

We Made a Difference!



Strolling through Birmingham city centre a few weeks back, in a doorway between the old library and museum, I noticed some homeless people asleep. What caught my eye was their tent.

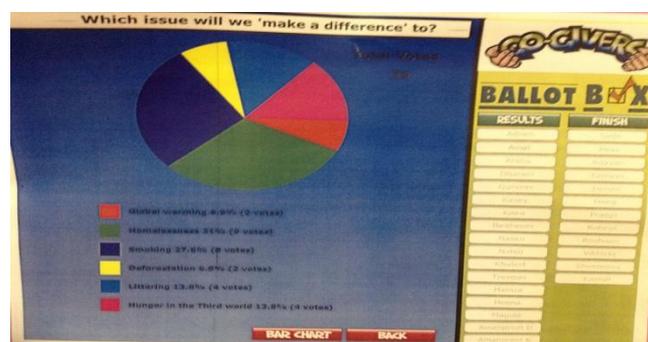
On return to school on Monday morning I informed my Year 5 class, who were thrilled that within hours of handing their goods over to 'The Give Back Project' they were on the streets being used. Their hard work was already making a difference. This was part of the beauty of this project, its immediacy.

Taking part in the Go Givers 'Make a Difference Challenge' for the second year running has been an extremely positive experience for us all and has, no doubt, had a huge impact on the Year 5 children.

When the Year 5 team began the project, we had key skills in mind which we wished to develop such as the children's ability to demonstrate empathy, display good teamwork, respect difference and apply creative approaches to fundraising. Ultimately, we were keen for our children to come away with the belief that they can create change for the better of their community. However, unlike other projects, it was the decisions that the children made which led the learning process from the outset, giving them a real sense of ownership. The learning evolved organically, with outcomes emerging naturally rather than being planned too far ahead which was refreshing.

Led by the TASC wheel, a tool now used by educationalists to organise charitable led initiatives the children controlled the project from start to finish. Initially, we considered a range of local and global issues to raise awareness and get the children thinking about what was important to them. Most children then presented persuasive pitches to encourage others to support their chosen cause. A range of issues were raised such as deforestation, littering, third world poverty, global warming but when it came to a democratic vote 'Homelessness' was selected.

Firstly the children had to consider what they knew about 'homelessness' and what they needed to discover in order to have an idea about how they could best support the problem. Subsequent weeks were spent developing their knowledge and understanding by:



- considering different ways of creating change in a charitable initiative
- developing empathy through stories, case-studies, poems and drama
- researching government and charity statistics
- finding out about national and local charities and their initiatives for fundraising and raising awareness
- exploring the opinions of our community through a questionnaire
- meeting with Ian Sturmeay, a fireman who works closely with the homeless community in Birmingham, and Councillor Sharon Thompson who avidly supports the cause

Once the children had developed greater understanding of some of the causes and consequences of homelessness as well as an idea of some of the support and initiatives available, they set about considering as many ways as possible to tackle the problem as well as who to target.



These suggestions were then evaluated, based on which would require least effort but have maximum impact. They chose to establish teams to organise effectively and a committee to monitor progress. They decided to do the following:

- Write persuasive letters to MPs in Writing
- Create screen printed images to raise awareness of the Cause in Art
- Hold a 'Super Sale' to fundraise including a cake auction

Once the preparation was in motion, the children also decided on ways to further raise awareness so held an assembly for the school, presented to parents and friends at the Super Sale, at Newman College and to Handsworth YPP. The children wrote the material for the presentation based on their reading and experiences throughout the project and their final words summed up their message simply. 'Make them feel they are not alone'.

The children raised £554 from their 'Super Sale' and unanimously decided to add their £50 prize money from 'Go Givers' to the proceeds. With this they bought items that were most needed by those living on the streets of Birmingham like socks, underwear, trainers, pot noodles, sleeping bags and tents...

Only this week the last of the sleeping bags were delivered personally to homeless people on the streets of Birmingham. This is something the children will never forget.

Witnessing the empathy, care, thoughtfulness and dedication of these children has been humbling. Rookery have adapted their curriculum to include a charitable led initiative in Year 5 as we believe with greater exposure to social issues and greater control over the development of projects the children can become more tolerant, understanding and accepting citizens as well as being highly motivated and empowered to create change, developing and improving their communities and world at large, in the future.



'The project showed me how homeless people are always in need of the things we take for granted such as food and a hot bath' Heena Sharma



'The 'Super Sale' was beneficial on many levels. Not only did we hold an auction but we also sold a wide range of household goods raising an extraordinary amount of money for the homeless community of Birmingham.'

Kevell Hutchinson



'The most memorable moment for me was when I was selected to represent our school raising awareness about homeless at Newman College. I was pleased because my teacher thought I offered thoughtful ideas and dedication to the project.'

Gunveer Malhi

by Martha Hemsted