

Why NOBODY can be a SOMEBODY

NOBODY IS VERY FAMOUS BECAUSE HE HAS A THEME SONG, AN ORIGIN AND THE POTENTIAL TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, AND ANYONE CAN DO IT IF THEY FOLLOW THE SAME KIND OF JOURNEY

by Jean Woolford

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL if you had a party and NOBODY came? Well, I met a group of children that would be very happy if NOBODY came because in this case, NOBODY is a somebody. Well, not a real person, but very real and very meaningful to a group of students with autism and Aspergers who attend Ruth Thompson Public Middle School in Mississauga.

On the day of my visit to Mr. Louise's class of nine students who are aged 11 to 13, they were asked to tell me about NOBODY by describing some of the activities that NOBODY participated in. The students not only talked to me and showed me pictures but they had written stories as well.

Connor talked about their activities – "When NOBODY came to us this year, I knew things were going to be different. NOBODY showed us to care for the environment and other living things. We helped save the wetlands in the back [of our school] and raised money for the Humane Society for dogs and cats without homes. ...Our class did many other things, like, for example, we planted a garden, learned about bullying and how to stop it and about how much words hurt."

Yusuf was asked to tell me about the Snow Day. Although he was very keen to

tell me and kept pointing to the pictures, he became quite agitated, was flicking his fingers, and rocking on his feet. From across the room, Zachariah brought NOBODY over and said, "I'll help you with your words." Yusuf held onto NOBODY, visibly relaxed, and both students showed me how NOBODY had helped build a snow fort. I was privileged to see the impact of the NOBODY program as it helped young students with autism and Aspergers be aware of the world around them, watch out for each other, share feelings, and want to be a somebody.

For every activity where the student and NOBODY helped a living thing, a story with pictures is put in a scrap-

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book so there is a record of all the great things that the students and NOBODY do. Each student gets to take NOBODY home where they help a living thing, like make cookies to sell for Diabetes or simply teaching their grandparents about what should be recycled in recycling bins. Then, the students write about the experience in the scrapbook and add pictures or drawings.



NOBODY is very important to every student. They hold him, work with him, and give him characteristics that make him a better citizen. Robert wrote, "Our goal is to make NOBODY proud of us and make him a SOMEBODY by helping living things. NOBODY made us help animals in the humane society, help with diabetes research, help the living earth, and donate cans for Food Force Building Day. We are very proud of NOBODY and he is very proud of us!" Robert focuses on pride; in oneself, in building self-esteem, in sharing, in reaching out and becoming engaged. All of these are challenges for individuals on the spectrum, and NOBODY encourages the learning, and the opportunity to practice these attributes.

The "Who is NOBODY?" program is the brainchild of Kelly Clark, a former school teacher. She created this EASY & FLEXIBLE program for Grades 1 to 12 students from Special Needs to Gifted and ESL. It helps young people respect themselves as well as others and care about the world around them. NOBODY, a denim cloth-stuffed doll with no features, arrives at a classroom in a suitcase with the basic material to support the program. NOBODY even has a theme song. From that day on, "everybody" helps the doll develop from being

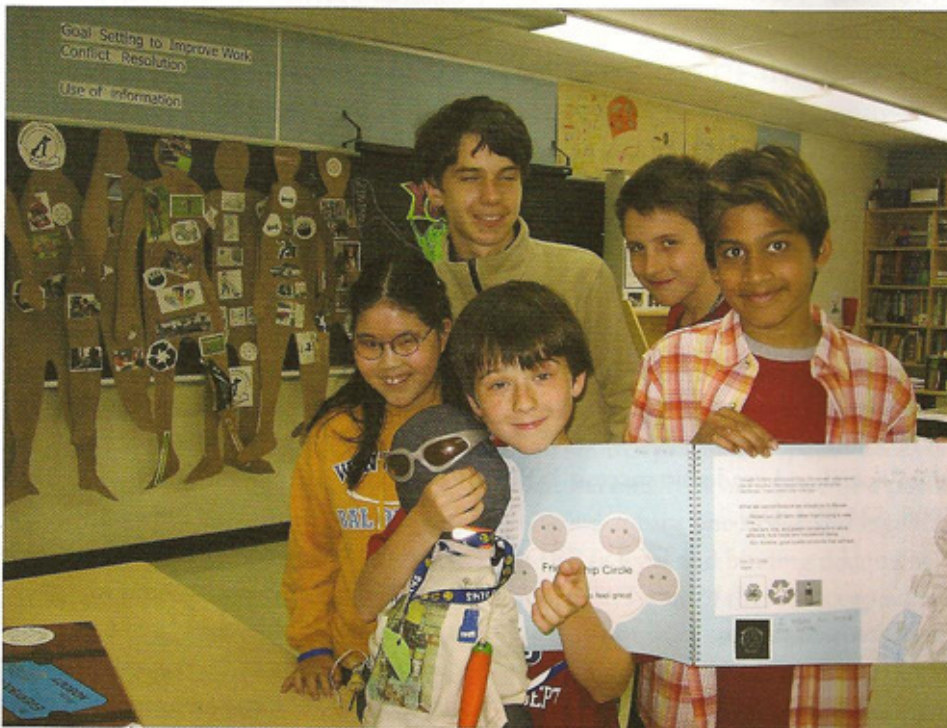
“NOBODY” – a doll with no character – to “somebody” who has lots of character and accomplishments as a result of the students’ actions.

Mr. Louise and the other staff were thrilled to have the Who is NOBODY? program in their class. “From the beginning the kids were immediately drawn to NOBODY. They were intrigued by this blue doll that had appeared in assemblies, in the hallways and on Riptide TV (the weekly school show that celebrates the week’s accomplishments). They found the word-play hilarious. Immediately, jokes began about how “Nobody did their homework” and how they were bringing “Nobody” home. The most incredible thing that started happening was that the children began to really care about NOBODY, something that is typically difficult for children with ASD.

They looked after him and used him as a communication tool to help others in the class. If someone was having a bad day, NOBODY was there to put a smile on their face. The kids took pride in the way they had cared for NOBODY and wanted to share their experiences with everybody who would listen. Implementation of the program was easy, it was really student-led. The students took over and brainstormed ideas about how they could make NOBODY a Somebody and worked together to make it happen. We had no choice but to continue the program this year, because this class wouldn’t be complete without NOBODY.”

The student who described the impact of the program best was Zachariah. “For me, NOBODY is like a friend. If I am feeling sad or worried, I hold it for a while and it helps me calm down. Per-

sonally, I like the idea of the NOBODY project, which really does help show that anyone who feels like a “NOBODY” can learn how to become a “Somebody.” My class, 812, put special items on NOBODY as dedications to our class’ actions to solve problems in places like the community, the world and the environment and as memories of NOBODY’s journey to becoming a Somebody. NOBODY is like a symbol of good and understanding in the world. The more we do activities with NOBODY and teach it how to do things, the more we think about NOBODY. We have shown NOBODY things like caring for the environment, gardening and composting, standing up for yourself, resisting peer pressure and a lot more that makes up only part of NOBODY’s legacy. NOBODY means a lot to me and I believe it will mean a lot to anybody who gets to meet it. I believe a NOBODY should always become a good Somebody, get taught good topics, meet good friends, and even become part of the community.” ■



Clockwise from top: Zachariah, Robert, Yusuf, Eric and Miki

Who is NOBODY?

The NOBODY program is easy to implement for each individual and classroom. At Ruth Thompson Public School, it has been well received and strongly supported by the Principal Cathy Standing, Guidance Counsellor Sheila Macleod and the classroom staff, Serge Louise ASD teacher, Sarah Packer ERF, and Deb MacKenzie ERF. Information about Who is NOBODY? can be found at www.whoisnobody.com.

Used Car Donations to Autism Ontario

Autism Ontario has linked up with End of Life Vehicles (<http://www.1877endoflifevehicles.com>) for a new Charity Car program. The purpose of this affinity program benefits both organizations. Autism Ontario will get \$150 or more for every car recycled by End of Life Vehicles. Spread the message to anyone who has an old car and is thinking of recycling it to contact the Canadian corporate office of End of Life Vehicles, 1216 Sewells Rd., Toronto, ON M1X 1S1. Be sure to mention that you would like your vehicle donation to benefit Autism Ontario.



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