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A doll without a face builds character in young people

by [John Campbell](#)
The Independent

Nobody is going to teach pupils in Trent Hills respect for themselves and respect for others. And you can thank the Rotary Club of Campbellford for that.

The service club is funding the introduction of the Who Is Nobody literacy program into local classrooms. It's a remarkable tool that encourages young people to get involved in good causes at the same time that it nurtures their self-esteem and enhances their academic performance.

It all starts with a gingerbread-shaped doll that hasn't any features. Children give it its character and in the process build up their own.

Nobody is the brainchild of Kelly Clark, a 31-year-old elementary school teacher currently on a one year leave of absence from the Toronto district school board.

"You see so many kids who have so much potential and unique qualities (who) try so hard to be the same as other people," she says. "They're basing their worth on if other people like them or if they're wearing the right clothes." Usually, it's the "bully figure" among them who serves as an inappropriate role model.

"They feel pressured to fit in by being the same as everyone, when it's a time in your life when you should be trying new things and making mistakes, and figuring out who you are and (what are) your interests and abilities, rather than being stressed out (trying to conform)."

Ms. Clark saw "so much potential (being) lost" that it saddened her and became her inspiration to do something. She resigned from her full-time position to work as a supply teacher in order to give herself more time to work on her idea. "It took two years to get the program easy to use, with input from principals and teachers (in 26 Toronto-area schools)," she says.

Typically, each child in a classroom involved in the program is given Nobody to take home for a week. A student's manual offers directions on how the child can take up a project "to help other living things - people, animals or the environment." In doing this, the students get to add attachments to the doll that represent the community outreach project they have undertaken, so that over the school year Nobody eventually becomes a Somebody who's helped others, with the good deeds being recorded in stories and pictures that are kept in a scrapbook.

The acts of altruism could be anything from shovelling snow for an elderly neighbour to raising awareness about breast cancer or animal rights.



Kelly Clark created the Who is Nobody program five years ago to help young people realize their potential and become good citizens as well as good students.

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In nearly five years since the program was launched, more than 80 organizations, including World Vision, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Salvation Army and Sick Kids Hospital, have benefitted from students taking up their cause. The issues tackled have included AIDS, drinking and driving, smoking, recycling, proper nutrition and world poverty.

The program, available to grades 1 to 8, gives pupils the opportunity to make choices that play to their "personal strengths," Ms. Clark says.

It's been used "in every type of class," from inner city to rural, and enjoyed success at every level.

"What makes the program easy is that it's basically show and tell," Ms. Clark says. "It takes five minutes of class time a week... There's an element of excitement when the bag (with Nobody) comes back to the class. The whole class wants to see what was added."

Everyone soon begins to seek how working together can make a difference, Ms. Clark says.

Nobody will soon be arriving in selected classes in the five elementary schools in Trent Hills, through the sponsorship of Campbellford Rotary. Each kit costs \$365 and the workshop Ms. Clark conducts with teachers explaining how the program works costs another \$65. She held a two-hour session recently at Hastings Public School; it was the third she's conducted within the Kawartha Pine Ridge District Board of Education.

Ms. Clark has formally established a connection with more than two dozen Rotary clubs across Ontario since September; the clubs recognized that they and her program share the common goals of promoting literacy, helping youth at risk, and promoting service above self. "They'd like to see it (go) international," Ms. Clark says. "I would love that."

(The Printing House Ltd., which supplies the printed materials, is another sponsor.)

Teachers and parents she's heard from are "excited" by the changes in students they have witnessed as a result of the program, Ms. Clark says. The youngsters become "really passionate" about issues and begin relating curriculum to "real life activities"; they also make the link between doing well in their studies and achieving career goals. Homework previously neglected now gets completed.

Ms. Clark says she was "motivated to stick" with the program through its long-term development after seeing "something inside (the pupils) be lit" by what it was teaching them. She "desperately wanted" them to feel "highlighted as individuals."

If you are interested in bringing the program to your area, or wish to learn more about it, visit <http://www.whoisnobody.com/> or call Ms. Clark at 416-597-2011.

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