

# 'G is for Grandfriends'

RAY SHEPHERD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



'It's our privilege to bring them joy.  
They smile, I smile.  
Your happiness is our happiness.'

June 14th dawned bright and sunny, a perfect day for the Golden Star Award presentation at Ray Shepherd Elementary School in Surrey. The winning program, 'G is for Grandfriends', was selected for fostering outstanding mutual learning and respect between seniors and K, Grade 1, 3, and 4 students.

A beautiful photo album with comments written by the students documented the interactions between sixty- three children and three groups of twenty residents of the Evergreen Baptist Campus of Care. Once a month during the school year, each class visited its own group of seniors, some living with dementia, others in assisted living. Through the photos and student writing it was evident that the children gained lifelong attributes: self-esteem, self-regulation, active listening, manners, communication (verbal and non-verbal), cooperation, compassion, competence, acceptance, inclusion, belonging, self-worth, gratitude, flexibility, patience, problem solving and empathy. Some seniors became involved with the kids in a way they didn't for any other visitors or activities.

The children and seniors played lots of games, shared crafts and read books together. The seniors enjoyed sharing their experiences with the students, who in turn learned of their histories and gained an understanding of some of the limitations of their grand friends. As one student said, 'I feel happy because I get to meet someone

who was living in the 1900's.' Another added, 'It's our privilege to bring them joy. They smile, I smile. Your happiness is our happiness.'

To celebrate the Golden Star Award, the entire school population assembled in the gymnasium along with seniors, teachers, parents and guests. Adding to the festivities, the school band performed its first concert in honour of the occasion. Some individual students spoke about the joy they experienced when visiting their special grandfriends. The student testimonials were heartfelt, sometimes humorous, and were received with enthusiastic applause from the seniors and audience. The bonds forged between students and seniors were evident. The words of one student, 'It doesn't matter how old you are, you can still have fun together', spoke to the benefits of intergenerational programming.

Excellence in Public Education Committee Members Charan Gill and Caroline Malm were delighted to participate in the celebrations. Teachers Ellen Petersson, Colleen Siple and Lisa Tome received the Golden Star Award trophy and a cheque for \$1,500 from the BCRTA. Next year's program will be enriched by the monies and students and their grandfriends will be the beneficiaries. In the end, our communities will be strengthened.

*Caroline Malm is a BCRTA director.*