

## Healthy Schools Year-End Story Template

**Date:** June 20, 2013

**School Name:** Walnut Park Elementary

**School District:** 54

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**Tell us about your Healthy Schools Team (i.e. who was on it? How many students? Other teachers? Partners?):**

**Our team consisted of :** Nicole Davey (classroom teacher), Sandy Morris (SEA), Sheylene (senior administrator at the Bulkley Lodge), 23 grade four students, 10 senior friends (residents of the Bulkley Lodge)

**Share Your School Story! Tell us about what happened and how it went!**

In the fall, I began the process of creating a student inquiry with my grade four class. We spent over a month learning about the process of inquiry and comprehensive school health. Students did a “needs assessment” of our school in November and decided on a focus. They wanted to explore the social/ emotional health of our school and its impact on learning. Students came up with the inquiry: “How can we make our school and community happier and how will that impact learning?”

We researched the concept of “happiness” and decided that happiness comes from making other happy, and that when students are happier they learn better. We then made an action plan. We decided to create opportunities to engage in “random acts of kindness” and became a Secret Santa to our school. We gave every member of our school community a small gift or note of gratitude. That was nice, but it didn’t real delve deep into what we wanted to explore.

After Christmas we decided to do something more meaningful in pursuit of our inquiry. We decided to create “The Living History” project. We wanted to bring happiness to a vulnerable part of our community and decided on working with senior citizens at our local assisted living retirement home. For Valentine’s Day, students made “memory boxes”, cards, gifts and baking and brought it the senior’s home. Students spent time getting to know many of the residents. Some residents were ill or suffering from dementia which made students a bit uncomfortable; however, by the end of the afternoon students really enjoyed the experience. We debriefed and talked about sensitivity, compassion and empathy and then planned the rest of our project.

For the next two months, we journeyed to the Bulkley Lodge to meet with one particular senior who became their “senior friend”. They spent time together and the grade four students interviewed their senior friend to get to know their story. The grade four students then wrote their biography.

At the end of the two months, we planned a celebration and invited the families of both the students and the seniors, staff from Walnut Park and the staff of the Bulkley Lodge. The grade four students read their biography out loud and then presented it to

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their senior friend.

Feedback from the seniors, the staff of the Bulkley Lodge, parents and the students was overwhelmingly positive. The grade four students felt they formed authentic friendships with their senior friends and felt very proud and happy that they could bring happiness to another person. There was a positive impact on the larger community as well. Parents, school staff and Bulkley Lodge staff felt that this had a very positive impact on the community, bridging the gap between generations and getting younger people more involved with volunteerism.

In terms of learning, it is hard to definitively show a direct connection between this project and student learning; however, the students' journal writing, discussions and biographies demonstrated some of the most thoughtful work completed that year. This project tapped into student engagement as well as happiness and well-being.

### **Reflections (what worked well, what would you do differently next year?)**

I felt this inquiry was a success and am very proud of the work the students did this year. I think that connecting with the community on an inquiry focusing on health is a meaningful, relevant way to get students to learn about important topics. I think we discovered that making someone else happy leads to one's own happiness, and we also learned the importance of empathy and compassion. I would love to continue this next year. I think bringing in family members of both the students and the senior friends would deepen the project. I also think that we could grow the program by focusing on activities other than the biography. I would love to see the seniors and students share a teaching role with the other. Perhaps the students could teach the seniors about Facebook and other technologies, and the seniors could share one of their passions.

I also wonder how students can connect with other vulnerable members in the community.

**Video:** <http://animoto.com/play/UY1jkYGE3s4h5apbv0cIeg>

**(Pictures below)**

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