



SEVEN OAKS  
SCHOOL DIVISION  
*community begins here*

# Community

B E G I N S H E R E

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## A P.A.W.S.-ative Impact

### How Leila North is Putting Positive Action in Winnipeg Schools

Even though the P.A.W.S. Program at École Leila North Community School is just a year old, it's already made a big impression on many people – including the judges of the prestigious Keep America Beautiful Awards.

In Early November, the students and staff in Leila North's P.A.W.S. (Positive Action in Winnipeg Schools) program found out they had won a Distinguished Service Citation Award as a Youth/Beautification Group in the National Keep America Beautiful Awards. Though it takes place in a Canadian school, P.A.W.S. was eligible for the award because of its affiliation with Take Pride Winnipeg, which is in turn an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful.

In fact, it was Take Pride Winnipeg that nominated Leila North's P.A.W.S. Program for the award – which is especially significant because of the organization's involvement in the program's origins.

#### The Start of Something Big

In September 2007, Leila North Vice Principal Anne-Marie Dooner (then a classroom teacher) was among a group of staff looking at ways to integrate experiential learning into the classroom. The staff wanted to introduce students to such important ideas as social justice, the concept of communities and the importance of getting involved and giving back. Even more importantly, the staff wanted students directly involved in developing a program, giving them a voice and an opportunity to take ownership of the activities.



The school had already looked at areas that would become part of the P.A.W.S. Program; children's rights, working with the elderly, school beautification, environmental issues. One area of particular interest was addressing the rise in graffiti on school grounds.

"We brainstormed with the kids on how to do things," recalls Dooner. "They had lots of ideas on how to stop graffiti, which often seemed to center around the idea of purchasing cameras to monitor kids. But while that's a solution, we wanted to extend our knowledge base about the issue".

Students incorporated their Language Arts learning to get a better understanding of the graffiti issue, interviewing the school custodians, Principal Blair Peppler and Assistant Superintendent Lydia Hedrich to get different perspectives. The

students also interviewed people from Take Pride Winnipeg, just as the organization happened to be starting a new program called Positive Action in Winnipeg Schools - P.A.W.S.

It was a perfect match with what Leila North had been looking for. The Leila North P.A.W.S. Program was formed.

#### Parts of P.A.W.S. Doing Their Parts

Now in its second year, P.A.W.S. has already become an integral part of the school's culture.

There are five groups in P.A.W.S. at Leila North (up from four groups last year), each supervised by a different teacher and assisted by other staff:

- The "Working with the Elderly" group, supervised by Darren Roy, connects Leila North students with the elderly community at the Maples Personal Care Home. The students

visit the Care Home to talk and play games, in an effort to dispel any myths and misperceptions the elderly may have about youth - and vice versa.

- The “Beautification” Group supervised by Jamie Krutkevich Slight, which focuses on activities and ideas designed to make the school look and feel like a great place to be. Last year, one of the projects the group undertook was to build benches for the front foyer of the school.
- The “Rights of the Child” Group supervised by Ursula Schioler, where students learn about the effects of war on children and how they can help, particularly through their involvement in War Child – a Canadian organization dedicated to providing assistance to war-affected children around the world. At a fundraiser dance held last year, the group raised over \$1,200 for the charity.
- The “Hands-On” group supervised by Eric Johnson, which looks at environmental issues and how Leila North students can do their parts to be environmentally friendly. One of last year’s activities involved building recycling bins for the school.
- The Graffiti SWAT Team supervised by Alyssa Rajotte, which will continue to address vandalism at the school. Students make a note of any graffiti on the grounds and try to have it cleaned up within 24 hours, no matter the weather. They are also exploring ways to share the PAWS experience with the surrounding Amber Trails and Maples community.

With so many diverse groups, P.A.W.S. covers a lot of ground. The

groups also get together to do large projects too. One of the favourites is the annual Day of Giving - a day when all P.A.W.S. students participate in activities from chocolate making to card making to sewing stuffed animals. At the end of the day, the group walks a huge bundle of gift bags to a nearby elementary school and hands them out to younger students.

Of course, there’s more to all these activities than meets the eye. There are also solid classroom and life lessons being gained as well. Darren Roy notes how the Working With the Elderly Group incorporates a variety of classroom elements: “We begin the year with a structured interview and then in following visits the students play games and share stories with the residents. It weaves itself well into the ELA, Social Studies and Health Curriculum, teaching about interview skills, confidence and esteem building, documentation, patience, tolerance and diversity.”

### **The Student-Driven Difference**

While the teachers provide guidance, it’s the students who drive P.A.W.S. They choose to give up their time, share their ideas and make planned activities a reality.

As Jamie Krutkevich Slight notes, “I expected them to enjoy P.A.W.S. but I’m finding that it’s a cultural shift for them and their minds are consistently coming back to making a difference - they write about it in their journals, they reflect on it in their growth statements and goals, and they apply it to their own lives.”

Each student has a favourite part of P.A.W.S. For Sasha, who is part of the Graffiti SWAT Group, it’s helping others with some help from his friends. “The job goes by faster, so you feel like you’re accomplishing something while having fun.”

For Canny, who is part of the Rights of the Child, the best thing is, “touching a child’s life.”

But perhaps the thing all P.A.W.S. students share is the feeling of accomplishment and knowing they’ve made an impact.

As Christina puts it, “Sometimes other students say, ‘why do you clean graffiti off - it’s just one little thing.’ Well, one little thing can make a huge difference.”

***The entire Leila North PAWS group will celebrate their recent accomplishments in December 2008 in Winnipeg after Tom Ethans from Take Pride Winnipeg accepts the group’s award in Washington, DC. Congratulations to all the staff and students on their great work!***



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