

You're nobody 'til somebody loves you

Grade 6 teacher achieves lifelong dream of teaching kids the joy of volunteerism by Kate Robertson

ON A COLD January day, Amanda Mizel's Grade 6 class received an unusual call from the principal of Doncrest Public School. "There's some weird package here for the class," the principal said, feigning ignorance. It was a briefcase, covered in stickers, with a card.

"It said: 'To Everybody. From Nobody,'" says Mizel, who decided to participate in the Who Is Nobody?™ project, run by sponsors such as Rotary International and Free the Children.

The kit contains a denim doll, called the Nobody Doll, along with a DVD, stickers and posters. Students are expected to take a turn volunteering, fundraising or making a positive change in their lives. Then, they attach something to the doll that symbolizes their accomplishment. The doll accumulates an array of symbolic charms, which turn the Nobody Doll into a Somebody.

But for 25-year-old Mizel, who is just finishing her first year of teaching, the project doesn't just fulfill a requirement in the course

curriculum. It's helping her to achieve a lifelong dream of helping kids see how they can make their community a better place.

"[The kids] really do feel like they are making a difference in the world," she says. "This was the reason I wanted my students to take part in this project — this is literally

organizing a food drive for the Richmond Hill Food Bank.

"He's so positive about this project," she enthuses.

Mizel is no stranger to volunteering herself. At age 12, her mother encouraged her to start volunteering at the local pool, teaching swimming to children with special needs.

"My mom has been a backbone for me in so many ways," she says. "She is a very strong woman who is always encouraging me to pursue my dreams. She is the one telling me to take that extra step, even when I don't think I can do it anymore."

Mizel continued to volunteer through high school and her years at York University, working with autistic children, teaching rock climbing and raising money for neurodegenerative disease research.

Now, Mizel is working to instill the values of volunteering and contributing to the community in her students, with the help of the Nobody Doll — which, thanks to her



Amanda Mizel participated in the Who Is Nobody?™ project with her class students, has become a Somebody. all three Grade 6 classes at Doncrest will be able to participate next year.

"By giving the doll responsibility, they feel that responsibility as well," she says. "I hope they carry it forth." Mizel hopes to raise enough money for two more Nobody Dolls (each kit costs about \$895), so that

In combining her passion for teaching and her dedication to making the world a better place, she is fulfilling a lifelong dream.