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Stayner students learn character traits from 'Nobody'

Wasaga Sun By Ian Adams 🖂

A group of Stayner Collegiate students have spent the last four months learning what it takes to transform a 'nobody' into a 'somebody'.

Stephanie Rusnak's Grade 9 Learning Strategies class took part in the Who Is Nobody character education program.

The 'Nobody' is a featureless fabric doll



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that arrives in a brown 'suitcase' addressed "To Everybody, From Nobody'. As the semester progresses, the students add three-dimensional representations of the projects they've undertaken as part of the course.

"It comes with no gender, no culture, no name, just referred to as a 'Nobody'," said Rusnak, who was introduced to the



Stayner students learn character traits Jinna Kerr Frost (left) and Stayner Collegiate teacher Stephanie Rusnak with Nobody. Ian Adams Photo

program during a Social Science department chairs meeting. "The idea is we want to turn 'Nobody' into 'Somebody', by teaching a variety of character education traits.

"Each week we see a development of who Nobody is becoming, and what Nobody is learning."

The doll is introduced to the class at the beginning of the term, and the students determine whether the focus of their main project will be to help animals, people, or the environment.

The students also do their own individual projects, which this year ranged from raising money for the Toronto Zoo, to building a chicken coop.

The class project was to clean up walkways around the high school, through the Missionary Church campground area, the rail right-of-way, and other areas students use to walk to school.

The Nobody now has mini recycling bins for boots, pop can tabs that make up its face, a hammer, blankets and towels (to represent a donation to the humane society), and work gloves.

This is the second year Rusnak has used the Nobody program to teach character traits in the classroom.

"It's a project that just keeps giving, and lending itself to a program that can continue on, and each class can put their own personal spin on it," she said. "It fits in nicely with the mandate of the Learning Strategies class, which gives students an introduction on how to be successful in high school, and in life."

Along with conducting the cleanup, the students also created awareness of being environmentally responsible by putting up posters around the school, and created a quiz.

They also took pictures of the recyclable items they collected, spelling out 'SCI Recycles'.

Jinna Kerr Frost cleaned up a lake area where her family vacationed as part of her personal project for the course. She also created a poster that's now pinned to the back of the Nobody.

She focused her personal story on Nobody on the traits of respect, responsibility, and caring when it came to the environment.

"Caring is kind of like respect and responsibility put together," Kerr Frost said. "Respect for the environment, and responsibility for cleaning up your own mess."





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Each student took on a personal project, along with the class project. One student raised money to donate to the Toronto Zoo for its two-toed sloth exhibit. Another student honoured his late grandmother by taking part in Jump Rope for Heart to raise money for the Heart & Stroke Foundation.

Another student built a chicken coop for his parents.

"In the past, that's something he wouldn't have necessarily offered to help out with," Rusnak said. "I think he really enjoyed it and was really proud of how it turned out."

The purpose of the personal project, said Rusnak, is to promote positive character traits

"Big or small, it's really irrelevant. It's important to make sure they come up with a plan, that they execute it, [and] at the end there's a class celebration of everyone's accomplishment," she said. "It doesn't have to be a big life-changing project, but we can do something small and it makes a difference for people.

"Small things can make a difference, and [students] embraced that."

The students also develop entrepreneurial and organizational skills, "and then just their level of confidence increases quite a bit.

"I can remember the first few days of class and we were talking about getting up and chatting in front of the class. People were really intimidated by that, but by the time we got every student in front of the class, they were able to use their presentation and speak very comfortably," Rusnak said.

"When I first came into this class I was terrified, shy and scared, but I got used to this class because they are all my friends," Kerr Frost said. "I was really scared to go up in front of the class and present, but then when I got up there, I realized they're all my friends, they're not going to laugh at me, they're not going to make fun of me.

"I think I've gotten better getting up in front a class and presenting."

"When I first introduce (the course) they're sort of nervous and kind of meek and mild," Rusnak said. "I haven't had anyone say, 'this is kind of stupid, I'm not doing it'. The way that it's framed, and I show them video clips of people doing good, and we talk about the importance of giving back to society.

"I think I see a lot of growth in these guys, and by the end, they feel pretty proud of all they've accomplished."



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