

Wellington's Wellness Team takes health movement outdoors



The global pandemic has had an impact on everyone's wellbeing, including physical and mental health. Now that they're able to interact face to face once again, the Wellness Team at Wellington Public School has mobilized their community to get back on track and outdoors.

On Wednesday, the school's Wellness Team, alongside the Grade 4 class of teacher Amanda Bonura, were at Elizabeth Hader Park on Timpson Drive to put their principles in action.

Our Wellness Team has been incorporating many different initiatives this year, especially with COVID, just really focusing on student mental health and boosting morale around the school, Ms. Bonura explained. On Friday, we had a school-wide wellness day and after three years of not doing anything with the entire school all together, it was a nice, fresh revisit to the school dynamic in terms of working together, connecting with friends, connecting with nature, and all of the rotations really focused on student wellbeing, and getting mentally and physically active.

One of the stations was making pinecone bird feeders using a few simple ingredients and, just a few days after the Wellness event, the team and the class were at the park, which the school adopted in 2018, to place the feeders on trees they planted the spring before the pandemic hit.

Our student leaders used pinecones and birdseed and it was nice for them to work with their peers in a stress-free environment, said Ms. Bonura. We had some calming music playing and students were really able to connect with each other and with nature.

Spending time in nature helps your wellness a lot, said student leader Nargol Azimi. Taking time away from screens and giving time for yourself, your own thoughts, your own ideas, and really just reconnecting with yourself.

Added fellow leader Stella Shel: It's also appreciating the world we're in and [the fact that] not everything is about school and video games. It can really help you reflect.

Over the last two-and-a-half years, this time for reflection has been very important for students.

The teacher says she has "definitely seen some negatives" in terms of the social impacts of COVID amongst students.

"They haven't been able to play with their peers at recess because we've been cohorted and they haven't had those same opportunities to connect with their peers the way they would have in the past with social distancing, not having groups, and doing more independent work. Now, as we're starting to open up and we're allowed to now get together and connect with one another, Wellness Day was a huge kick-off to that, to have the entire school together rotating through.

"It wasn't a huge group, but they were still able to connect with peers they wouldn't typically see and just build on those friendships and those social relationships, which is a huge, huge aspect in supporting mental health."

Wednesday's visit to Elizabeth Hader Park wasn't just the culmination of their Wellness Day activities as the school year draws to a close, but it was also a chance to renew their school's commitment to the green space.

They're regularly on site to help clean up litter and to keep an eye out for any acts of vandalism, reporting things to who they should be reported to when needed.

"This has been a multi-year plan and commitment to Elizabeth Hader Park, which is why I thought it would be such a nice tie-in to revisit the trees we planted years ago, see how they're doing, see how we can continue to preserve the environment, not just for ourselves but for the animals and habitat around us," she said. "With our bird feeders, we're giving ourselves more opportunities to connect with nature, being mindful, intentional, and I think it was really important to have students create something for students to make it even more meaningful."

By Brock Weir
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