

Students build character helping animals, people, environment

By Lindsey Leamen
Staff Reporter

When a faceless denim doll showed up outside a Grade 5 classroom, no one could know how dramatically it would affect lives.

It was the day after the March Break when an unmarked box arrived outside of Andrea Wirth's classroom at St. Peter's Catholic School.

It, as the doll was called, was nobody. The students were required to organize projects to help the environment, animals, or people. They could donate money, their time, or raise awareness.

Once they had completed the project, they attached something symbolic to the doll to represent the contribution.

Students really took initiative in finding foundations and societies that interested them. The projects ranged from selling Gatorade for the World Wildlife Fund to taking a dog to a nursing home to do pet therapy, to cleaning up local parks.

Ms. Wirth noticed that the students all chose things that reflected their personalities.

"The community atmosphere in the classroom has grown," said Ms. Wirth about the effects of the program.

She also said the projects have helped to mould the classroom, and the students shared a common goal.

"It's helped them to grow personally, and broadened their view on the world."

Victoria Byškov and Cassandra Lupul sold popsticks at lunch for 25¢. They chose to donate the \$62 they raised to the Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre so more children could benefit from its services.

"We're children and we're lucky we don't have special needs, so we need to help those that do," said Victoria.

"I thought it was a good experience and I learned a lot from it."

Kassandra said, "They were really happy that they got the donation. To remind us of our experience they gave us t-shirts that say Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre."

"It really touched me when I did this," said Victoria. "I am able to help other

children in the world and together we can make a difference."

Emma Farrell and Rebecca Mattina held a three-day bake sale with all the money raised going directly to the St. Catharines Humane Society.

The girls chose to donate there because they "really liked animals," said Emma. They saw the animals and realized that a lot of help is needed.

In the three days they raised \$123. One of the best memories Emma had was when "everyone wanted to come back, but we were sold out."

On Friday they had bonuses such as sour keys in addition to the cookies, cupcakes, rice muffins, and bread.

Of the whole experience, Rebecca summed it up well when she said, "It just felt good."

Josh Thelesson's aunt was a nurse in Tanzania for a few years and it was while Josh was looking through some of the pictures of children with torn clothes and not enough food that he realized that something had to change.

He "asked (his) aunt to give a presentation to raise awareness."

He said that although he didn't want to live in Africa, it was good to raise awareness for people his age.

Each student got to make a page in the scrapbook outlining the project they undertook. Photos and a brief write-up for each visually show how much impact the doll has had.

Once all of the projects were completed, the doll got eyes to see all the great things it had done, and a smile, to be happy for all the people it touched.

Now students are taking turns bringing the doll and scrapbook home to show their families.

The program was developed by a teacher in Toronto who wanted to touch children in a different way. This was the first time for the project in the Niagara area.

Ms. Wirth said it was "really successful," and "it is not time-consuming, but the impact is high."

For more information on this innovative teaching aid that is low maintenance and high-impact, contact Kelly Clark at (416) 597-2011 or email lkitt@canada.com.



Andrea Wirth's Grade 5 class at St. Peter's Catholic School initiated projects to donate money, their time, or raise awareness on important issues. The denim doll pictured above is covered with symbols of the class's hard work. On the left is the scrapbook that details each student's efforts.

Photo by Lindsey Leamen

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