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Nobody program teaches Stayner students to be somebodies

COMMUNITY Jan 31, 2017 by Ian Adams Wasaga Sun



From left, Stayner Collegiate students Tessa Vermilyea, Grace Millsap and Hannah Delorme with 'Who Is Nobody', a program that uses a featureless doll to teach character traits. - Ian Adams/Metroland

A featureless doll has put a face to what constitutes character for students in Stephanie Rusnak's class. This is the third year Rusnak, a social science and humanities teacher at Stayner Collegiate, has used the Who Is Nobody program, after she was introduced to the concept at a school board social science leaders meeting.

'Nobody' is a fabric doll that arrives in a brown 'suitcase' addressed "To Everybody, From Nobody." It starts out with no features and, throughout the semester, students add three-dimensional representations of the projects they undertake.

There's also a class project, which this year was selling Fresh from the Farm produce bundles to spend on food and other items for the Stayner-Clearview Food Bank.

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Stayner students learn character traits from 'Nobody'

"The growth in the students, even in terms of basic classroom skills such as organization, initiative, is huge," Rusnak said of the kids in her Grade 9 Exploring Family Studies class. "These guys had to send an email to someone they didn't know, or call someone they didn't know."

The Who Is Nobody program has been used in several schools in Simcoe County. The character education program was created in 2002 by a Toronto teacher as a vehicle for kids in Grades 1 through 12 to help them put action into helping others.

Tessa Vermilyea created a stop-motion video, posted on YouTube, to raise awareness of bullying.

She made the video to recognize that her younger sister was bullied at a former school.

"Maybe if someone had been there to help her, things could have changed, so I wanted to spread that message," Vermilyea said.

Her project landed in a tie with a project by Hannah Delorme and Grace Millsap to provide a struggling family with a happy Christmas as the best in the class as voted by the students.

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The project really helped to bring out Vermilyea, said Rusnak.

"Tessa tends to be a very quiet individual in the classroom, so it was really cool ... when I asked (the class) whose project stands out, it was a tie," she said. "I thought it was neat that (Delorme and Millsap) did something clearly visible in the community, and while Tessa's didn't, it still had a big impact on the students.

"The rest of the group appreciated the fact that it didn't matter who you were or where it was coming from, everybody helped in a cool way."

"I learned that if I put my mind to something and I really want to do it, I can," added Vermilyea.

Delorme and Millsap worked with Family Connections to sponsor a family for Christmas.

"It felt really good to help out a family to make sure they could afford their Christmas and not have a little boy not have a Christmas," Millsap said.

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Their project was presented as a Christmas present secured between Nobody's hands. The 3-D representation for Vermilyea's project is a camera.

"I don't think we've ever done anything like what we've done for (this project). It was an eye-opening experience to what is going on in other people's lives compared to the lives we have," Delorme said. "We have parents who can afford to give us a family meal and presents for Christmas, but there are people who can't afford that."

Rusnak sees the program as building students' confidence, and having them recognize their responsibility of helping others in the community. Other student projects included encouraging people to volunteer for a local cat rescue program, and accompanying kids as they went trick-or-treating on Halloween night.

"It's probably a project that some of them worked harder on than other projects," Rusnak said. "They seemed to enjoy the interactive, student-directed way of helping others and doing something that's positive."



by **Ian Adams**

Ian Adams is a reporter for Simcoe.com, covering community news and events throughout south Georgian Bay, and municipal councils in Collingwood and Wasaga Beach.

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