

School project connects teenagers with seniors



George Hopkins shows a group of students and teacher Sarah Vincent a 100-year-old Kodak Brownie camera. Shortly after this picture was taken, they all pulled out their cell phones to take pictures of it.

Alex Cooper/Revelstoke Times Review

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At Moberly Manor last Wednesday, George Hopkins was busy wowing a group of teenagers. First, he showed them his 50-year-old mechanical calculator.

Then, out came the Kodak Brownie – the 19th century camera that revolutionized photography and made it affordable for the masses. He also had a mechanical level with him.

As he was doing this, all the students (and myself) pulled out their cell phones to take pictures. Even Hopkins had a smart phone that, of course, is equipped with a camera, calculator and level app.

The grade eight students were at Moberly Manor taking part in a program called Bridging the Gap, which aims to address issues of racism, prejudice and stereotypes, “and then develop ways of creating a more inclusive community,” as teacher Sarah Vincent put it.

The program is funded through EmbraceBC, a provincial program that aims to promote multiculturalism and eliminate racism in British Columbia.

In Vincent’s group, the focus is on ageism and eliminating stereotypes teenagers have about seniors and vice-versa. Throughout the program, which started in February and runs to the end of the school year, they have discussed issues surrounding ageism and have spent time with seniors at Moberly Manor.

“I was talking to different seniors in the community and they really feel there’s a widening gap,” said Vincent. “They talk about how they used to know a lot of kids and get together and interact with kids on a regular basis and that just doesn’t happen anymore.

“Now it seems like kids are in school, adults are in the workplace and seniors are in the home.”

When I arrived at Moberly Manor that day, Vincent and several students were sitting at table with Marlene McQuarrie. McQuarrie was showing them a memento from her teenage years – the Penticton Teen Towns constitution she helped craft in the 1940s. The constitution laid out the ground rules for a Teen Town – from the election of a teen mayor and council to the role of the chief of police to membership duties.

I sat down at another table with a few students who were talking to senior Mary Doebert. I asked the students what stereotypes they had of seniors; they said that they’re slow, they’re bad drivers, they’re hard of hearing.

I asked if the experience had changed what they thought. Peyton Donovan said they were finding the stereotypes weren’t true.

Added her friend Sierra Frazier, referring to Doebert: “She’s not slow and she’s a very nice and interesting woman.”

Part of the experience is for students to show that the stereotypes seniors might have of them aren’t true. Vincent said that the students were concerned about the stereotypes seniors had of them. They were also doing the project to show older people in the community who teenagers really are.

“A lot of people think teenagers are bad and we do a lot of bad things like smoke and drink, but some of us are good,” said Frazier.

Doebert, for her part, said she loved kids; she used to work as a librarian and loved dealing with children of all ages. She didn’t harbour any stereotypes about them.



Marlene McQuarrie (in white) shows a group of students a copy of the 1946 Penticton Teen Town Constitution she helped create.

Vincent told me there are several more events planned for the group before the end of the school year. On Wednesday, May 16, there will be another teen-senior get together at Moberly Manor in the afternoon. More seniors are welcome to take part.

On Saturday, June 2, there will be a youth dialogue event at the farmers market in the morning and then at the United Church starting at noon. The goal is to address the issues raised by the project with youth and other community members.

On Friday, June 15, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEEAD), Vincent’s class will be partnering with the Community Response Network for an event with seniors at Moberly Manor. The details are still being worked out.

As well, on Friday, June 1, she is encouraging the community to take part in Canada’s Intergenerational Day. “People can do little things like calling a grandparent or older friend, go for a coffee or to see a movie,” she said. “It’s a baby step in terms of interacting more with different generations.”

Vincent hopes that the project will continue after the school year ends; suggesting activities like inviting seniors into the classroom or visiting the seniors centre on occasion.

“I guess how the program’s going right now, I feel like it’s a first step,” she said. “I feel it’s new to students and seniors.... At the same time I know a lot of seniors interact with students or their grand kids but when we look at the big picture, our community’s not as IG friendly.”

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