

Whitby boy hunts for old cellphones to save gorillas

Project connects students to their community through humanitarian efforts

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BY PARVANEH PESSIAN

WHITBY -- Most people wouldn't find anything in common between cellphones and gorillas, but eight-year-old Keegan McGonigal wants everyone to be aware of the connection.

The Whitby boy recently completed a project at Pringle Creek Public School centred on recycling old cellphones in an effort to save endangered gorillas in Africa.

The world's supply of coltan -- a mineral found in cellphones -- is found in the Republic of Congo. In the last decade, thousands of illegal miners have invaded protected parks and destroyed gorillas' habitats in search of coltan.

"The project was about helping people, animals or the environment in some way so I decided to do something that is good for all of them," said Keegan, who has so far collected about 20 cellphones from people in the community.

The project that the Grade 3 student was participating in is known as Who is Nobody, a character education program that highlights the importance of giving back to the community, his teacher Sonya Latimer said,

"This blue doll called Nobody arrives in the classroom and it has no gender, no ethnic background, no occupation and no character. Each child takes it home for a week during their time of helping the community and through their efforts, Nobody becomes somebody."

Some of the other initiatives students embarked on include fundraising for the Humane Society of Durham Region or even shovelling a neighbour's driveway.

"The program really drives home the sense of community because it allows the children to become connected with their environment and the people around them," Ms. Latimer said. "They're always anxious to get their hands on Nobody and get started."

The school is planning on placing a permanent donation box at the office for people to drop off their cellphones that will eventually be sent over to the Toronto Zoo.

"That way we can keep saving gorillas so it's not like just a one-time thing where we forget about it after the project," said Keegan, who visited the gorillas at the zoo last month.

The experience allowed him to better understand the benefits of his contribution, his father Dave McGonigal said.

"The average lifespan of a cellphone is about 14 months so instead of putting it into the landfill, it's doing something useful for the environment.

"This next generation I think is the most important for trying to turn things around and help the devastation that's out there."

Drop off old cellphones at the Toronto Zoo or mail them to Cell Phone Recycling Program, c/o Curator of Conservation Programs, 361A Old Finch Avenue, Scarborough, ON M1B 5K7.



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Sidebar

With many experts fearing the extinction of gorillas in the next few decades, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums has named 2009 the year of the gorilla.

In addition to the Toronto Zoo's efforts in collecting old

www.whoisnobody.com

email: info@whoisnobody.com

phone: (416) 333 7774