

Students come together to help Australian wildlife following bushfires



Aurora students came together last week to make a lasting difference for wildlife left devastated by devastating ongoing bushfires in Australia ? one tasty morsel at a time.

Images of the inferno ravaging the continent have gripped the world and recently captured the attention of primary students at Aurora's Lighthouse Learning and Development Centre, a private school for children with Autism located on Old Yonge Street.

Beginning last Wednesday, January 15, continuing through Friday, January 17, the students opened their doors to the community, offering dozens of different varieties of cookies, cakes and squares, some baked in-house and by the Lighthouse parent community, and some donated from local bakeries, raising hundreds of dollars for the Steve Irwin Foundation, benefiting the Australia Zoo.

?In our classroom, we're always focusing on kindness and helping others,? says teacher Megan Jeanes. ?As well, we have been talking about animals in our science and non-fiction unit, so it kind of met together at a perfect time with what is going on in Australia. I thought it was a great opportunity to show that we can be helpful to others, not only in our own community, but to make an impact globally.?

When The Auroran visited Lighthouse before classes began Thursday morning, the place was buzzing as students, parents and teachers picked out their sweets as students collected money for the baked goods from a stand decorated with images of wildlife directly impacted by the bushfires. Each dollar received was carefully placed into a big glass jar emblazoned with ?Koala Funds? and an image of the marsupial.

In selecting images, Ms. Jeanes says she shied away from

some of the more graphic photos emerging from the environmental disaster, but did not shy away from giving students a real picture of the devastating situation.

‘We have talked about the fires and how that has affected their homes and the animals themselves,’ she said. ‘It is a bit of a sensitive topic to kind of dance around, but we have been giving them the truth. The students have really tried to get a sense that there is someone who needs their help. Looking at the pictures of koalas, kangaroos and different animals in their homes and looking at what the fires have done to their homes, it really drives home how massive the damage has been.’

When they were looking at ways to make a positive difference, the class decided a bake sale was the best way to rally the community, involving not just students and teachers in the planning process, but the entire Lighthouse family as well.

Ms. Jeanes says it was ‘all hands on deck’ to make it happen and everyone involved ‘baked tirelessly’ before they opened up their doors last week and, in the process, raising funds for the Steve Irwin Foundation's Wildlife Warriors was just as important as driving home to students the importance of kindness.

‘The thing that has really resonated with our students is there is a place in the world that is in danger right now, where their homes are being taken away from them, and it is their duty as a kind person to offer their help in any way they can,’ says Ms. Jeanes. ‘That is something we try to foster in the classroom, child to child, so I think for them to see what they can do globally is important.’

‘So often, and I am guilty of it too, when you're thinking about just one person you think you can't have a huge impact, but coming together as a school, with this bake sale, it really shows that we can make a difference. I am really proud of all of us and proud of the students, the work they have put in, and how much money they have raised.’

For more information on The Steve Irwin Foundation, the Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors, and how you can help, visit australiazoo.com.au.

By Brock Weir