

Trinity College School students build smiles, one playground at a time

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TCS students raise funds to build playground in Afghanistan

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PORT HOPE -- Kids in Afghanistan will soon get to experience the simple joy of play, thanks to a resourceful group of Trinity College School (TCS) students.

Dec. 14 to 17 marked the inaugural 'Week without Walls' at TCS, an opportunity for the 450 Grade 9-12 students, plus 90 staff members, to venture out beyond the school's historic walls to lend a helping hand and connect with the greater community through a variety of service activities.

Students headed out to one of 35 sites, both local and farther afield in the county, to Peterborough, Durham Region and Toronto to volunteer in schools, animal shelters, nursing homes and food banks, just to mention a few. And one student-led initiative extended its community service reach half-way across the world to the war-torn nation of Afghanistan, to help provide playground equipment for children caught in the midst of conflict.

During 'gym-a-thon', 65 students participated in three non-stop afternoons of sporting activities ranging from water polo, basketball and floor hockey, to ping pong and squash. The students pledged to raise a minimum \$100 each with a goal of \$6,000, enough to build a playground for a school in Afghanistan, but in the final tally, the students raised \$7,006.92. This unique fundraiser was the brainchild of Grade 9 student Will Langford, 14, of Port Hope. Will's aunt is the director of the B.C.-based charitable foundation Playground Builders. Since 2007, the foundation has built close to 50 playgrounds for children in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Palestine Territories to "put smiles on the faces of children and build a better future, one playground at a time."

The project struck a chord with Will and when he shared the information with fellow classmate Cal Quantrill, 14, also of Port Hope, the idea blossomed into an action plan. With the help of TCS site leader Cyndi Langford the boys put together a schedule of sporting activities and over the week, they watched the fruits of their hard work come to fruition.

"For a lot of these (Afghan) kids, the only place they have to play in is in the wreck of a blown-up fighter jet," Will said. "I was really moved by that. We all know about Afghanistan, but what about the kids?"

Cal added having a safe place to play is an important part of childhood.

"In Junior School, the main thing we looked forward to was recess," Cal noted, with a grin. "I've got a feeling a lot of these kids (in Afghanistan) haven't be doing a lot of playing over the last couple of years."

The students also videotaped the gym-a-thon and will send cards to the Afghan children, to show them that Canadian youth really care. Ms. Langford added the money raised will build one playground complete with all the requisite equipment, including slides, swings, teeter-totters and monkey bars. The play yard will be put up by locals to instill a feeling of ownership and pride in the completed project. It will be fenced-in and also serve as a gathering place for kids and their parents, a dedicated place of play, she added.

Week Without Walls is the first of its stripe among Canadian schools, although Service Learning Director Kim Vojnov conducted a similar exercise in Manila, noted Ms. Langford.

It is the school's goal to spread awareness among students, "that there's a world outside this school," she said, adding the school stresses the importance of giving back, especially at Christmas.

"TCS students are tomorrow's leaders and giving back is an important part of life," she said. "We hope the great feelings they get when serving others will burn beyond their years at TCS and continue through adulthood."