

MONTESSORI MATTERS

MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF LONDON

EXPECT MORE FROM EDUCATION

Issue 30 – APRIL 2019



Community Matters

A message from Tina Sartori

Community can be defined as *a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals*. At every stage of Montessori, there is an experience of community – and community matters.

In a very basic sense, our students share a common place with their classmates for up to three years; here they learn how to treat one another with grace and courtesy and how to manage as a classroom community. This is where the *fellowship with others* comes into play. This fellowship is developed through classroom expectations, which is commonly referred to as “freedom within limits.” Since each year there is only one-third of the class that moves on and a new one-third that joins, the Montessori classroom allows for the continuity of these expectations, and lends to a high functioning community environment.

Mixed-age environments, one of the vital components of an accredited Montessori program, sets our children up for the community atmosphere they will find themselves in almost any setting of their adult life – it will be rare to find themselves in a situation where everyone they are interacting with in their community is the same age. They *find shared common attitudes and interests* with their classmates as they are in the same developmental plane within the three-year age span. The older students strengthen their independence and become the leaders; the ones who nurture the younger students in the classroom. The younger students gain so much from observing and learning from the older children around them. “The older ones are happy to be able to teach what they know. There are no inferiority complexes, but everyone achieves a healthy normality through mutual exchange.” (“The Absorbent Mind,” Dr. Maria Montessori). Our students will find themselves numerous times throughout their lives sitting in these different levels within a community. Can you

imagine your workplace with this sense of community?

One of the most important aspects and a feeling of connectedness in a community setting, comes from sharing a meal. Our students have a *shared goal* of wanting to eat lunch! This is why at every level in the school, meal times are taken together, often with family-style serving. Having the opportunity to share a meal, with people who truly care for one another, allows for a high level of well-being within the child.

As students move through our traditional Montessori program, their sense of community grows as they are developmentally ready to manage and interact in community setting beyond their classrooms. Learning how to function and care for themselves while living with others who are not their parents (ie: during extended, multi-day field trips) inspires the student to develop a whole new skill set for what it means to function in a community setting of a

shared living space. This is where all three aspects of community – *a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals* – really starts to come to fruition.

The final step for our students in experiencing how community matters, occurs when they take the broader perspective of caring for the community that not only surrounds them, but beyond. How they internalize the experience they have had in a compassionate community, impacts their interpersonal skills and ultimately how they interact in a community setting once they leave us.

This imprint of what it feels like to have a strong sense of community is so evident in our alumni. Year after year we find them coming back and checking in on the community they spent so many years thriving in. It feels like home, just like your community should. ●



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Alumni profile: Inspiring hope through charity

Community matters to Ayesha Islam. A recent MA graduate who is currently in Grade 9 at A.B Lucas Secondary School, Ayesha attended Montessori Academy of London from the Toddler program all the way through Junior High. Her brothers, Esa and Humza, are in Years 6 and 3, respectively. She explains: "My parents chose a Montessori education for my siblings and me because they saw benefits in its child-centered approach. They really valued how Montessori encourages children to be curious, gain independence, and above all, to become leaders in their community. ... They appreciated that it is a more global form of education that can be applied in and out of school, throughout our lives."

As Tina noted in her message, community is defined as "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals." Ayesha says this accurately describes her experience of community at Montessori Academy "because it is a supportive environment where teachers and students greet one another with a positive attitude and an excitement to learn. I define community as a group of people who, alongside one another, feel protected and are inspired to be the best version of themselves because of each other."

Montessori inspires a sense of community in the classroom and throughout the school, Ayesha explains, whether it's the teacher-student bond or the peer relationships among the students in the multi-age classroom. "Students like myself who have grown up in their Montessori community, have been together with the same peers throughout their lifetime, and therefore, feel extremely comfortable while at school. This encourages a family-like environment – a supportive community."

She says Montessori encouraged the sense of community both within the school environment as well as the community at large. For example, she remembers cleaning up Piccadilly Park, which is a public space, yet so integral to the school's daily life. Students also handed out gifts to the school's neighbours during the holidays. "I was driven to become an active community member by engaging in such activities. One of my favourite charitable activities was when my Junior High class went to Parkwood Hospital to entertain and play music for the veterans. The enthusiastic reaction we received from the veterans was so satisfying, as the looks on their faces showed pure joy. Seeing how happy our small act made them

proved to me how simple but so important it can be to give back to your community."

Ayesha was also one of the first MA students to be part of the school's ME to WE service trip to Ecuador. "On this trip, we assisted in building a classroom in a small village, called Kanambu. This incredible experience taught me a great lesson of our global community and the impact we can make across the world. I am not

only a community member of Montessori or London but also of the world. Being a part of this community, we can give back and work together to help others who are less fortunate in a much more global sense," she says. "I came back to Canada after this trip realizing the importance of giving back to my community outside of Montessori."

She volunteers at the Muslim Resource Centre in London to assist refugee families who have come to Canada from war-torn countries and is part of a theatre group that spreads awareness of gender-based violence and its impact in our society. She and her brother Esa joined forces with their cousins in Toronto (who used to attend a Montessori school) a few years ago to create Blossoms for Hope – a charity that raises money for a variety of charities by designing, making and selling handmade jewellery, bookmarks and greeting cards. Through this venture, they've raised money for cancer research at St. Joseph's Hospital in London and Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto. They also raised

\$6,000 for Human Concern International (HCI), to build a well in Somalia. "This year, we wanted to focus our attention to the shortage of clean water in Canada. Living in a country where fresh water is seemingly everywhere, we often forget that there are Indigenous communities where this is not the case. Therefore, we reached out to an organization called Water First that offers training on water purification, as well as employment opportunities after the training, to locals in these communities," she explains.

"Little by little, we have been trying to spread 'blossoms for hope' through raising money for various charities over these last four years, all because four small children realized the importance of giving back to one's community."

Ayesha says, "My experience at Montessori has truly helped me realize that community matters and that even the smallest deed can help build our community." ●



Ayesha and Esa selling Blossoms for Hope to raise money for charities.

WE Club: connecting MA to the community

By Lisa Eastick

The Montessori WE Club began three years ago as a new way to build community among our Upper Elementary students. The sharing of values such as care, respect, integrity, and kindness is at the heart of this group when addressing the needs and challenges of local and global society. Our WE Club has utilized many of the resources developed by WE Schools, the educational program that gives students tools to create social change, operated by the non-profit, charitable organization, WE Charity. Many people are more familiar with the social enterprise ME to WE, which operates separately to support the mission and operating costs of WE Charity.

Students in Upper Elementary (ages 9 - 12) become increasingly interested and concerned with social justice and are looking for ways to engage with others and collaborate to make transformative change. Over the course of the last few years, WE Club has explored a variety of topics on both a local and a global level including food, education, poverty, water, social media, and the humane treatment of animals. One of our first major projects involved planting and growing tomato plants to sell as a fundraiser for LUSO Community Services. As another non-profit organization, LUSO provides programs and services in the London community for children, youth, families and seniors of culturally diverse and ethnic backgrounds. The tomato plant sale generated \$300, which the WE Clubbers used to purchase the items most needed by the families utilising LUSO's assistance. When Leroy Hibbert, LUSO Multicultural Outreach

Program Coordinator, came to collect the items at school, the students beamed with pride and inspired optimism as they helped to load up Leroy's car. There was a feeling



TOP: Upper Elementary students decorate for the holidays at Mount Hope; ABOVE: Lisa Eastick speaks to the students before WE WALK FOR WATER last year.

of, 'Wow, look what we did together!'

Growing the tomato plants was the first horticultural venture for the WE Club. Last summer's installation of the school greenhouse has presented many more opportunities for the sustainable cultivation of plants. The WE Clubbers are fast becoming the stewards of the greenhouse, as much seed planting has already taken place in preparation for abundant greenhouse growing of vegetables to supplement hot lunches and perennials to plant in the school's courtyard gardens.

Other local activity includes our annual visits to the Mount Hope Centre for Long Term Care. During November, we walk up to the centre together to assemble and decorate several indoor Christmas Trees for the residents to enjoy. Students have the opportunity to chat with the residents, who always seem genuinely thrilled to have them there and helping out.

WE Club's most significant fundraising activity to date was the WE WALK FOR WATER event that took place in Picadilly Park last May. After learning about water as a basic human right, despite more than 840 million people not having basic water service, WE Clubbers organized and promoted the event that had all Elementary students experiencing the difficulty of walking the 1km track carrying heavy 4-litre jugs of water. The reality is that over 260 million people, mostly young girls, have the daily task of collecting water from distant

sources. Our Montessori families were very generous with their donations, enabling the group to raise more than \$1,600! WE Charity ensures that each \$25 donated provides clean water for one person for life. This means our school provided at least 64 people with water for life!

We will once again be holding the WE WALK FOR WATER event in Picadilly Park on June 7, 2019. Our hope is that the Montessori community will continue to support WE Club and our continued efforts toward positive social change. ●

2018-2019 Annual Appeal

Giving is in bloom this spring

In November, we sent home our Annual Appeal letter. In it was a drawing of a maple leaf which we encouraged you to decorate and return to the main office with your donations. Over the past several months, we have watched the tree come to life with each contribution from our families and friends! The tree represents the famous and gorgeous Japanese Maple outside of our Toddler/Casa location at 718 Waterloo St.

Our goal for 2018-2019 is to raise \$80,000 to complete upgrades to Junior High that will help ensure we can accommodate our students for years to come. This project will include new floors, paint and kitchen renovations, along with higher-grade appliances to meet the requirements of our growing program. **Did you know... each week, the Junior High cooking committee prepares and serves 150 lunches for their peers and teachers?**

Everything in our school is a result of the kindness and generosity of families before you. Our buildings, classrooms, furniture and outdoor learning environments are examples of the wonderful progress we have made thanks to your gifts over the years. We are just over a quarter of the way to our goal for the year! **Please help our tree – and Junior High program – bloom by supporting this year's annual appeal!** ●



Alumni news

Calvin Kelly wins Global Music Award

Calvin J. Kelly graduated from Montessori Academy/Montessori House of Children 11 years ago. During his Montessori years, he composed many songs. Seven of his compositions were used in a new Canadian musical called *Let the Music Come Alive*, which premiered last September in London. Calvin won Global Music Award for "I'm Alone", in category New Musical Theater Music, December 2018. The musical is about how music can help people.



Mom Carla Rose Kelly says, "We are so very grateful to all of his teachers at Montessori who supported his music. Special thanks to Ann Sugrim for asking him to compose a graduation song called "Thanks for the Memories" that he performed at the ceremonies and shared with all of the graduating students. This song was also incorporated into the musical. Many thanks for all the encouragement for Calvin!!"

Learn more about Calvin's work and the musical *Let the Music Come Alive*: www.LetTheMusicComeAlive.ca ●

It's a musical year! Join us!

Join us for one of our performances of "Roald Dahl's Willy Wonka" on May 14 & 15 at Wolf Performance Hall!

Find details on the school's website: montessori.on.ca/willy-wonka



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