

Students help kids facing challenges feed their creative souls



By Brock Weir

Carter Eby knows his late sister Haddan is beaming with gratitude.

As a Grade 10 student a couple of years ago in Pickering College's Global Leadership Program, he initially shied away from nominating the Haddan Eby Endowment Fund for a student-led fundraising initiative. He didn't feel putting forward the charity set up in his sister's name to benefit kids battling childhood cancer was appropriate at that time, says his mother, Kim.

This year, however, Pickering's Grade 10 students took up the challenge, securing \$2,000 for the fund, which benefits Camp Oochigeas, a camp tailored for kids facing battles similar to Haddan.

‘I feel very proud as a brother for Haddan because I know this is something she would feel grateful for,’ says Carter. ‘She would be very proud of all of us right now, being able to keep her legacy going at Camp Ooch, and in our community as well.’

Over the course of each year, Pickering College staff are able to opt into a program deducting each paycheque by an amount of their choosing. By term's end, the pooled money goes toward a particular cause. Staff this year decided to put their money behind the students and, at the same time, enable them to learn more about charities and non-profits.

Enter the Pickering College Philanthropy Challenge.

‘Students were in groups of three and they were all competing for this prize money,’ explains student Lexi Giorgi. ‘First place got \$2,000, second place got \$500, and the third got \$250. We all chose an organization we thought would be a great recipient for this money and when we did our research and pitched why our organization would be in need of money, the Haddan Eby Foundation and Camp Ooch won the pitch.’

The deeper the students delved into the work of the Haddan Eby Endowment Fund and Camp Ooch, the deeper they knew it was the cause they had to boost.

Their emotion for the cause carried over into their work, they say, particularly as hits so close to home for the Pickering College community.

‘It is something really close to home with having Carter here at the school and having the family part of the school,’ says student Samuel Correa. ‘It was eye-opening for me.’

One particular eye-opener for the students, they agree, is the statistic of how many kids are diagnosed with childhood cancer each day. By the time fellow student Harper James was through the middle of her part of the presentation, they illustrated 43 kids faced a diagnosis in just that short window.

‘Choosing Camp Ooch and the Haddan Eby Foundation really inspired us to volunteer later on and put out the word that, if we know someone, Camp Ooch is there for them and they can possibly go there or even volunteer,’ says Harper. ‘It is just something special for the kids to give them a place where they feel at home.’

This was a verdict teacher Julia Hunt says makes exercises like these all worthwhile.

‘One of the questions students were really attentive to was how to get involved and volunteer,’ says Ms. Hunt. ‘I think the presentation was very moving for the Grade 10 class and you can see a lot of them are trying to figure out how that might fit into their life and how they can have a chance to volunteer.’

Receiving the \$2,000 cheque alongside Camp Ooch's Michelle Afinec was Haddan and Carter's mother, Kim Eby. She said she was grateful that students had the opportunity to learn more about how childhood cancer affects kids and the services places like Camp Ooch can provide. In this case, the camp has earmarked the money to aid in the construction of a new arts and crafts facility in a future camp season.

?It was interesting because when Carter went through [the Global Leadership Program in Grade 10] he didn't feel it was appropriate [to put the fund forward] at that time, so I was really quite honoured they chose it because it wasn't something I was even thinking about,? says Kim. ?When Carter came home and told me, I thought it was lovely because Haddan would be their classmate at this time.?