

Students turn 'Nobody' into somebody

More than 40 classrooms participated in the character-building project

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DURHAM -- "Nobody" started off with nothing, but the good deeds of students have given it eyes, clothes and an identity.

On Wednesday night, students from 27 schools gathered in the Durham District School Board's Education Centre to celebrate and showcase Who is Nobody?, a character education project that occurred in 40 classrooms, including Erin Mattes.

"This is Nobody, a jean doll that wants us to teach him to help people around the world," said Erin, a Grade 2 student at Sir Samuel Steele Public School in Whitby.

The project begins with a nondescript doll that gets clothing and other objects added to it to represent the good deeds from each student.

"I helped the people that had no food or no toys by sending stuff to where they live," said Keira Estrela, one of Erin's classmates. She showed off some of the articles students added to the doll.

"He has trees to help stop junk mail, he has a hat from donating clothes," Keira said.

"He has a bracelet and a card for donating to breast cancer," Erin said.

For the project, each student took the doll home for a week, then shared with the class how they helped Nobody, Keira said.

"I went trick-or-treating to help raise money for a food allergy," Erin said. "I think it gave us a great chance to make a difference in the world."

"I think it's good because now we know how it feels to help the other people," Keira said.

Teacher Cheryl Singer-Coulson was one of six to initially pilot the project in the Durham District School Board. Since then, she's made presentations to the board and provided in-services to other interested teachers.

"I love character building, I think



Crystal Crimi / Metroland

Keira Estrela, left, and Erin Mattes show off their Who is Nobody? display during a Durham District School Board event June 4. The Grade 2 Sir Samuel Steele Public School students were just two of many who participated in the project intended to build character.

it's an essential part of education," said Ms. Singer-Coulson, a Grade 2 teacher at West Lynde Public School in Whitby.

Who is Nobody? allows students to pursue

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-- Teacher Cheryl Singer-Coulson

their own interests. Kids did everything from gardening and yard pick-up, to sending Valentine's treats to battered women in Denise House.

"It really introduced them to a lot of social aspects they don't know about or maybe they do," Ms. Singer-Coulson said.

A boy in her class did his project on the Children's Aid Society, where he and his brother were adopted from. Her class's Nobody included a necklace of pop tabs for wheelchair chairs, a dog collar for the Humane Society and pennies for Free the Children.

"Every 3D item represents projects from the class so your Nobody becomes somebody because of what you've done," Ms. Singer-Coulson said.

Her husband, Richard Coulson, did the project with his Grade 11 outdoor education class at Eastdale Collegiate Vocational Institution. The high school is the only one in Durham involved.

The students did it mostly on their own time and participated in things such as a cancer walk, supporting pandas, and cleaning up Lakeview Park.

"It made them feel good to help others," said Mr. Coulson.