



Never underestimate the power of those with little hands and a young mind. They can do some amazing work.

Shovelling driveways, collecting food donations for the North Bay Food Bank and crocheting scarfs for the Warming Centre are just a few of the ways students at W.J. Fricker School are giving back to their community.

TELUS and Free The Children have launched Give Where You Live campaign.

Speakers are traveling across the country talking and empowering students to identify social issues and take action on them to make positive change in their community.

The message was driven home to more than 300 elementary students from W.J Fricker and Vincent Massey Public Schools Tuesday morning.

Free the Children speakers Alex Dymont and O'Neil Gaudet used humour to help send a strong message about the importance of giving back, standing up and speaking out against bullying and mental health awareness.

"I want you to know that no matter how old you are you can make a difference," Dymont said. "Everyone has something they can give."

She also reminded students that it feels good to give back.

"Instead of spreading hate, spread love. Giving and helping others will make you happy," Dymont said.

"From the second you wake-up you start making decisions. You have the choice to stand-up for someone being bullied or use appropriate language, but the feeling you get when you do something that benefits others is great."

Zenna Hilliard and Holly Haines got the message loud and clear.

The two Grade 7 students are looking to expand their volunteer work to assist other communities.

"Volunteering makes me feel good. I want to do it again and again," Zenna said following the presentation.

"You learn how to help others and you're doing it without being paid or asked."

Zenna said she has spent time volunteering at the North Bay and District Humane Society as part of the Fricker Gives Back.

Holly has also been bit by the volunteer bug.

"We helped raise money for a school (in a third-world country), now I would like to help build it," she said. "I want to get my hands dirty and help others."

Holly said it's important for young people to just be themselves.

Bruce Downey, coordinator for the Me to We program at the Near North District School Board, said education must inspire kids, teachers and principals.

He said the Free the Children campaigns, which is an extension of Me to We, is curriculum based and focuses on topics like bullying, misconceptions about volunteering and ideas to help students make a difference in their daily lives.

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