

Thinking of Others

By Jo-An Vargo

It's almost Thanksgiving, and the Primary School students will be reflecting on the many reasons they are thankful. Taking the time to be introspective is a powerful tool for young children to experience. Our days are very full of activity, and sometimes it is hard to think quietly about what is important to us. Developing this capacity and recognizing its value early in life can have a profound influence in our children's lives in the long term. Not only can this thinking lead to a deeper appreciation of our own lives, it can help develop empathy for others whose life circumstances are less fortunate. Two of our current third graders are shining examples of how time for personal reflection can influence others and create a community service project that reaches across the world.

Caroline, Liddy and I have been discussing their desire to help children in Malawi. The girls proposed a new community service project for the kindergarten through third grade students. It will take the place of a fundraiser that we've done for the last three years.

Both girls know Jan Adams' daughter Sarah, a Holland Hall graduate who coached US field hockey and worked in our Primary School Extended Day program prior to leaving to do mission work in Malawi last February. They enjoy keeping up with Sarah's activities and were concerned when she contracted malaria this summer. They wanted to learn more about this infectious disease and independently researched it.

After reflecting, talking together, and with their families, the girls came to me. I'll let their written proposal speak for itself.

"What is malaria? A disease that can be life threatening. Malaria is a sickness spread by a mosquito. If you get a mosquito bite here, it's a little itchy, and you put cream on it. If you get a bite in Africa, you need very expensive medical care, and sometimes families don't have enough money to do that.

But we can help!

Here's how. What we need to do is earn money to buy mosquito nets. If people sleep under a mosquito net in Malawi, a place in Africa, they have a 99 percent better chance not to get malaria. Our donations will be sent to Malawi. No nets, though, just the money because it is cheaper to buy them in Malawi. No matter how much money we raise, there will never be enough money to keep everyone safe ...

We created this program to help other children because we are kids, and we need to help!"

Caroline and Liddy made a presentation to the K-3rd grade students on Monday, Nov. 16 during Community Meeting. The students will earn coins by doing extra helpful chores at home; a fundraising technique we've done in the past to raise funds for Heifer International. We'll collect the money in a big plastic jug from just before Thanksgiving

until the Winter Break, so we can see the amount grow daily. At the end of the drive, the money will be counted and put into an account to earn interest until the summer.

Then Liddy's mom Vanessa and Jan will take an eagerly anticipated trip to Malawi to visit Sarah, and they will take our money to buy mosquito netting for beds. (It's much less costly to do this rather than buying the netting here.)

This effort is a shining example of the ways in which the life lessons we teach both at school and at home can positively impact our children, our school community, and the world. I'm looking forward to assisting our young philanthropists, and I'm confident our student community will embrace their goal and earn coins for the cause. Be prepared for some friendly and helpful youngsters coming home to do extra chores. What a help they'll be just before the holidays!