

# REAL ACTS OF CARING

MUNDY ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - COQUITLAM



When Harriette Chang and a class of grade 4/5 students introduced the concept of *Real Acts of Caring* (RAC) in 2005, they could not have imagined the impact the program would have. For fifteen years, students in the RAC Program have done kind and caring acts for others without expecting anything in return. Since earning a Golden Star Award in 2015, the program has continued to evolve both locally and provincially.

Interacting with seniors has been a particular focus of RAC. Students from grades 4 to 12 have visited seniors' residences to play board games, sing songs, and simply sit and chat. Throughout the pandemic, students have made and sent greeting cards to seniors in care facilities. The cards have brought great joy to seniors who were experiencing loneliness and isolation.

As COVID-19 restrictions continued into a new school year, RAC students realized that they must think outside the box. Thus, the Intergenerational Integrities Program was born. The goal is to build a bridge of positive connections between youth and seniors in BC and Alberta through virtual meetings. In 2021, a focus was students meeting with Korean War Veterans, listening to their stories and building respectful relationships.



Students also connected with a group of seniors who make cloth bags to encourage people to use less plastic. Out of this collaboration grew a RAC initiative called Single Use Plastic Elimination Reinforcement (SUPER). RAC students created inspirational 'green messages' to be placed in over one hundred bags. On Earth Day in April, each RAC student donated a cloth bag with a message.

Throughout the years, the RAC Program has been adopted in many BC school districts. Sixty-six municipal and six provincial proclamations have declared RAC Week which is held in February every year. In 2021, the RAC Week poster designed by a senior was distributed to all school districts, inviting all BC public school students to celebrate RAC Week with Real Acts of "COVID" Caring.

RAC students have acquired empathy, executive functioning skills, emotional development, and presentation, communication and advocacy skills. They also have learned how to reach out to seniors for support and ideas in making positive change. In return, seniors have appreciated the respectful connections made with the younger generation.

Congratulations to Harriette Chang, RAC students, and seniors for finding safe authentic ways to connect and learn from one another during a most challenging time. Kudos! •

**Excellence in Public Education Committee**

# G IS FOR GRANDFRIEND

RAY SHEPHERD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - SURREY



Prior to the pandemic, the “G is for Grandfriend” program developed relationships between the students of *Ray Shepherd Elementary* and seniors from the Evergreen Baptist Seniors’ home and Westminster House, both in Surrey. But as COVID took hold, restrictions closed the doors of seniors’ residences to visitors. Isolation and loneliness ensued; seniors craved outside connection, care, and encouragement to combat these feelings. At the same time, teachers *Lisa Tomé* and *Ellen Petersson* and their students were faced with the challenge of what to do with “G is for Grandfriend”.

Recognizing a need moved the challenge to opportunity as students and their teachers talked about loneliness and ways that they could remain connected. Each month, the grade 3/4 class wrote heartfelt letters, made cards, and sometimes sent gifts and crafts to their assigned Grandfriend. Great love and care went into each activity. Residence staff helped seniors to link with their students through correspondence and other modes of connection. The “G is for Grandfriend” program acquired a different format and relationships remained intact. At holiday times, all Ray Shepherd students participated in schoolwide projects that resulted in beautiful cards for over three hundred seniors.

Then a different opportunity came knocking in a most unexpected way for the K/1 class as they went daily to the forest for math or science. It was here that they met and became friends with Finnigan, an old and very friendly dog, and his 88-year-old owner. This encounter became a regular occurrence as Finnigan and Grandfriend Don began to plan their walk to coincide with students’ activities in the forest. Grandfriend Don is a retired doctor who sensed and encouraged students that needed that extra bit of attention. With the teacher’s approval the class was invited to say their last hello to Finnigan. With understanding and compassion they participated in the cycle of life. Grandfriend Don has continued his walks without Finnigan. Meeting up with the students had become an important part of his life. He knows every child’s name and the students know his favourite things. The Grandfriend-and-class relationship culminated in an 89th birthday party. This intergenerational relationship will be remembered for a lifetime.

Congratulations to Ray Shepherd on winning a Golden Star Award in a most unusual year. •

**Excellence in Public Education Committee**





# TEENS TO SENIORS ART

SENTINEL SECONDARY SCHOOL - WEST VANCOUVER



The BCRTA Excellence in Public Education Committee encourages teachers to enhance the learning experience of students through interacting with seniors. The students acquire leadership skills as they access community resources, and interact with peers and seniors with an emphasis on encouraging art. Their reporting through blogs, newsletters, websites, posters, Instagram, and YouTube prove their industrious and engaging program offers deep connections to over 150 seniors at various care homes. One recent winner exemplifies connections even during this pandemic.

West Vancouver's *Sentinel Secondary* students "craft and talk" group has been active for three years and links to 9-10 care homes with a goal of interconnecting through a variety of crafts and discussions about topics of interest. Writing to their pen pal friends, sharing bags of craft items, and making ornaments, flower craft, and paintings all encourage seniors to try new forms of artistic expression. Sixty-five secondary students formulate the ideas, research and gather supplies, place the art kits into colourful bags tied with a ribbon, and attach a note of cheer for each participant.

The senior recipients express their gratitude for the students' creativity and caring. During this pandemic, visits have been arranged by Zoom, though they will



return to in-person interaction in the future. While the volunteer chats with one or two seniors about their day and their life stories, and they engage on a craft project together, they build intergenerational interactions. Letters of thanks show the seniors' deep appreciation.

The goals of this winning school project are summed up by supporting and educating members on everyday kindness, empathizing and trying to do right 'even when no one is watching or recording it', and learning to collaborate with each other and elders.

The students learn crucial collaboration and communication skills, leadership skills arise from taking the initiative for tasks to make the kits. As the volunteers in this group use their creativity, problem solving skills, critical thinking, and adaptability, they develop empathy for others. The weekly intergenerational Craft Kits Project ensures the real winners are seniors, who benefit through improved mental health and motivation. •



**Excellence in Public Education Committee**

# INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM

THETIS ISLAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - THETIS ISLAND



For the second year in a row, a small one-room school on Thetis Island successfully fulfilled the requirements for the BCRTA Golden Star Award with their intergenerational project.

*Thetis Island Elementary* is a K-7 school, with 20 students. This year, though there were COVID-19 restrictions, they were able to connect with 18 Seniors and Elders through various programs. Living on an Island, the children are very aware of their ocean environment. In the fall, with the assistance of three seniors--two of them divers--the children were able to clean up both the near ocean floor and the shoreline. They were shocked by the amount of debris and garbage they collected.

An elder from the neighbouring First Nations island of Penelakut visited the school, sharing stories about Residential schools, and teaching the children some words in the Hul'qumi'num language.

In November, the grade 2-7 students, entered the Royal Canadian Legion Poster and Literary Contests and collectively were awarded \$750 in prize money!

A couple of Zoom meetings brought Lynn Davies, a Canadian Poet, to the classroom, where she shared her "riddle poems". On the second meeting, the children shared their "riddle poems" with her. She has posted some of them on her website.

Because the seniors of Thetis Island have not been able to visit the school in person, all students have been



writing pen pal letters to them since February. The seniors very much enjoy getting and replying to these letters.

The students have an ongoing project of raising mason bees. A senior, Susan Sarioglu, visited to teach the students about the mason bees hatching process, and about how amazing they are as pollinators. The children also have their own succulent garden with help from the community Elders who deliver manure and succulent plants.

In the upcoming months, the children will have their annual beach walk with elder Marine Biologist, Andy Lamb. There is also a pending visit from Florence James, the elder from Penelakut, when the children will share their new found skills in the Hul'qumi'num language and listen to stories and songs.

The 20 students have learned much during this difficult year: living in harmony with nature, understanding their environment, empathy with their Island seniors, and developing a relationship with their First Nations neighbours. We trust they will apply what they have learned to other work that they do now and in the future.

Congratulations to the students and teachers of Thetis Island Elementary!



**Excellence in Public Education Committee**