

Lifestyles



■ The Grade 2 and 3 students of Percy Centennial with their friend SOMEBODY.

Brian Schuette photo

Unique project raises children's self-esteem

BY BRIAN SCHUETTE

Trent Hills - Late last year an interesting new program began in grade schools across Trent Hills.

It was 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 a nobody realize that they are indeed a somebody.

The program began when mysterious boxes arrived in classrooms addressed, "To: EVERYBODY, From: NOBODY."

When the teacher in each class opened their box, the children found inside a featureless, blue denim gingerbread doll. Its appearance gave away no personality traits, cultural background, interests or age. At this point, it was about as much of a Nobody as a doll is ever likely to be.

Over the school year, each student took it in turn to take Nobody home for a week. They followed 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 completed their week's project, they attached an object to the doll that they felt represented their project. For example, a child helping a senior do some garden work might at-

tach a toy shovel to the hand of Nobody. Someone participating in a fundraising walkathon might put a running shoe on Nobody's foot.

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

The project demonstrated to the children how individual effort is part of the greater whole, just like a community. They experienced how easy and fun it is to help others. One important aspect of the program was 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, project creator and international educator Kelly 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.

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

This week, the Grade 2/3 class of Ms. Ward at Warkworth's Percy Centennial School talked about their completed project. The doll was covered in souvenirs of its journey through the community and was now named SOMEBODY. When asked who Somebody is now, they replied, "All of us!"

The badges representing their individual acts of kindness included a small pillow, a tiny shovel, a teddy bear, socks, a ribbon, a juice box, hearts, a dog tag, a cat's collar, a card, a snowman, a whale, and many other objects. The children spoke with pride about their own contributions to the project. One made cupcakes for a babysitter. Another cleaned up a ditch in front of the family's home. One boy shoveled his neighbour's driveway, while another made a card for someone in the hospital. One student took the family dog to visit a nursing home.

"My Grandma's friend was away for two weeks and we had to feed her pet," said another.

Clothes were donated to Goodwill, garbage was cleaned up, someone made cookies for the nursing home, and one did his bit to help endangered species.

The kids had some interesting answers when asked what they had learned as well. To begin with, they learned that everybody is a somebody. The self esteem purpose of the project seemed to have been accomplished. Respect for others, helping your family, and saving the world were some of their other answers. One thing the students all agreed on - they had fun and would love to do the project again.

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