

Kids teaching kids about dealing

with disabilities

by Amie Heaslip
Staff Reporter

A group of grade 7 and 8 students from George Vanier School in Combermere have been getting a unique view of the world — from behind a life-sized puppet.

The puppets are part of a series called the Kids on the Block. The puppets were created by Barbara Aiello in 1977, and over 700 community based groups in 49 states and 14 countries use them to promote a very special message. The Kids on the Block teach kids "how to deal with people with handicaps. We will be going to other schools to perform," said Anita Boles, Special Education teacher in charge of the group.

Boles first worked with the puppets when she was at Queen's University. "Most of the people who work with the puppets are adults. In our program I will continue to train students to work with the puppets. It is open to all students to be puppeteers. There are auditions each year, because each year we welcome the grade eights as they go into grade nine," said Boles.

The Kids on the Block is set up as a series of skits with questions being answered from the audience at the end of each skit. The puppeteers not only have to know how to handle the puppets, and the lines that they must say, but they also have to be able to answer any question about their character's disability. "The tricky part is answering open forum questions in character. The Kids had to do a great deal of research on the disability that their character has," said Boles.

The group will be travelling throughout the county to teach children in grades 1 to 6 about disabilities. The puppets range in age from 9 to 11, and have disabilities such as cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and blindness. "We hope to perform throughout all the local schools, both in the separate school system, which George Vanier is a part of, and the public schools in the next few months. After that we hope to go as far as the schools in Pembroke and Round Lake," said Boles.

Kids on the Block has the support of George Vanier's Parent/Teacher Association. They are not charging the schools for the performances and are hoping that donations will come in to cover the costs of transportation and any materials that the group may need.

Last Wednesday, February 9, was the group's first big performance. They performed for a group of students from grades three and six. The day before, they performed for students from their own grade seven and eight classes.

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