

Math skills add up to community help

By SUSAN SCHWARTZ, The Gazette November 29, 2010

The Grade 6 students at Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramp's School (ECS), a girls' private school in Westmount, put their math skills to work for a good cause this month: they measured, multiplied and divided ingredients for a hearty chicken noodle soup that went to Le Bon Dieu dans la rue to feed more than 200 homeless young people.

As the 11-and 12-year-old girls learned during a presentation by Sue Medleg, development coordinator for Dans la rue, the organization has been working to help homeless youth for more than 20 years. She explained to them how young people not much older than they are can wind up on the streets through a combination of circumstances largely beyond their control. "It's not always financial pressures that bring them there," she said. "You can have money and live in a large house ... but it's not a home if you don't feel safe and loved there. You might feel so bad that you decide it's better to leave it."

Once on the streets, Medleg said, they are often overwhelmed by the challenges of finding such basic tools of survival as shelter, food, clothing and medical attention. "They don't have enough tools in their tool kit," she explained to the ECS group. She explained to the students how, in school, they are learning many tools, from reading and math skills to working in teams.

After school on Nov. 16, the students gathered in the ECS kitchen to chop vegetables and prepare the soup. Their parents knew about the project -and the girls had brought ingredients as well as some of the equipment from home.

They made more than 50 litres of soup, which was poured into 3.5 L containers and delivered to Dans la rue. The school received a collective thank you -and, in response, ECS thanked Dans la rue for suggesting the project: when ECS math teacher Stefanie Perra asked Medleg about an activity suitable for Grade 6 students, she had suggested making soup.

"This was a wonderful way for the girls to develop their math skills AND give back to the community," she said. Perra teaches math to middle school -and part of her job is to develop community-service opportunities for the students. "The girls had to work with fractions and scale their recipe: each made a double batch of soup," she explained. Colleen Gagnon, also a middle-school math teacher at ECS, was involved with the project as well.

"I liked cutting up things and putting them into a big pot," said Leela Merritte, one of the students. "It was really fun and kind of cool that we were making soup for kids who

might be our age." She was also impressed by Medleg's talk. She "gave this really wonderful speech that brought tears to your eyes."

Emily Levens, another student, went home and told her parents about making the soup for Dans la rue. "They thought it was really good that we were helping other people that way," she said. The experience also made her feel that she "would definitely like to continue" doing work that helps others.

In a second phase, the students will figure out the actual cost of the soup and what it would have to sell for if they wanted to sell it as part of a fundraising project.