

Parkwood kids turn Nobody into Somebody

MARGARET SAMBOL

This Week

Throughout the year, students in Mark Cruise's Grade 6 class have added items to Nobody turning him into Somebody.

"I learned it's important to give back to the community because maybe not everybody has the same things you have," says one student, Chelsea, about the project.

"I learned you can actually find yourself by helping others," says another student, Safeera.

The students have been participating in the "Who is Nobody?" program this year.

At the beginning of the year, the class received a doll with no distinguishing features named Nobody. Every student had a week with Nobody where they did a charitable or character building act, although some students worked in teams so they could all have a turn before the year end. At the end of the week, the students gave Nobody something to indicate the work that they had done.

"We added something to build Nobody's character from whatever we did to help the community," says Amanda, who added Nobody's smile because the cookies and toiletries she donated to the homelessness services Centre 454 with her friend Brenna put a smile on the faces of the people who received them.

"I baked cookies and sold them door to door for the Humane Society," says Mia.

"I collected sports equipment for the United Way," says Zach.

Teagan raised \$300 by collecting books for the YMCA,



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Developing character: Students in Mark Cruise's Grade 6 class at Parkwood Hills Public School have learned a lot about themselves through the Who is Nobody project this year. The students did charitable acts and added something to represent their good deed to the Nobody doll, shown centre.

while Renée helped her dad with house renovations and Charlie and Patrick collected canned goods for the Mission downtown.

Now, Nobody has a full wardrobe of clothes, a face and a lot of personality from the students' efforts. For example, Devin added a green soccer jersey because he helped the environment by making a frog pond and Aki added a pencil to show how he helped his sister with her math homework.

"I learned anyone can help society no matter how old or young," Neil says.

Spencer says he learned that it is fun and feels good to

help people.

"It taught them about character education, co-operation, empathy, respect and integrity," Cruise says.

The program began with two DVD sessions which the class watched together to introduce the concept and it took off from there.

Before they did their project, the kids had to submit a proposal to Cruise and get it approved.

"They were quite excited about it," Cruise says.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Kelly Clark, the founder and director of the Who is Nobody program, came up

with the idea because she was frustrated seeing kids trying to fit in.

"I wanted my students to figure out what made them 'different' and to use their differences to make a difference," Clark says in an e-mail.

Her idea was to create a "choose your own adventure" program so students could learn about themselves and about helping others, while building their self-esteem.

"You can't help but be ecstatic about a child's project," Clark says.

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"When each student presents your natural instinct as a teacher is to immediately tell a child or young adult how great they are for reasons that are very personal to him or her – you are complimenting them for their actions – things that they earned, things that are lasting."

The program is now offered in 39 school boards across Canada, America and England.

Dave Palmer helped arrange for the school to receive the kit through funding provided by the Rotary Club of Nepean-Kanata, although he is now a member of the Rotary Club of Arnprior.

In 2007, when he was director of club services for Nepean-Kanata, Palmer arranged for the club to buy two Who is Nobody kits for a North Gower school.

"It's a phenomenal character building exercise," Palmer says.

With the success of the program in North Gower, the club committed to purchasing, and contributing to kits for schools in Stittsville and the St. Laurent area, as well Bayshore Public School, Bells Corners Public School and Parkwood Hills, and re-charging the two kits in North Gower so a new class could use it this year.

Not only does the program develop character, but it also teaches public speaking and writing skills as the students report on

what they did during their week with Nobody.

"It assists youth in identifying a need and developing something to fulfill that need," says Palmer, a Bells Corners resident,

Based on a show of hands, everyone in the class at Parkwood Hills said they would recommend the Who is Nobody project to other people.

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**• Dave Palmer of
the Rotary Club**

Cruise says the class would like to thank Palmer for arranging for the Rotary Club to sponsor their kit.

As a final class project, the students are raising money to sponsor a child in need. Their goal is to raise \$420 and so far they have raised \$300. The students have collected money through a bake sale and change box. For their last gift to the character education doll, student Briana wants to give Nobody a name, after the child they sponsor.

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