



St. Gabriel students learn life skills by helping build school in Kenya

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After tireless fundraising efforts over the last year, students and staff at St. Gabriel Catholic School have gathered enough money to build a school for needy children in Kenya.

By selling food, drinks, candles and paintings and raising money through other initiatives, the largely student-run efforts in support of the Free the Children - Me to We campaign have amounted to \$4,500. Representatives from Free the Children are to attend the school on Thursday, May 6 to accept the cheque and congratulate the students.

"The money came in steadily and it was actually a surprise," said Grade 6 teacher and fundraising organizer Anette Shortt. "Until we checked last month, we didn't even realize we had achieved our goal."

Since the school attended a motivational event called Me to We in 2007, a committee focused on raising funds for social justice initiatives has been organizing fundraising events. Last year, the school was able to support the construction of a clean drinking water system in a Kenyan village; funding a school was next on the list for St. Gabriel. In two years, the students have raised a total of \$8,500.

The two projects were selected by grades 7 and 8 students, while fundraising was supported by all students, their families, parish members and the community. The funding will help facilitate education overseas, but students at St. Gabriel are also learning valuable lessons.

"Social justice is a component of the religion program here," said Shortt.

Each month students focus on a different virtue that ties in with their fundraising campaign. Compassion was featured in May and April was about justice. Social change was the theme during parent and teacher interviews, so students made paintings of important people involved in changing the world and sold them in the school.

Running the constant stream of events and keeping everyone interested helped students to develop marketing, financial management, creativity and leadership skills they can use for the rest of their lives.

At times like this, Shortt feels it is important to also give credit to the community.

"Really, I want to give a message of gratitude to the people who have supported us - families and members of the parish and community. It has honestly been a great opportunity for us and we are really grateful for that."

Now that the goal for this school year has been reached, students intend to start thinking about their next charitable venture.