

Wellington students take the environment into their own hands at local park



By Brock Weir

Some people might choose to stay indoors when the snow is flying, but students at Wellington Public School had a very important mission to attend to and a few flurries weren't going to stop them.

Grade 3 and Grade 5 students pulled on their snow pants, laced up their boots, and slipped eye-catching green t-shirts over their thick winter coats on Friday and trudged as a group from their school to nearby Elizabeth Hader Park.

Despite the cold, they were ready to put in some elbow grease to make the park greener by the time spring arrives.

Wellington Public School formally adopted the Timpson Drive park at the start of this school year through the Town of Aurora's Adopt a Park program.

Since then, they have taken ownership of the park, regularly clearing up garbage and other debris and keeping a watchful eye on vandalism, saying something when they see something.

"We chose this initiative to help out the environment and do something for the community," said teacher Amanda Bonura, herself bundled up against the March cold, as students ran by with garbage bags they were filling with items as varied as chip wrappers, a beer bottle, and even a baseball that didn't fare so well over these last few wintery months. "Our entire school has adopted the park and we have taken ownership of it, treating it as if it is our own property."

"Each class takes a turn once a week and we come by and clean up any litter or debris we find. We report any vandalism or broken objects to the Town and, in the spring, we will be doing some planting and the kids are super-excited about that."

But, as excited as they are about getting their hands dirty and planting some colourful flowers as soon as the ground thaws, they were equally excited about the task at hand.

"You got to help society clean up," said Brad.

"We can help the environment and make it a better place," agreed Anri.

"It is fun staying outside, hanging out with your friends and just cleaning up," added Carlyn.

When asked why it was important to them, Anri said that the more they help clean up the park, the more they can hang out at the park and not have to worry about trash. They all agreed.

"You know that you're helping the world and it is just fun coming outside for a little bit," she added.

Their key messages?

"Don't put your garbage in the park because it is actually really bad and there are other people and other animals that enjoy coming here," said Anri.

Added Brad: "If your dog does its business, you can help by cleaning it up and not just leaving it on the ground."

They are a group of kids who just like to help out and, in Ms. Bonura's view, if they can show the students they can have an impact well beyond the confines of their school yard, so much the better.

But the kids in the Earth Guardians club are hard at work behind the walls of their Wellington Street West school as well.

"We have eco educators, who are responsible for spreading the message within the school," she explains. "We have four teams - eco auditors - who are the intermediate grades, and they are responsible for going to each class to ensure that garbage is being thrown out properly. We now have composts within our classrooms as well. Some have eco worms that eat up some of our banana peels and apple cores in kindergarten class. We ensure classes are saving energy wherever we can and especially during recess and lunch.

We're usually eating our lunch with the lights off and our eco auditors are ensuring we're doing that. There is a golden eco award

that goes out to the class that has maintained that over a month.

?I think it is important for them to understand they do have an impact and they do have a voice. They have that ability to help and help spread the message. A little action that stems from each and every one of these individuals becomes a huge impact when we all come together and consume the earth because, at the end of the day, this is our home, this is where we live, and we want to conserve it and save it and it is important for them to understand how we can do that.?