tacos.

"It's a great party," said Gabe Kuskie, a 14-year-old from a family shelter in Santa Ana, shepherding his sisters, Kathryn and Serena Stanley, ages 9 and 5, respectively, through the free photo booth stop. "I think it's really great for all these people to give up their time to do this for us, too."

The Happiness Project, an Orange County non-profit that works with shelter and motel kids, started the holiday party five years ago at a Santa Ana soup kitchen, said Lindsay Dickhout, its executive director. South Coast Plaza offered to host it the following year and this year's partners and sponsors included the Festival of Children Foundation, the Young Presidents Organization, and Athletes First.

Miley Cyrus' Get Ur Good On charity also joined in this year, which brought the 19-year-old star, her mother and a few others down to hang out and meet the kids, after first stopping by the mall's Sanrio store to meet three Make-A-Wish Foundation youths flown in from Florida to have their wishes granted.

"Do you like Hello Kitty like me?" Miley said as she entered the store to reactions from the three girls that ranged from squeals to overwhelmed and shy. "Because I am obsessed!"

She cheerfully signed autographs and posed for photos with the girls, their families and even the person inside the store's Hello Kitty mascot costume, and then moved out in to the mall to talk to young volunteers about the importance of what they were doing for the children and their families who would soon fill these marble hallways with excited chatter.

"What you get back for yourself is what you give out to other people," she told them.

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Festival of Children Foundation