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Students' good works turn Nobody into Somebody

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St. Benedict's school counselor Sharmayne Seal with the blue denim doll, Nobody. Seal's Grade 5 health class shaped Nobody's appearance and identity through personal projects benefiting the community as part of the Who is NOBODY program. SUBMITTED

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Russell Piffer leducrep.newstwo@sunmedia.ca Grade 5 students at St. Benedict's Catholic School got a lesson in the value of helping others through a featureless denim doll named Nobody. The 60-centimetre doll arrived at St. Benedict's in a "mysterious package" school counselor Sharmayne Seal presented to her Grade 5 health class in October. The package was from Who is NOBODY, a program where each student is assigned to come up with a project to help others in the community. At the outset of the program, Nobody had no age, interests, abilities, or gender. A different student took the Who is NOBODY kit home each week and once they completed their project, attached an item representing their project to the doll. "You take an example of what you did and attach it to him," said Seal. "So in the end, the blue doll has an identity." Along with decorating the doll, students presented their projects to the class and made an entry in the Who is NOBODY scrapbook, said Seal. "It didn't have to be a big time commitment, it just had to be meaningful," she said. "I think the strength of this program is kids realize, 'I can make a difference.'" Grade 5 student Danika Manion said she raised more than \$100 for victims of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines by selling bracelets. When she finished the project, she put a bracelet around Nobody's neck, as a necklace. Another student, Deeyana Mirzaie, donated clothing to the Salvation Army and put a pair of socks on Nobody's feet to represent her action. "I felt good because less fortunate people would have something to wear," she said. "[I learned] there's a lot we can do to help other people." Other projects included Mheri Capistrano cleaning up litter at Bridgeport Park, Frances Resurrection donating her hair to an organization that makes wigs for child cancer patients and Alexa Bird cooking dinner for a single mother. "After you help people you feel good inside and want to keep doing it," said Bird, who received a sown heard from one of the single mother's children, which she attached to Nobody. Tatum Kirkpatrick, who donated a quilt patch to the WIN House women's shelter, expressed a similar opinion. "I learned that it's nice to just not think of yourself and help somebody else sometimes," she said. Another student, Madison MacNeil, said she gave a \$10 Tim Hortons gift card and a blanket to a homeless person in Edmonton. "On a cold day they can curl up in a blanket and enjoy a cup of coffee," she said. "After I did that I put eyes, nose and a smiley mouth [on Nobody] to represent that I made someone happy." These were just a handful of the projects completed by the class, which transformed Nobody from a blank denim doll into a Somebody. Seal said this was the first time she did the Who is NOBODY program and would definitely do it again. "The kids love it," she said. "They really own it because they come up with the idea, they do it, so it's quite independent." According to an information package from STAR Catholic, Who is NOBODY was developed by Toronto teacher Kelly Clark to help students develop self-esteem. "Individuals build self-esteem by discovering their strengths and using them to help the community in a personal way," the package said. Participating students completed more than 35,000 projects and helped more than 700 organizations from 2002-2010. According to St. Benedict's principal Connie Greer, the program compliments the culture at the school and in STAR Catholic school division. "It's a culture of caring for each other and it's a culture about seeing the needs that someone else might have, and recognizing those needs, and doing what you can to help them," said Greer. "[Who is NOBODY] integrates so beautifully."

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