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We Day makes impression at local school

Muriel Martin students learn about making a difference in the world

By: Scott Hayes

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SHARING INFO – Pearse Schoenberger (right) and Thomas Gibson (left, blue shirt) discussing ISTAR, the U of A's Institute for Stuttering Treatment and Research with fellow students from Muriel Martin Elementary School.

SCOTT HAYES/St. Albert Gazette

This Wednesday turned into 'We' Day when an international humanitarian movement raised the roof at a Deer Ridge elementary school.

Muriel Martin hosted a mini We Day event that started with a rocking morning assembly for a grander purpose.

"Mini We Day is inspired by Free the Children's We Day that they've been hosting around Canada for the last few years," explained teacher organizer Jody Bialowas, adding that the school has taken trips to We Days in Calgary and Vancouver in recent years.

"It's all about inspiring youth to go out and make a difference in the world."

When asked how favourably the kids respond to the messages and the inspiration, she replied, "Tenfold."

The school hosted some special guests for the occasion. Local rockers Tupelo Honey as well as Alberta singer Tenille performed a set telling the 500-plus students to Play It Forward, the name of her tour of schools across the country. At the end of the performance, she spoke about how the kids could make a difference in the world.

"We try to leave the kids with three examples of how they can go out into the world and play it forward," she explained, saying that giving soccer balls to children in financially struggling countries, or creating music or hockey based fundraisers for worthwhile causes. She added that generosity could even be the smallest of gestures.

"It's simple to just smile and be kind to someone in your class that you don't usually talk to. Maybe they need a friend and maybe that friend is you. We really want to encourage them to just go out and spread that kindness no matter what impact it might have. It matters and it does make the world a better place."

Her performance and its message to the youthful audience were as striking as the fact that most of the kids were wearing pink in support of an anti-bullying movement.

We Day is an educational event intended to promote thoughts of increasing concern with issues that affect the communities at large, both locally and globally. After the lunch break, a group of Grade 6 students set up an NGO fair to demonstrate their interests in various charities and social service groups.

The fair represented many well-known organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, Second Chance Animal Rescue Society and the Youth Empowerment and Support Services.

There were also some lesser-known, esoteric groups that their student representatives spoke with much enthusiasm and fervour about. With plates of treats to encourage attention, Jacob Herman was thrilled to speak about the Hervey Foundation for Cats, a no-kill cat sanctuary and shelter based out of Stony Plain.

Herman said he loves cats and can't stand it when they are mistreated. The foundation takes in strays and abused cats and gives them a loving home.

"They go walking around on the street, rescue the cats, bring them back to the shelter and give them medical care. Eventually, they put them up for (adoption)," he said.

The Hervey Foundation also works to educate the public to have compassion and respect for all animals. People can learn more about the organization by calling 780-963-4933 or by visiting www.herveycats.com (<http://www.herveycats.com>) . Students Thomas Gibson and Pearse Schoenberger had a booth devoted to the Institute for Stuttering Treatment and Research, based out of the University of Alberta's faculty of rehabilitation medicine.

Their appreciation for ISTAR's services were for vastly different reasons. As a younger boy, Schoenberger stuttered so much that teacher Jody Bialowas said he hardly spoke. Now he speaks clearly, confidently and with eloquence.

"ISTAR is a non-profit organization created by Dr. Einer Boberg. In its early stages it only treated adults, not children," Schoenberger said.

Its clients now range in age from three to 82, says its website at www.istar.ualberta.ca (<http://www.istar.ualberta.ca>) .

"They help people by playing games," he continued. "I really want people to know about this because really nobody does. I want people to be aware that there's places out there that can help people."

Gibson put in his two cents.

"To me, I'm thankful to ISTAR at making him talk so I can actually have some conversations with my friend!" he jibed, offering Schoenberger a warm hug at the same time.

To learn more about We Day, visit www.weday.com (<http://www.weday.com>) .
