

## Golden Star Awards

“Look beyond the shell that encompasses us to the heart within,” says Jeanette King, Grade 3 teacher at Alexander Robinson Elementary School in Maple Ridge. And it is this philosophy that drives the programs that this year received the BCRTA Golden Star Awards. Three programs, singled out from among eighteen outstanding applications, exemplified the richness we looked for in school programs that established intergenerational relationships between students and seniors.

The students in Ms. King’s class visit the seniors of nearby Holyrood Manor every two weeks to chat, read, write, and do arts and crafts together. The exuberance of the students brightens the lives of the seniors, and the strengths of the seniors support and assist the students. On the passing of a “buddy”, one student wrote, “I will miss Bill Irvine. Whenever we left, he would give me a hug, a handshake, and a high five. He helped me with my reading by giving me the first sound.” Compassion, kindness and empathy are developed as students interact with the frail members of society. Over the years the program has involved Manor seniors who refuse to come out of their room except for meals and to see their little buddies with whom interaction widened their world. At the same time, the “ children begin to recognize that the world goes beyond their world of video games and toys as they move from self to others” [King]. While visiting Holyrood Manor, the students saw that their “buddies” were unable to access their own back yard. They generated the idea of installing an automatic door at the Care home, decided to

take matters into their own hands, and raised almost \$5000 for it.

In Penticton and Summerland, high school leadership and at-risk students, with the guidance of Sandra Richardson and Linda Beaven, are learning about the lives and worlds of society’s often “forgotten members”, seniors who have Alzheimer’s or other dementias. After training with a certified clown therapist, students create their own clown characters and then take their “shows” to long-term care facilities. The training process guides students to build trust, confidence, and skills they need to work with Alzheimer patients. While doing this, they unwittingly learn much about themselves, gaining self-esteem and discovering in themselves the gift of helping others. Seniors share the snapshots of their lives before their illness. Jean Kearney, Recreation, Volunteer and Adult Day Program Co-ordinator, observed typical interaction: “One clown engaged an elderly gent who has profound dementia. For over 20 minutes talking about his life’s experiences . . . he shared more with [his clown] than he had with most of the care home staff . . . I saw residents reaching out to touch young faces, stroke the students’ hair and smile. I saw students singing, “You are My Sunshine” with residents and playing a pretend game of baseball with a gentleman who used to love the game. It was very powerful.”

Marjorie Ireton Roach’s class in Victoria’s Strawberry Vale Elementary School regularly visit their adopted grandparents at Berwick House Residence at Royal Oak. Each Grade I

student is paired with a senior. During the interaction, the children develop communication skills, manners, and respectful behavior as well as a caring attitude towards a senior who is not part of their family. They learn to adjust to seniors who have walkers, hearing aids, or require oxygen; and they bring energy, enthusiasm, fun, and joyfulness to brighten the seniors' day. They make gifts for their "Berwick grandparents" and have authentic reasons for writing, sending cards to remind them of their visits, and then reporting on the visits, some that occur even on weekends: " I feel really happy when I see Patricia Harris on spring Brake. I went and visited Patricia Harris with my mommy Daddy and Grandma we went for a toire and then saw Patricia we were really happy when we saw eahether. We went and got som doonenet."

Programs that received the Golden Star Awards this year develop transforming relationships that foster learning, respect, caring, and empathy. In Maple Ridge, a father, not wanting to enter the meeting area where the seniors were, told his son he would wait outside. The student turned to his dad and said, "Don't worry, Dad. I was scared the first time I came to visit, too, but they are just like us on the inside. They are just a bit more wrinkly on the outside."

~JoAnn Lauber, Chair  
Excellence in Public Education Committee



*Sandra Richardson, clowns, BCRTA & Linda Beaven, Summerland co-ordinator*