

Steve MacLean student helps turn Nobody doll into a somebody

'Who is Nobody' project supports Carlington school

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Steve Maclean Public School student Finn Uchman, 8, officially presents the items generated through his clothing drive to Kim MacDonald, principal at W.E. Gowling Public School in the west end on Dec. 15. - Tatum Uchman/Submitted

Finn Uchman knows what it takes to become a somebody.

The eight-year-old was chomping at the bit for his turn to take home the 'nobody doll' for an assignment on giving back.

"Every Grade 3 class Miss Brouse does a Nobody Project to spread kindness," said Finn, who is in Tracy Brouse's class at Steve MacLean Public School in Riverside South. "You try to spread kindness to other people. You have to accomplish something, like donating clothes, donating food to the food bank."

'Nobody' is a denim cloth doll that has no face, but as the students take turns bringing it home and spearheading a kindness project, they each add a memento to the doll.

By the time the week-long projects wrap up in June, the doll will look like and become a somebody.

At this point in the process, Nobody has been outfitted with a T-shirt, and Finn recently added blue mittens to represent the clothing drive he launched in support of students at W.E. Gowling Public School in Carlington, where Finn's mom, Tatum Uchman, teaches Grade 2.

"That represents your project perfectly," Brouse said.

"Nobody comes as this blank denim doll and it doesn't have a gender, no ability, no skills, no ethnicity, no culture – that's the whole idea," she said. "No interests, no character. And so it's a character education project."

In addition to building character, the project requires students to do research, write a report and present their findings to their classmates.

"The main idea is to teach Nobody to be a somebody through these acts of kindness," said Brouse, a Barrhaven resident who was first introduced to the [Who is Nobody?](#) project six years ago and tried it out at Queen Elizabeth Public School in Ottawa's east end.

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Her students over the years have spearheaded a variety of campaigns, including cleanups, recycling and collection drives for the food bank and the humane society.

Finn got the idea to help the west-end school after he overheard his mom telling his dad about the need at her W.E. Gowling school.

"Our principal put out an S.O.S. that we were missing certain sizes of stuff," Uchman said, especially for students in junior kindergarten to Grade 2. Many are new Canadians and refugees who are still settling into their new lives in Ottawa.

"That's kind of when the light bulb went off and he thought, 'I could do that for our Nobody project,'" Uchman recalled.

At first she wasn't sure the project would work, but then Finn wrote a post on the Riverside South Community Association's Facebook page on Dec. 6. The response to his request for clothing donations was overwhelming, attracting 76 likes and 42 comments, many of them from Riverside South residents wanting to help.

"This community is amazing," Uchman said, adding that many donors actually went out and purchased brand new clothing for the project.

One woman spent \$200 on new winter boots, and a friend purchased a pile of new mitts, scarves and winter

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hats.

"We're talking Columbia snowsuits with tags, North Face snowsuits with tags, and runners," Uchman said of the donations, which also included a large pile of socks.

"A lot of our students unfortunately come daily without socks on," she said, adding that she regularly hands out warm winter clothing, such as toques, to students who don't come to school wearing proper outdoor clothing despite the frigid temperatures. "New is huge."

Finn and his mom went together to W.E. Gowling on Dec. 16 to officially present the vast array of new and gently used donated items to principal Kim MacDonald. The items have since been sorted and added to the school's donation room, where students can pick out items they need.

"I felt really generous," Finn said. "There are kids in the world that don't have much clothes."

by **Erin McCracken**
Erin McCracken is a reporter/photographer with Metroland Media's Ottawa South News. She can be reached at erin.mccracken@metroland.com Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
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