

# All-girls for the WIN: Local students inspired to help women in need

Service Day at SMS (St. Margaret's School) was borne of a challenge: last year's Leadership 11 students attempted an initiative to engage the rest of their school in community service. As the second annual event rapidly approaches, they are obviously on to something.

The Grade 11 students sought out causes in the community and coordinated with local non-profits that struck a chord with them. They proceeded to mobilize their peers and teachers to form a task force of around 200 people that dispersed throughout Victoria to clean beaches and clear invasive plant species; to bake for the

homeless and spend time with seniors in care; to collect donations and collaborate with the Victoria Women in Need Cooperative (WIN).

Planned and executed by the young women themselves at every stage, this was a prime example of student-led learning and the SMS motto in action, "Servite in Caritate ~ Service with Love."

Students walked away with concrete skills, and greater awareness about the needs of the community beyond the borders of campus. But after show-and-tell was done, the partnership with WIN was just getting started.

"St. Margaret's School

has been really supportive of our organization for the past few years, and now the students are going above and beyond," says WIN's Executive Director, Clare Yazganoglu. "There is a beautiful alignment between the school and WIN as we continue to support women in our community."

This term, WIN was back at SMS leading Middle Years students in a unit on self-esteem, entitled *Beauty From Within*, teaching the girls to use a critical eye when looking at images of women in the media.

A WIN rep then pitched a Fashion Show project to the Middle Years Leadership classes. The girls were immediately bitten by the idea and set to work brainstorming ways

to get involved. "We really appreciate the enthusiasm and eagerness of the students," says Clare.

Aspects of the project have been woven into the Middle Years Skills classes engaging students in everything from Culinary Arts to upcycling clothing and event production.

Both Skills and Leadership were recently introduced to Grades 5—8 when St. Margaret's launched its new Middle Years program this past autumn (2013).

With fashion show plans well underway, SMS Leadership teacher Donna Holmwood had another brainstorm.

In celebration of International Women's Day, the whole school gathered at a special Assembly to reflect on the struggles still facing many girls and women around the world. Each student was then given a square of fabric which they decorated with messages of hope.

Next, Donna and a team of volunteers will be undertaking another

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St. Margaret's School students from Early Learning to Grade 12 work together to write messages of hope onto quilting squares on International Women's Day.

labor of love to assemble all 350-odd squares into full-sized quilts. The blankets will be added to packages distributed through WIN's New Start Program, which every year helps at least 100 women from transition houses to start a new life by providing them with household essentials.

Lofty goals of inspiring a next generation of philanthropists aside, for Donna the ultimate goal of these projects is to instill a simple love of service. "It just feels good to give," she says.

the beginning of a fruitful partnership. "It's so important to demonstrate to these girls the impacts that even small actions can have for others less privileged. It's easy to forget that while there is much to do to improve the status of women in a global sense, there is also plenty of need in our immediate community."

Adds Cathy, "We're a girls' school; supporting causes affecting girls and women is a no-brainer." It is her hope that experiences like these will empower SMS students to find their

All efforts will end

