

Puppets help children see disabled as 'normal' people

Joanne the puppet is 'normal'. But she doesn't know much about her disabled friends.

That's where Kids on the Block comes in. An American syndicated puppet program, 'Kids' allows school children a chance to learn about the handicapped.

Betty Rowley from Mississauga came to town Thursday to talk to the North Halton Kids on the Block committee.

She and her puppet troupe have been teaching children that disabled people are no different than anyone else.

Now that Bill 82 is in effect, which calls for the integration of handicapped children into the school system, Kids on the Block is needed even more, Mrs. Rowley said.

Through the puppets, children learn how the disabled feel and they learn about terminology, she said.

Short of breath

A high percentage of people who suffer from emphysema and chronic bronchitis have been heavy smokers. If you suffer from shortness of breath caused by either emphysema or chronic bronchitis, call your Lung Association for further information.

Her Mississauga group started out by obtaining a set of puppets on loan from the Ontario government.

Borrowing is much cheaper, because to buy the specially-made puppets costs from \$400 to \$900 (American currency).

There are usually three puppets used in a play: one abled and two disabled puppets.

The North Halton group, with six members, have an agreement with Mrs. Rowley to borrow her puppets. Mrs. Rowley will be the trainer for the North Halton Kids on the Block. Class will begin in January.

The local group wants to do a trial show or two, then prepare to perform in school classrooms by September, said treasurer Barbara Herner.

Anyone interested in becoming a puppeteer can call Darlow Balsille at 877-3419.

A charitable organization, North Halton Kids on the Block can give tax receipts for any donations.

Kids on the Block was started in the United States by a mother whose child had Cerebral Palsy. The child was not integrating properly into the school system, so the mother created 'Kids' to help students understand the disabled, Mrs. Rowley said.

Puppeteers don't have to be experienced, but they have scripts and must read up on the disability their puppet has.

The puppets have to give short answers to the student's questions to maintain interest, Mrs. Rowley said.

Betty Rowley works one of the puppets used on the Kids on the Block program for children.



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