

Free The Children Club not content to rest on their laurels ? or their trash



By Brock Weir

After collecting 10 tonnes of electronic waste last month, students in Cardinal Carter's Free the Children club helped take a lot of weight off the shoulders of local residents, as their garages became piled higher and higher in obsolete electronics.

Those who brought in their old computers, TVs and VCRs, gained some much-needed elbow room, the students collected a record amount of waste, and earned over \$1,400 for Rose of Sharon and laptop programs for Aboriginal students in Northern Ontario in the process. But, they're not content to sit back and bask in the glory of a hard-earned record. It is merely driving them to look for ways to do more.

‘A few of us are going to Kenya next month and, personally, I am going to take ideas from there and come right back and see how we can start supporting those communities,’ said Maha Khawaja, a Grade 11 student who will be among the leaders of the club in September. ‘I am sure we are going to stumble across some things we have never done before, but we do like this e-waste thing we have going!’

‘We are going to be building a school there, so I am buying all my construction gear, steel-toed boots, a hat with a flashlight and things like that. In terms of mentally preparing myself for what we are going to see, I am more excited than anything because I have been fundraising and just thinking about all these kids in these countries for so many years now, I finally get to see it.’

Although this year's fundraiser put more of a focus on local issues, many international charities have benefited from initiatives organized by the school's Free The Children club, particularly the construction of a school in Baarind, India.

Free the Children is a very active club within the Cardinal Carter community and, as they looked on at last Wednesday's cheque presentation for all their hard work, Grade Nine student who had their first taste of the club this year were eager to try out new ideas and initiatives to grow the club in the next school year.

Many came into the club inspired by the work of the national founders Craig and Mark Kielburger. Seeing the impact they had throughout the world with Free the Children, they wanted to be a part of the change.

‘I like the idea of really helping children around the world in our community, in our country because we are so fortunate with what we have and I just want to make sure other people have the same opportunities we do,’ said Anastasia Afanasseiva.

Adds Alexander Jacobs: ‘Ever since Grade 8 when they introduced this at my old school, I thought the idea was awesome. Once I saw it in high school, I wanted to join and I haven't looked back. There are just so many great causes that we have contributed to.’

This year, they were happy to be introduced to Rose of Sharon that have an impact so close to home. Learning more about the organization that provides support to single mothers in Northern York Region, they said, gave them some perspective and showed how people in unfortunate circumstances can be marginalized or misunderstood within the community.

Additional initiatives the students plan to mull over the summer is a new program floated by student Charles Troy to expand the initiative to collecting used bicycles for kids in developing countries in order to make the journey to collect fresh water a little bit less arduous, as well as new marketing campaigns to ensure the e-waste collection record is theirs for years to come.

The e-waste was ultimately collected by ARTEX, in conjunction with the Ontario Electronics Stewardship Program. For Melanie Wild of the Stewardship Program, Cardinal Carter's success with e-waste can serve as a case study on a much wider scale.

?You have done something great for the environment to ensure that substances haven't gone into landfills and you have recaptured things to go back in production like cooper and aluminum, you have earned money doing it and now that money is going to go to your favourite charities that are going to have an effect of positive change in other environments.?