

Education goes hands-on at Sustainability Centre

Hollie Pratt-Campbell
Kingston This Week

Students in Tara Murphy's First Avenue Public School kindergarten class met Snake Man, Worm Lady and Blue Bin Derek on a recent class trip and took home some valuable lessons.

The trip to the Kingston Sustainability Centre— where they met Matt Ellerbeck, Gerie Baker and Derek Ochej — was part of a community helpers unit required by the kindergarten curriculum; it was also intended to teach the children about sustainability and ways in which they can help the environment.

Murphy explains that it is important for the children to learn about a wide variety professions, particularly those that are lesser known.

"One of the reasons we came to this space was to meet a lot of different community helpers," says Murphy. "[The Snake Man, Blue Bin, and the Worm Lady] are some unusual ones for the children to hear about, not just your typical fireman or policeman."

Sustainability Programs Manager Dan Hendry is excited to have the opportunity to expand the outreach of the centre.

"Our goal is to bring people together here as much as possible," he says. "We've had high school classes and community living tours before, but this is our first kindergarten class. It's great to get children exposed to the idea of conservation and composting at a young age."

Developing a respect for animals that are normally considered gross or unwanted is equally important, explains Hen-



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Hannah Joyce, Carter Millington and Ryeley Gatto learn how worms keep soil healthy.

dry. Although many people are afraid of snakes, the ones found in southern Ontario are really quite harmless.

The children's response to the snakes was terrific.

"It was amazing to see the number of children who overcame their initial fear, and were courageous enough to actually hang on to the snakes," says Dan.

Worms may seem dirty on first glance, but are undoubtedly an important part of the ecosystem. The children learned how worms help keep the soil healthy by breaking down organic matter into fertilizer, and how people can do this at home through vermicomposting.

"We hope that by educating the children we will help break down the apa-



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Brody McCullough and teacher Tara Murphy examine a worm at the Sustainability Centre.

thy many people have toward composting," says Dan. "It will make them see the importance of putting things like banana peels in the composter or green bin instead of the garbage."

The children also enjoyed Ochej's blue bin lesson, which taught them about recycling rules, sorting paper, Styrofoam, and plastic bags into the proper recycling boxes.

"This way, the students will be able to pass the information on to their parents," says Hendry. "The point is to get as much education out there to as many different people as possible. That's what helps create change."

Murphy was extremely pleased with how well the students responded to the exercise, and how much they enjoyed listening to the three speakers talk about their jobs.

"It's good to make them aware of things like this at a young age, so they can become good members of their community," she says.

Hendry was also happy with the day's success, noting that events such as this one are what the Sustainability Centre is all about. He hopes that Kingstonians will remember that the centre is always available to them.

"That's what it's all about, it's for the