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## Making a wish come true

**Karen Lloyd**  
Local News - Thursday, February 22, 2007 Updated @ 9:09:25 AM

From North Hope Central School to the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario: Happy Birthday, Shane.

At the age of four, Shane Bernier was diagnosed as having Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia.

While the Lancaster, Ontario, boy did go into remission, he suffered a relapse in July 2006. On May 30, he'll turn eight years old.

Currently undergoing a course of chemotherapy at CHEO until the end of June 2007, Shane has one wish, and that is to make it into The Guinness Book of World Records for having received the most birthday cards.

When Kent Birks of Port Hope caught wind of this, he felt compelled to help.

"I really wanted to help him get his wish," the eight-year-old explained.

Through his school's unique character development program, Who Is Nobody, Kent has been able to do just that.

The program, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Canada, encourages children to work on initiatives that show service before self.

They use their talents to do something for a living thing - person/people, animal or environment - and then write, draw or tell about it.

When their project has been completed, they pin a memento of what they've done on a doll who symbolizes nobody.

The school's Grade 3 teacher, Julie Gilbert, who enabled the project to happen, explained the doll, is essentially a nobody.

"It has no gender, no character, and through this project, the students are building character," she said.

"They're helping nobody, become a somebody."

Other students in her class organized a Christmas gift drive for children in need, they raised awareness about AIDS in Africa, and helped to collect food for the local food bank.

Kent wants to make a wish come true for a young man his own age.

"The Who Is Nobody program in itself is pretty amazing," said Ms. Gilbert. "But then seeing the impact it's having on the kids in my classroom is nothing short of a miracle."

The program has not only taught Kent how to organize and launch such an initiative, but it's also given him a sense of pride knowing that his actions he can, in fact, make a difference in somebody's life.

"I learned that something as simple as a birthday card can make someone really happy," he said. "After his birthday, I'm going to check in The Guinness Book of World Records to see if he made it in."

Shane is currently receiving up to 1,000 cards a day from individuals all over the world. In order for his wish to come true, he needs about one million birthday cards.

By hanging posters throughout his school as well as at various local stores, along with small business cards with Shane's address, Kent is determined to help Shane reach his goal.

Every student who makes a birthday card for Shane will receive two ribbons - one that says, "Happy Birthday," and an orange one that Kent explains is the colour of leukemia.

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North Hope Public School student Joshua Vinge, 8, left, sits with Kent Birks, 8, in the school library yesterday. Kent, who is holding Nobody the Rotary doll, has organized a birthday card drive for an eight-year-old Quebec boy with leukemia, who wants to get in the Guinness Book of World Records for having received the most birthday cards.

Photo: Ted Amsden

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