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The future rests in our helping hands

Volunteering Brings the Community Together

*Written by: Sharon Clark-Koufis, Marketing & Communications Manager, Volunteer MBC
May 15, 2013*

It has been said that volunteering is good for the community. It has also been said that it can bring a community together and that volunteering can help lead change. This was most certainly reaffirmed during a recent event held in the Queen Street and Kennedy Road area of Brampton.

The ChangeTheWorld: One Community at a Time event honoured the short life of Kesian Williams. It offered the message of change – positive change in the effort to help mend a grieving community and to try to make it a better place. Kesian was a 9 year old boy who loved basketball, spending time with his friends, enjoying life and creating peace. He was tragically taken away as a result of a bullet that was directed at his home. A home which he, his mother and his older brother had only recently moved into. This tragedy has shaken the Queen/Kennedy community, and beyond. But, through a collaborative effort of a number of partners and caring community members the idea came about to create an event to bring healing and to honour the memory of a young boy who had inspired so many others.

Saturday, April 27, 2013 was a sunny, bright day. The school grounds at Sir Winston Churchill Public School overflowed with many high school student volunteers, and an abundance of parents with their young children, many of them classmates and friends of Kesian. Enthusiastic youth volunteers unselfishly shared their basketball skills, painted the young one's faces, made ChangeTheWorld buttons and offered a number of other fun activities. The event included a park clean-up and surprise musical appearances by the talented Wali Shah-Painting and David Record.

Perhaps the pinnacle moment of the event was the mural project where a number of canvases were lined along a chain-link fence in the middle of the school yard. Positive words graced many of the canvases with the goal to inspire others to share their inner thoughts. Words like "respectful", "cooperative", "honest", and "change the world" appeared. Paint brushes draped with colours of every shade began to make their mark on the canvases. Expressions of caring, sharing and remembrance formed through various forms of creativity. Houses, trees and flowers took shape; while many 'artists' simply wrote their names. The most profound, however, was a simple peace sign – Kesian's favorite symbol, which was drawn on each of the canvases by Tanya Garvey, Kesian's mother. Next to each peace sign was Kesian's name written in a rainbow of colours by Brampton Mayor, Susan Fennell. It was evident at that very moment that everyone who attended the event that day came together to celebrate change in their community and that Kesian was close in everyone's thoughts.

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Through the efforts of Volunteer MBC, the local volunteer centre; the City of Brampton; The BRIDGE, a not-for-profit community service organization; the Brampton Fire Department; Peel Regional Police; Sir Winston Churchill Public School; artist Dorota Pankowska; musical artists Wali Shah-Painting and David Record; and 80 high school volunteers from the surrounding area, April 27 marked the day where this Brampton community turned a tragic event into an opportunity to bring people together to make a difference by creating memorable moments. It was an opportunity to not only be the change that we want to see in our community, but to put action to words and actually make it happen.

To view the memories that were created at the ChangeTheWorld: One Community at a Time event, visit: www.flickr.com/photos/volunteermbc/sets

More information:

The *ChangeTheWorld – Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge* is funded by the Government of Ontario, in partnership with the Ontario Volunteer Centre Network (OVCN), and is a province-wide campaign for youth aged 14 to 18 years to volunteer through a wide variety of exciting local initiatives. The campaign began during National Volunteer Week (April 21 to 27) through to May 20, 2013. The goal is to inspire youth to volunteer, develop new skills and broaden their awareness of community service organizations.

Volunteer MBC is a volunteer centre serving the cities of Mississauga and Brampton, and the Town of Caledon. The centre offers a referral and matching service for volunteer placement within the community for all ages. They also provide education and support for volunteers and community service agencies and organizations, and serve the corporate community with various programming services that engage individual and team volunteering. Additionally, the centre strives to be a strong voice to support and promote volunteerism. For more information, to access their on-line volunteer opportunities database, and to find more details on the centre's three convenient locations in Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon, visit www.volunteermbc.org.

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(left to right) Mayor Susan Fennell, City of Brampton; Kristin Bergen, Principal at Sir Winston Churchill Public School; Carine Strong, Executive Director at Volunteer MBC; and Tanya Garvey of Brampton.



Photo caption: Jacqueline-Abena Addo (centre) one of the many volunteers who came to help out. Abena led a friendly game of basketball with local area youth

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