

Thursday, April 2, 2015

As students and families at our school have been part of the Starfish backpack program for at least the past 2 years, I just wanted to take a moment to share with you some successes we have noticed.

It is not until one works with people who are vulnerable in many ways and struggle to have their basic needs met on a daily basis, that they can truly understand how this affects the students. To witness the stress and anxiety that this puts upon the children and their role as a student. This stress and anxiety, which is often the result of worry about where the next meal will come from, is often exhibited in many ways: inability to focus, poor performance, bad/erratic behaviour, poor attendance, impulsivity, explosiveness verbally and behaviourally, high anxiety, etc.

Over the past two years we have noticed many improvements. This year **we have found that there are fewer negative behaviours witnessed on the playground and in the hallways and office referrals.** Students are not as reactive, they are more willing to take the time to calm down and talk –problem solve issues that arrive. We have noticed that **certain students have better attendance and are more able to focus.**

Recently when looking at term data, it was noticed that we have increasingly more students approaching and meeting expectations in both literacy and numeracy. One teacher was fearful to hand in her data, she stated **“All my Grade 2 students are currently meeting expectations in Mathematics, I have never had this happen in all the years I have taught here.”**

This next example may seem strange to many people, but **this school year I, as the Principal, have not had one child swear at me or call me vulgar names. This is a huge improvement and yes I do connect this to that fact that these children are being feed on a regular basis –due to receiving Starfish backpacks.** Yes, the children that did speak to me like this in the past are now part of the backpack program.

Parents are more willing to come and talk to us as a staff, letting us know when they need help or are having a difficult time. They are “trusting” us and this is really important in a school situation, but even more so when dealing with families who are vulnerable and fearful of authority. They often carry around a fear that their children will be taken from them. The backpack program has played an important part in building this trust and improving the community feel at our school. There were families that were fearful of taking the food, as they thought that MCFD might find out they are unable to provide for their children and then take them from their care. By not having to release the names of the children who receive backpacks and being able to reassure them that no one would know who receives the backpacks – **has helped to build this trust and help us to better meet the academic, as well as social/emotional needs of our students.**

The extra food for the weekends provided by the Starfish Packs has reduced stress in the homes, which in turn reflects in the behaviour of our students. **Until you have lived through the experience of the changes, you can't truly understand the magnitude of the positive impact that children having food on a regular basis has on their lives. Imagine how this can positively impact their future and ability to live up to their true potential.**

All the help and support that we have been receiving is greatly appreciated, it is making a difference in the lives of our students – the children of Abbotsford and their futures.

Sincerely,

Principal of Abbotsford Elementary School receiving Starfish Packs