

Don't overlook milk bags, say Lester B's Eco students



By Brock Weir

Chances are over the course of the last week, you probably threw out a milk bag or two.

But, students at Lester B. Pearson Public School urge you to give the humble milk bag a second look and consider the possibilities before tossing the next one in the trash.

Members of the school's Eco Club are hard at work cutting, tying and weaving what is usually just one man's trash and using handmade looms to create treasures for third world countries.

"We are making mattresses out of milk bags to send to third world countries because some countries don't have anything to sleep on and they are sleeping on the ground right now," says Grade 5 student Toni Adebayl. "By making these mattresses, we are helping them and helping the environment by recycling."

A key member of Lester B's Eco Club is Evan Lehrvass. A Grade 7 student, he saw the school's Eco Club dwindle in membership over time to the point where it simply fizzled out. Working with teachers, and drafting in his fellow Grade 7 student Curtis Maier, they set about reconstituting the club to make an impact on the world around them.

"It is very important to have an Eco Club because this is a big building and a lot of trash is thrown out," explains Curtis. "We try and help reduce the trash."

When teacher, and club facilitator, Wendy Dicker saw a video on an initiative with people cutting up milk bags to weave them into mats and other useful products, it was a concept the Eco Club jumped on.

"We thought we should do that too because milk bags are a big part of waste and they can't be recycled," says Evan. "We thought we could help reduce waste and help people in need if we did this."

Adds Alexandra Mumford, Grade 3: "Some people think it doesn't really matter that the milk bags stay in landfills for over 20 years."

This is a message Ms. Dicker has tried to instill in Eco Club members.

?Last year, a couple of the girls came to me with the idea of milk mats and collecting milk bags,? explains Ms. Dicker. ?We collected them only, but this year I wanted to take it a step further and we created the looms. We had a parent create the large looms and some of the kids made the smaller looms with my assistance. Now, we collect the bags, cut the bags, loop the bags and loom the bags.?

When mats and mattresses are finished, Ms. Dicker bundles them up and takes them to Milk Bags Unlimited in Kleinburg where they are distributed to the developing world.

?They are great for the environment, they are waterproof and they last for 20 years,? she says. ?Evan is very passionate about the environment and we knew these milk bags would stay in landfills for many, many years. Given that there is another purpose for them, why not put them to good use??

At the end of the day, in addition to making a worthy contribution to those in need, this is all about awareness, Ms. Dicker adds.

?We [pitched this] at our Character Matters assembly so we educated the entire school in what we were doing. A lot of the kids just brought the milk bags in and didn't know what they were for. Their awareness is getting better because of initiatives like this. I think the kids really understand that these will stay [in landfills] for many, many years, collecting in a dump when they can be put to good use. I truly believe it increases the level of consciousness to think twice about what you're going to use and what you're going to put in the garbage rather than the Blue Box or Green Bin.?

But, let's have Toni sum it up:

?People think the Club is going to be boring and we're going to go from class to class checking garbage, but if you have something like this and you are doing it for a good cause, it is really fun and also really exciting. Don't overlook milk bags!?