

Project helps raise children's self-esteem

BY BRIAN SCHUETTE

Trent Hills—A mysterious character has arrived in our community and it bears watching over the coming months.

Why "it" you may ask? "It's" real name is actually "Nobody" but both work pretty well until you get to know who it is, or more exactly, who it becomes.

Nobody is part of an interesting new program coming to grade schools across Trent Hills, designed to help students become involved and even passionate about helping their communities, to build respect for themselves and their peers for their altruistic actions, and to make children who feel like they are Nobody realise and that they are indeed Somebody. The program begins when a mysterious box arrives in the classroom addressed, "To: EVERYBODY, From: NOBODY."



■ Educators participating in the Hastings Who is NOBODY? project came from public and separate board schools across Trent Hills. From the left are Liz Collard from Hastings Public School, Bev Huble from Hillcrest, Kelly Clark and Penny Watt from Hastings, Susan Ward from Percy Centennial, Michelle Towns from St. Mary's, and Lynn Prince, Principal of Hastings Public School and host for the workshop.

Brian Schuette photo

When the teacher opens the box, the children will find that it contains a featureless, blue denim gingerbread doll. It has no face or markings, no name, no clothes. It's appearance gives away no personality traits, cultural background, interests or age. Whether the kids call the doll "It" or "Nobody," (both names are used in the program) it is at this point about as much of a Nobody as a doll is ever likely to be. Over the school year, each student takes it in turn to take Nobody home for a week. They follow simple steps from their teacher to plan and carry out a project designed to help and be kind to other living things, be they people, animals or the environment. When they've completed their week's project, they attach an object to the doll that they feel represents their project. For example, a child helping a senior do some garden work might attach a toy shovel to the hand of Nobody.

Someone participating in a fund-raising walkathon might put a running shoe on Nobody's foot.

As the community outreach projects begin to mount up, Nobody begins to show more and more personality with each passing week as new items are attached. After a class full of experiences, the doll can no longer be called Nobody because it has so many tales to tell; it is covered from head to foot with badges of its contributions to the community, and it clearly has a personality. It has become SOMEBODY! And the children themselves realise that they too really are Somebody the world needs.

All the projects are recorded in a scrapbook with photos, drawings and heartfelt stories. The collection shares personal experiences and Everybody benefits from each individual experience. The book demonstrates to the children how individual effort is

part of the greater whole, just like a community. They experience how easy and fun it is to help others. In testimonials from educators and the children themselves, the youngsters who participated in the "Who Is NOBODY?" Project are often said to go on to continue their community outreach work on their own, having enjoyed their experiences so much.

Project creator and international educator Kelly Clark introduced the program to Trent Hills teachers at a workshop at Hastings Public School on December 14. She says it's a holistic approach to prevent bullying and to build self-esteem. One important aspect of the program is to encourage the children to use their own interests and abilities to perform their acts of kindness as a means of enhancing their sense of self-worth. While teaching, Clark found that students too often try to fit in with their peers by ignoring the things that make them unique. The program encourages them to examine those things that do make them special and to use those qualities to participate in causes they feel passionate about. "It's getting kids to respect themselves and others," she said at the workshop. "That's the Number One indicator. It's getting kids to figure out what makes them unique, then building respect on that."

Who is NOBODY? has become recognised as an effective way to address these and other youth issues and has garnered the backing of Rotary International. The project is sponsored and financed locally by the Campbellford Rotary Club because it promotes their common goals of literacy, service above self, and helps youth at risk with bullying and emotional problems.

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