



The Rose Quartz Crystal end-of-meeting EDAS club debrief protocol and heartfelt share

EVERYBODY DESERVES A SMILE

by

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SD 71

It's almost 5:00 pm when students in the École Puntledge Park Elementary library gather in a circle around a pink salt crystal. A student stands, takes the crystal in his hand and hefts it as he makes a connection to that day's guest speaker. He replaces the crystal on the ground and another student stands, picks it up and shares her thinking. The gesture is repeated until almost every student has chosen to speak. Many share sensitive personal information. Most express feelings of gratitude. Some break down in tears and are comforted by their peers.

The students are members of Puntledge Park's Everybody Deserves a Smile (EDAS) club in Courtenay. An initiative of French Immersion teacher Chantal Stefan, EDAS works with school and community volunteers to reach out at holiday time to people experiencing homelessness. The EDAS club invites students in Grade 7 to coordinate and package donations that pour in from the community and local businesses—woolen socks, toques, gloves and scarves, soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and cellophane bags of lovingly decorated

"When I was the Principal of Ecole Puntledge Park Elementary School, I got to witness firsthand just how powerful of an impact EDAS had on students, staff, and parents. The messaging around empathy, compassion, kindness, and caring was incredible. Shedding a light on the plight of the homeless in our own community and around the province was a lesson the students will never forget. I watched students transform their image of homeless people and then take action to do something impactful for them. EDAS is the epitome of hands on, real life learning that leads to a life-long attitude of helping others. For many students, it was the highlight of their elementary years."

Geoff Manning

Assistant Superintendent

SD71 Comox Valley Schools

"EDAS has become part of the fabric and the values of the school and one the key reasons why Puntledge is very much known as a School with a Heart. The project has set an overall tone of kindness, caring, and compassion in our entire school community. Of course, a project of this magnitude incorporates much more than the social/emotional pieces, it provides an authentic learning experience for some of our grade 7 students to show their inspiration, their leadership, their commitment, and their involvement. The EDAS project allows our students to develop their core competencies in a most meaningful way."

As a proud School Principal, I can confirm that the lasting and provocative impact of the rich learning experience that is EDAS has left an indelible mark on our students and future leaders. It is most definitely not surface learning, but rather deep service learning."

Stephane LeBlanc

Principal / Directeur

École Puntledge Park Elementary School

holiday sugar cookies. EDAS club members also meet with guest speakers each week: homelessness advocates, addiction and substance abuse counsellors, church leaders, and public relations experts. The speakers aim to help students challenge the stigma and myths surrounding addiction and homelessness, while showing them how to become advocates for social justice in their communities. These are tough topics for pre-teens to take in stride, and the salt crystal ceremony allows them to debrief in a supported atmosphere where all voices are welcomed, and mutual support and trust are guaranteed.

Since its inception in 2003, the EDAS project has provided more than 21,000 holiday care packages to homeless shelters, soup kitchens, library programs, low-income housing, support agencies, and those on the streets. EDAS is a heartfelt endeavour that takes an entire school community to organize. Classroom teachers lead students in hand-painting gift bags, and penning holiday cards with genuine messages of caring and hope. Home Economic classrooms and local bakeries bake and decorate thousands of cookies in their kitchens, using a time-honoured recipe from Stefan's childhood. EDAS club members collect and count mountains of community and business donations. As the winter holiday season approaches, students lead a packaging day in the school gymnasium where elementary school children carefully select items for their handmade gift bags while local musicians play Christmas carols and children's songs to create a festive and joyous atmosphere. At the end of the day, the entire school community gathers in the gym to witness the splendor of thousands of gift bags ready to share with those in need.

The project takes up huge swaths of time, so Stefan and her team of EDAS leads – locally, and across Vancouver Island and beyond – have been deliberate in connecting each aspect of EDAS to the BC Curriculum. Primary and intermediate core competency mats link the project to British Columbia's Communication, Thinking and Personal/Social proficiencies. Big Ideas from the Art, English, Social Studies and Career Education curricula figure strongly in all stages of the project.



Grade 1 French Immersion love for our homeless population



A local homeless man speaks to the students about making wise choices in life



Grade 7 EDAS club student doodle of their servant leadership experience with the EDAS project.

"The EDAS curriculum, and the opportunities that it presents, offers some of the most important and authentic learning that any public school system can offer its students. For students and adults of all ages, the 'service for others' focus builds practical skills, as well as a social and emotional maturity that underscores that one person CAN make a positive difference in the lives of others. Addressing many of the key components of personal and social responsibility, EDAS has given thousands of students the confidence to believe in themselves as change agents, and has created connections with community that take student learning outside of the school walls. It is one of the most humbling and inspirational learning platforms that I have ever experienced as a senior leader in British Columbia!"

Sherry Elwood

Retired Superintendent

SD71 Comox Valley, SD38 Richmond

"To see EDAS in action in a school is truly phenomenal. What EDAS accomplishes goes far beyond the artwork that students complete and the donations of warm clothing they bag up. It teaches to the heart of students in a way that is profound. It gives them life lessons that they can use immediately and into the future. EDAS asks students and staffs to learn how to listen and hear information that may be contrary to their current beliefs, asking them to reconsider what they thought they knew about people's struggles ... The EDAS curriculum is a simple one – easy enough for any teacher to incorporate into their class, but the depth of it is complex. I feel that it is one of the most important curriculum of our times. I encourage everyone to bring EDAS curriculum into their schools, to help make our world a better place."

Jennifer Hedican

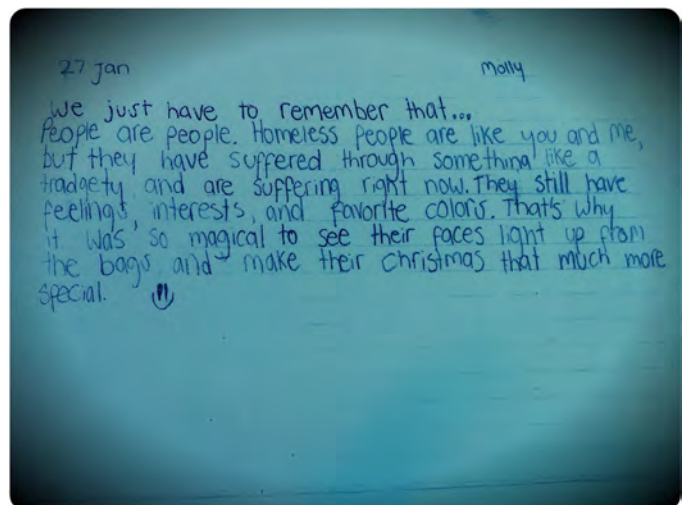
Vice Principal & Outdoor Education Teacher

Huband Park Elementary

Perhaps the greatest impact of the project on students' hearts and minds is felt on delivery day. Piling out of the district minibus at stops across Vancouver Island, students hand out gift bags to people struggling with addiction and homelessness who are eager to share their experiences and offer advice. *Listen to your parents, listen to your teachers. I listened to my friends and look where I am now. Stay in school*, they tell students. *Make good choices. If I had it to do over again, I would have finished school, I wouldn't have tried drugs and alcohol, I wouldn't be in the position I am in now.*

Students realize that no one ever chooses to be homeless, and that many of us are only a few 'life hits' from finding ourselves in that same situation. They develop empathy and compassion for marginalized individuals in our society, bringing us one step closer to the EDAS vision for a more just and inclusive society.

Everybody Deserves a Smile has grown exponentially since Stefan and her friends first placed 88 homemade care packages on garbage bins in the backstreets of downtown Edmonton. The project shines a little holiday light into the lives of individuals experiencing terrible darkness, but above all it impresses upon students – more powerfully than almost any other experience in their school years – the importance of the choices they make today in setting a course for their futures.



Presentation from Molly, grade 7 EDAS club, to the BC Minister of Education, to the SD 71 Board of Education, and at the School District 71 Conference.

THE EDAS PROJECT ACROSS VANCOUVER ISLAND & BEYOND

Annually, as an EDAS team across Vancouver Island and beyond, we hand out to more than 2,000 people living on our streets at Christmas.

Campbell River	Active
Comox Valley	Active
Nanaimo	Active
Port Alberni	Project Runs Every Two Years
Duncan	Project Runs Every Two Years
Powell River	Active
Red Deer, Alberta	Active

Victoria & Vancouver

Care packages are delivered to local shelters in Victoria, and to local shelters and the streets of the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver

Montreal, Quebec

EDAS runs a piece of the project, and partners with La rue des Femmes in Montreal

London, England

EDAS runs a piece of the project, and partners with Refugee Community Kitchen in London, England



Grade 7 EDAS club works to ignite their school community to help the homeless population at Christmas



Grade 7 EDAS club delivers care packages at the Rockbay Landing Shelter in Victoria, BC