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**RICHMOND HILL'S TOP STORIES**

**You are nobody till somebody loves you**  
Faces AND Places

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(Richmond Hill) - Looking at the faceless blue doll called "Nobody", it's hard to imagine the difference he's been making.

As part of an innovative literacy program called "Who is Nobody?", the doll has become an increasingly important part of a unique approach to teaching in York schools.

Members of the Richmond Hill and York Region rotary clubs made it all possible raising more than \$3,500 to buy kits.

Each kit is \$365 and each workshop is \$85.

They were presented to the schools at a ceremony last month in Thornhill.

Seven schools, from Thornhill to Keswick, have bought kits, which include a doll, scrapbook, film and information for teachers and students.

After receiving the package, students work to discover their own interests and create their own way of being kind to living things. It can be anything from picking up litter in the local park to donating clothes to Goodwill or teaching about another culture.

Each student takes the doll home for a week and adds something representative of their lesson. They then present the doll to the class along with their own story and a picture.

By the end of the year, the doll is infused with the spirit of the students' character and covered with mementos of their explorations -- no longer a "Nobody".

All their work is compiled in a scrapbook and the doll becomes the class mascot.

"I was teaching and I saw a void in the classroom," said project creator Kelly Clark, who took three years to assemble the project.

"Public school is really a time to explore, make mistakes and find out what you're good at," rather than being forced to conform, she said.

She designed the project to meet curriculum requirements in areas such as literacy while allowing students to develop their individuality and think of others.

Some of the local schools making use of Nobody include Beverly Acres and Charles Howell public schools.

The program fit perfectly with the ideals of the service club in terms of teaching literacy, encouraging children to do things for others and performing "service above self", said Bill Harris, president of the Richmond Hill Rotary Club.

"It's a remarkable tool that encourages young people to get involved in good causes. At the same time, it nurtures their self esteem and enhances their academic performance," he said.

"We were so impressed by the presentation she did on the unit, we purchased five to distribute to schools."

This year, the project's sixth, will see about 100 projects taking place across Ontario. It's the first year Who is Nobody? has gone beyond Toronto and York Region and it's now in 14 boards across the province.

Ms Clark said she hopes school boards will soon take it on en masse but, in the meantime, local schools and Rotary groups have helped by buying the kits. The Printing House has also helped by donating materials.

Venture Park Public School teacher Wendy Herman can't wait to break the little guy out of his box.

"Nobody is up and running in my classroom. I am going to have the first presentation today and the kids are ultra excited," she said last week.

Angelica Karchevskaya, a Grade 3 teacher at Beverly Acres Public School, said her students jockeyed to see who would take the doll home first.

Already three children have taken Nobody, doing everything from learning about the Ontario Humane Society to teaching little children ice skating.

"They can see that by doing something for others they can help themselves," she said.

Moreover, the fact they have to write in Nobody's scrapbook and do an oral presentation is helping their literacy skills and attitudes.

"They all want to take it and create a mascot and create somebody from Nobody," she said.



Thornhill Public School teachers Michelle Fermont and Sumona Sanyal show off "Nobody", a new tool to teach students literacy and character education.

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