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EDUCATION

Students grow through social projects



By Diana Martin, Chatham Daily News
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John Hazika, 11, holds Mandela, right, the Mr. Nobody doll the Mrs. Marianne Visser's Grade 6 students, background, at Chatham Christian School have dressed with items representing the community impact projects the students initiated throughout the school year. PHOTO TAKEN Chatham, On., Thursday June 20, 2013. DIANA MARTIN/ THE CHATHAM DAILY NEWS/ QMI AGENCY

Nobody can inspire children.

The nondescript blue doll, named Nobody, arrived at Marianne Visser's Grade 6 class in the fall thanks to the sponsorship of Dr. Wendy Edwards, a local paediatrician, and her husband Keith Hindmarsh.

"He had no personality, no interest, no abilities," said Visser. "Through the course of the year we wanted to create a somebody from a nobody."

Students were challenged to select from the areas of the environment, animals or people and initiate a service project that would most reflect a characteristic of themselves to their classmates.

When the project was completed, a three-dimensional object reflecting their achievement would be pinned on the blue doll.

The projects varied from helping animals at the Chatham branch of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, assisting family, teaching Sunday School, collecting eye glasses for Loads of Love, to a number of environmentally-gearred projects.

Aaron Pardy, along with his family, chose to clean up the backyard of a single mom with two boys.

"They had a really bad backyard," said Pardy. "So I helped by painting their swing set, pulling out weeds, putting new mulch in and installing a new swing for them because their old one was broken."

Alanna Hoogstad ran a hot chocolate stand in December and raised more than \$600 and collected four bags of canned goods for the Salvation Army food bank.

"I've learned that one person can make a very big difference in the world," said the 11-year-old. "Even if it's just \$20 you can still make a pretty big difference for one family or more."

The students also donated supplies and their time to Canadian Food for Children to help organize and pack backpacks with school supplies, shoes and cut fabric to be sent overseas.

Closer to home, the students rallied together to finish a page for former classmate, Shay Pitt, who bought \$75 worth of supplies for the Chatham branch of the OSPCA. Pitt transferred schools halfway through the year.

The students hard work has earned them the distinction of being highlighted as class of the week by the Nobody office in Toronto.

Visser said, to date, 45,000 students across the country have participated in the program.

"The students were just wowed that they could do something significant, even though it seemed little to them," said Visser. "Because it wasn't abstract anymore. It became a tangible thing."

Nobody, now adorned with a stuffed kitten, chef's hat, sunglasses and a number of objects, has been renamed Mandela in honour of Nelson Mandela, South African anti-apartheid revolutionary and politician.

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diana.martin@sunmedia.ca

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