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## St. Thomas fourth-graders help Down Syndrome Network

Story

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Posted: Monday, February 1, 2016 12:00 am

Fourth-graders at St. Thomas the Apostle have partnered with the Down Syndrome Network of Arizona to increase awareness and understanding of the Down syndrome community. This relationship, now in its fifth year, is part of St. Thomas's schoolwide community service program, STA Serves.

Each grade level has a different focus within STA Serves. The fourth-graders' assigned area is children with special needs.



Each year, the first interaction between the fourth-graders and the DSN is the Day in the Life workshop. This workshop gives students the chance to ask questions and participate in hands-on activities that display the everyday life of people with Down syndrome. They rotate through 10 different stations that simulate a variety of disabilities, both intellectual and physical. A few children from the DSN visit the class during this activity, giving the students a new perspective on the disorder.

"This experience allows the St. Thomas the Apostle students to learn that children with Down syndrome are just like them," said Emily McLaughlin, the service organizer at St. Thomas.

Louise Bowden, the director of development and special events for the DSN felt the service project, "gave [the fourth-graders] a chance to not only realize the differences and challenges individuals with Down syndrome may have but to see the many likenesses they have."

She said, "Afterwards, the fourth-graders had a better understanding of many of the limitations Down syndrome presents and how those limitations can be overcome. The service project promotes awareness and understanding of Down syndrome among peers who do not have a disability."

Throughout the year, the fourth-graders have the opportunity to participate in various activities with the DSN. Some of these activities include supporting the Buddy Walk, inviting them to the St. Thomas the Apostle school carnival, helping with the DSN's annual holiday party, and hosting playtimes. These efforts spread awareness and promote compassion and inclusion.

Both the DSN hopes that this partnership with STA will help change misconceptions by children as well as adults.

"Children with Down syndrome experience cognitive delays, but the effect is usually mild to moderate," said Bowden. "Children with Down syndrome are more like other children than they are different; they learn and grow just like everyone else. They simply achieve their goals at a different pace."

The DSN serves as an invaluable resource for parents and families of individuals with Down syndrome, both by providing information and connecting individuals with opportunities in their school and community.

Bowden explained, "The overarching goal of collaborating with students, like the St. Thomas fourth-graders, is to establish the practice of welcoming, valuing, empowering and supporting diverse academic and social learning among students of all abilities in an inclusive environment."

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Posted in Local News & Features, Schools & Sports on *Monday, February 1, 2016 12:00 am.*

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**Arcadia News**  
January 11 at 10:15am

Thank you to the sweet Bhatnagar family for nominating their Veritas teacher for the Arcadia News Teachers We Love Award! The children were very excited this morning as they prepared to surprise Mr. Davison in front of the entire school with flowers, our award package and even a delicious homemade sandwich!



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