

St. Max students spread holiday warmth to homeless women and youth



By Brock Weir

St. Maximilian Kolbe students bundled up against the elements on this past snowy Monday, heading out on a mission ? helping homeless youth and women in Toronto bundle up, as well.

With just a few days to go until Christmas, the students loaded up a bus, laden down with numerous bags of clothing, boxes of food, and much more, all benefiting Covenant House.

It was the culminating project for students in the Grade 12 Challenge & Change class, but it was a transformative experience for participating kids.

?I didn't know there were that many homeless youth, to be honest,? said Christian Zeyan. ?I always knew that some had run away, but I assumed they eventually came back or found their way to family. It is crazy to know there are shelters dedicated just to homeless youth and not women or men. It was also interesting [when we researched the needs] that it wasn't just physical needs like food, water and shelter.?

With this being the Christmas Season, included on the list were a few extra trifles, such as chocolates, to help spread the festive cheer, along with the essentials like socks, shoes and toiletries.

But, job number one was spreading the word about their mission and how the St. Max community could help.

?Through social media, talking to students in the cafeteria and making announcements, we got the word out we were collecting for Covenant House,? said Cassie Dalesio. ?It is a cause really close to our hearts because they are youth just like us. We got so many donations that we split it up and now we're taking it to a women's shelter too. Through the efforts of just talking to students and making them know why we're doing it, we got a lot of donations and we're really grateful.?

One of the most useful channels in getting the word out, they found, was Instagram, a social media platform used by most of the student body as well as the faculty, including Principal Melton Moyo, who used his own feed to spread word on the initiative.

Finally, when all was counted and sorted by the start of the week, they were ready to roll.

?This year, we actually get to give things to people on the streets, and I am really excited to be able to give something directly to someone ? one on one,? shared Jacqueline Reilly.

The mission of the Challenge & Change course is to inspire students to ?do justice and do better in the world,? said teacher Vanessa Panetta.

?I was completely overwhelmed with how fantastic they did,? said Ms. Panetta. ?There is an overabundance of different varieties of donations and they really surpassed my expectations and did great. I think the most important thing [they see through this] is that as blessed as they are to be in the community there are those, especially at this time of year, who are less fortunate and something so small that might be irrelevant [to the students] can be so much more to everyone else.?