

ACTIVE FRIENDS

(formerly called Expert Friends)



**Learning and teaching how to be a
trusted friend at General Wolfe**

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Thanks and Acknowledgements

We are thankful to the children who participated and have made this program a success and have role modeled more inclusive, caring relationships at school. We are also grateful to the staff, SSAs, parents and consultants who have stood behind us to expand this program and our vision of having no more isolated children in our schools and healthier friendships.

Wolfe's Active Friends Program, which started with the name 'Expert Friends' is currently being led by **Wolfe Vice Principal Luanne Kerry**. Our former Vice Principal Catherine Jamieson and our current principal Isabel Grant and past principal Denise Johnson were the leadership team that brought this into our school. And the SSA (Support Aides) who also founded the Wolfe program with the peer groups as well as those who took the training and supported the concept are all deeply appreciated. It has taken a team of effort.

The program was paid for by the generous donations from the General Wolfe PAC (year 1 to 3) and the Variety Club (year 2) and was created during the leadership of Cathy Heath, our PAC chair.

We are grateful to Kim Pemberton, the parent who brought this program to our school. Kim helped us see that we needed it, and not just for her child, but for all children who are suffering with the daily pain of isolation in addition to other challenges they may be experiencing. **Our collective vision is to have this kind of program available for all isolated children and to provide a happier healthier social and emotional envelope for all our children.**

This concept has been a result of many people's work in the field. Our particular version is based on the Expert Friends Concept or Peer Power from Bonita Holman at CBI Consultants. CBI has generously allowed us to share their parts of intellectual property from this program as their hope and vision is to see this kind of program available for all children. We have not yet had the benefit of working with the Friend to Friend nonprofit but will have one group with them this year, but they also are doing tremendous work in this field and we also highly recommend them as a resource in addition to CBI.

This binder has been created to help turn the Active Friends concept into more of a systemized school wide program so that it isn't just used to help the odd child but becomes integrated into the school functioning. We hope it will support future years at Wolfe and helps other schools create their own versions of this program.

Creating this information binder was led by the Nancy Bradshaw (PhDc, Active Friends Program Assistant and parent), and it will be reviewed by our Active Friends Steering Committee: Kim Pemberton (parent, program initiator); Luanne Kerry (Wolfe Vice-principal); Isabel Grant (Wolfe Principal).

I apologize in advance for any errors, this is part of my volunteer effort for this amazing program and I am still learning. If you would like to copies of this document, have ideas to add, **please contact the author: Nancy Bradshaw nancyb@joyfilledproductions.org (604)873-3586**

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVE FRIENDS	4
<i>Why the goal of friendship?</i>	5
<i>How is the Program Structured?</i>	7
<i>What do the children say about the program?</i>	8
<i>What is the need?</i>	9
<i>What are the intended outcomes of the social groups?</i>	11
<i>Year one and two results at Wolfe</i>	12
<i>The purpose of these written materials</i>	13
HOW TO SET UP AND RUN THE ACTIVE FRIENDS PROGRAM	13
<i>Overview of key steps</i>	13
<i>Selection criteria for the ‘active’ friends only training</i>	14
<i>Objectives for the Active Friends Only Training</i>	16
<i>The organization of the playgroups (or social groups)</i>	16
<i>Setting Goals and Measuring Results</i>	16
<i>What not to do in the Group</i>	16
<i>Running of the Group</i>	17
<i>Documenting Results – Video and Data Collection</i>	17
<i>Dealing with Issues within the Group</i>	17
<i>Roles</i>	17
PROJECT PLAN AND CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS.....	22
<i>Checklist for Success</i>	22
<i>Budget and Budget Management</i>	23
<i>Financial Options</i>	23
<i>Key Components to Minimize Costs</i>	23
EXPANDING THE PROGRAM	24
<i>Class-wide and school-wide implementation of friendship skills</i>	24
<i>Multi-School Implementation</i>	26
<i>How Many Groups to Set Up</i>	26
PROGRAM MATERIALS.....	26
<i>Sample PAC Presentation Material</i>	29
<i>Training and Curriculum Materials</i>	29
<i>Grade Specific IRP Information that links with Active Friends</i>	34
<i>Social and Emotional Development Grade Specific Information</i>	35
<i>Samples of Visual Cues etc</i>	35
<i>Mid Year Assessment and Final Assessment</i>	35
APPENDICES.....	35
<i>Appendix 1 – Year 2 PAC Presentation</i>	36
<i>Appendix 2 – Year 2 PAC Update</i>	40
<i>Appendix 3 - VSB Presentation to VSB Chair and Committee 3</i>	42
<i>Appendix 4 – Vancouver Sun Article</i>	44
<i>Appendix 5 – Forms used with permission</i>	51
<i>Appendix 6 – IRPs Relating to Active Friends and Healthy Living</i>	52
<i>Appendix 7 – References and Bibliography</i>	53

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVE FRIENDS

"The better part of one's life consists of his friendships." Abraham Lincoln

A Few Quotes from People Involved with Active Friends

"During 33 years of working in schools, I've seen many initiatives designed with purpose of building or strengthening positive peer connections between children with complex learning needs and their schoolmates.

The students involved in this project have achieved, by a vast margin, the most authentic, sometimes purposefully planned, often spontaneous warm, respectful, supportive peer connections of all the efforts I have known of."

Isabel Grant, Principal of General Wolfe School

"Being part of this is something I'll tell my grandchildren about. Hannah (the formerly isolated child) and I aren't Expert friends or Active friends, she's just my friend. I've got her back and she's got mine.

Although I wasn't one of the participants in the Active Friends program, we all learned by example from the Active Friends participants and our whole grade had a big shift. In the boys group, I noticed how much kinder they all became."

Claire Edmonds, Wolfe Student Council President 2008/2009

"I believe that this shouldn't be a side project, this should be a required part of teaching. I just can't believe if there is a way to help a child not be alone and lonely, that it is not an integral part of the educational system."

From the evaluation form written by one of our Staff Running an Active Friends Group

"The social envelope the children are in at school is one of the most critical elements of them feeling well and ready to learn. While the majority of children do pretty well with their friendships, there are some who are slipping through the cracks and not forming friendships.

Even when I was a child, I remember trying to help those children who were left out, but although I tried, I didn't have the skills to make an impact. Active Friends creates an environment to help all the children learn the skills to shift what was the group shame (of ignoring an isolated child) to what has become an enormous group joy and something to feel really wonderful about. It has been a gift to be part of. "

Nancy Bradshaw, Parent Volunteer of a Typical Child

Why the goal of friendship?

Friendships are one of the greatest gifts in life and can bring great joy or angst to a child's school experience. It is in essence the container in which a child experiences school.

And yet, developing relationships and handling conflict or challenges can be a struggle and there are a significant number of children who are very isolated even in schools where peers are caring and smart but do not know how to shift this unfortunately dynamic.

Communication and friendship skills are not innate, so children are still finding their way when they are in elementary school. Without adequate experiential training, children can develop bad habits in how they communicate with friends. Children can become more defended, less trusting and more likely to treat others with care if they have been treated that way. By working with children in a compassionate, hands on way at an earlier age, we can give them the expertise to create healthy friendship habits and relationships.



At General Wolfe in our first two years of the program we saw complete shifts where the two children who had been isolated for 5 years, became happily integrated not just amongst their active friends but amongst their whole grade. In the two new groups we set up in year two, we saw some beginning shifts but are finding it takes two years to see the big results as year one seems to be some skillbuilding (learning to play together and overcome obstacles) and year two more authentic friendships seem to gel.

So we know there are solutions to peer issues and we saw how dramatic the result when it was set up as program not just to benefit one isolated child, but was an approach the school is using for shifting the dynamics of the playground.

The goals and issues that the Active Friends program addresses are:

1. This program results in special needs and/or isolated children creating **real lasting friendships**.
2. Despite excellent programs like Roots Of Empathy and Second Step, excellent school codes of conduct, support workers helping children, we still see major issues with special needs children not integrating very well with other children.
3. **Children learn social behaviours best from each other** so the peers are coached in supporting the focus child which is key to the program's success.
4. Typical children do not have the skills to help an isolated child integrate and **this program focuses on training the isolated child's peers**. This also involves a

different way for the support workers to learn to help the isolated child as instead they work with the peers.

5. **The benefits are as rich for the 'active' friends** and the school as they are for the formerly isolated child. At Wolfe, both typical and isolated children want to be in this program and we have witnessed shifts in the entire grade as the other children model the active friends behaviour towards the focus child.
6. **Building our children's social and emotional intelligence will also increase our academic success.** "Early social and emotional competence is becoming recognized as being a key indicator of success in the future showing up as early as grade 8."¹

"A meta-analysis of more than one hundred studies compared students who had SEL with those who did not. The data shows impressive improvements among the students who were in social and emotional learning programs in their behaviour in and out of the classroom and their scores were a large fourteen percentile points higher than similar students who were not given social and emotional learning programs."²

7. "Emotional and social learning not only helps our children academically but helps them become more capable, happier and more confident and these life long foundations make them less prone to alcohol abuse, depression or violence, key issues facing our children today."³

Although it sounds like a relatively simple concept, it has taken significant expertise to develop within our school with help from CBI, a Vancouver based behaviour consultancy firm to create successful outcomes as it is peer group facilitation, not specifically special needs attention.

Everyone has been in highly functional group as well as dysfunctional groups we'd

¹ Academic achievement in Grade 8 can be **better predicted** from knowing **children's grade 3 social emotional competence** than from knowing **children's grade 3 academic achievement** (Caprara et al., 2000).

Prosocial behaviours exhibited by students in the classroom **are better predictors of academic achievement** than are standardized test scores (Wentzel, 1993).

Social emotional literacy reduces violence and promotes prosocial behaviours (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, & Zaidman-Zait, 2002; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998)

²Lantieri, L. and Goleman., "Building Emotional Intelligence" Sounds True Inc., Boulder CO 2008 p.3 Study was from R. P. Weissberg, J.A. Durlak, R.D. Taylor, A.B. Dymnick and M.U. O'Brien, "Promoting social and emotional learning enhances school success: Implications of a meta-analysis." Manuscript submitted for publication.

³Ibid Lanteri from Shapiro, L.E. *How to Raise a Child with a High EQ: A Parent Guide to Emotional Intelligence* New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

rather forget and the facilitation of a group can make all the difference. When peers get together, how you go about creating a group where people feel closer, rather than feel their increased differences, and how you create group cohesion and deal with group dynamic issues like cliquing etc.

General Wolfe's Active Friends program is designed to help the school community address the need of social inclusivity and relationship skills, a need also identified in the Ministry of Education's IPR for healthy living and safe schools. The program is designed to not only benefit the focus children and their active friends, but spin off to all children in the playground.

The Active Friends Program is designed to help children build exceptional, life long skills in emotional and social intelligence—a key indicator of long-term success in school. The social environment of children is not only critical for their learning success, but friendships are considered one of the most important parts of childhood.

How is the Program Structured?

The program's approach is based on children teaching children in a structured, adult-facilitated environment. It is based on the best of social inclusion, peer-mediated learning, and school-wide, positive, behavioural support research.

The program is a play or social group with up to five children per group. They meet officially once a week over lunch hour. They meet in a specific place and there are visual supports specific for that group which can be made by the group.

The peer group is designed to have one "focus child" who has experienced isolation or other social challenges and three or four "typical" children in a structured play environment facilitated by a trained adult. The trained adult interacts only with the typical children to teach skills and understanding so that they can empathize and coach the focus child.

The focus child is selected by the administration with input from the teachers. As well parents make requests if they want their child involved and they try and consider that as supportive parents are helpful. An observation period is critical to ensure a baseline is taken and specific goals are identified so the group can focus on the highest priority areas of development (i.e. conversational skills, learning how to take turns and play games, how to get attention in positive ways etc.).



There is specific criteria for selecting the right combination of active friends as a variety of personality types makes for a more functional enjoyable group, as well as peers who are interested in this program. In our school, it quickly became a program most children and their parents wanted them to be part of.

In the first three sessions the typical peers are trained and in the fourth session the focus child joins the group for the first official session. What happens in the group is largely determined by the peer group with the adult helping them decide what decisions they need to make. At the year end we have celebrated with a party for all the children involved in the program.

During the sessions, it is a bit of a fishbowl as the children are being watched, coached and often videotaped. And as they get used to it and they gain permission to coach the focus child, the relationships begin developing more naturally. We found year one had a big of an emphasis on skill development and in year two the bonds seemed to deepen in a much stronger way.

The primary way this extends to other children is on the playgroup as these children are modeling different behaviour with the isolated child and in our cases, the other children have copied what is happening. As a result of the new friendship skills from this program, these children go into the playground with a higher level of play and social skills and shares this with all the other children.

We are in the process of setting up a friendship drama program that will build on these skills and be available to all our children as a lunchtime option.

What do the children say about the program?

From our year end evaluations all of the children (except one) and their parents involved wanted to be part of the program again. They talked about how it make them feel so good to help their friend.

We invited some of the children back to Wolfe who had been part of our Active Friends program and here is a summary of some of the key things they told us:

1. Before Active Friends, they really didn't know how to interact with the novice friend and she seemed scared and uncomfortable around them. They didn't know how to go beyond being polite.
2. they didn't really know the focus child. So having a small group allowed them to really get to know her in a way they hadn't been able to over the first 5 years at school and get to like her.
3. They talked about how much they had seen the focus girl change from the beginning of the program until now.
4. A girl who had not been part of Active Friends but had been the Student Council President came and spoke about how the active friends were role models so everyone learned how to play with the children who were isolated. She said it changed their whole grade. She said with the boys group she was

amazed how much kinder and caring all the boys became too. She summarized what is so special about this program when she said:

“I’m not Hannah’s expert friend, or her active friend, I am just her friend. She’s got my back and I’ve got hers.” Listening to them, we were all pretty much in tears as it was obvious that there were real friendships developed and lives were radically changed.

It was the same great children who just didn't know how to interact with the focus children, and this program gave a few peers hands on skills which all the other children were able to pick up as well.

What is the need?

Why does Wolfe need social groups such as the ACTIVE friends club?

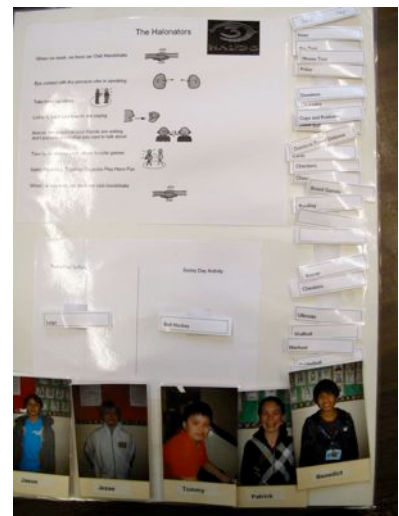
We already have a good school and great children at the school. However, like most schools, we have a number of children whose teachers or parents identify as needing support as they are experiencing serious isolation or big challenges with friends. Unfortunately despite our other great programs and special needs supports, there are serious isolation issues for some of our children.

Most of the isolated children are special needs children and most of our typical children are not specifically taught how to integrate with them, so our children may be well mannered towards them (at best), but have no idea or enough understanding of them to be interested in creating a real relationship.

Healthy relationship skills are a very small part of the school curriculum and while we have high expectations of our children, there is not as much teaching of emotional and social skills to support them in reaching those expectations.

We know children (and adults) feel good when we are acting with integrity with our own values, so most children enjoy treating their friends well and being treated well. Most children are at some point on the receiving end of being purposely excluded, teased, or bullied, and don't know how to deal with conflict, nor how to speak up or set boundaries respectfully.

Sometimes people say, “girls can be mean or boys can by xyz,” but anyone with a child, can see how beautiful their child is on the inside and our role as a school community is help bring more of that forward. We all act poorly when we feel in an unsafe environment, have felt we may get hurt or treated harshly or a place where we can't really trust our friends.



Our kids are good but like adults can develop some bad habits often out of not really understanding the options that will truly address what is bothering them. Helping our children learn how to meet their goals in positive ways reduces these kinds of issues. Often children are mean when something else is going on for them. They desperately want to be included or they haven't learned empathy.

Learning friendship skills and having children on the playground who have learned the skills through 'active' friends helps make everyone safer as poor behaviours become less socially acceptable.

It is one thing to learn concepts of how to deal with these issues, **it is completely another to be coached through real life situations and to try out new ways of being**—new ways of speaking up, setting boundaries, enrolling another child to do things a different way. Learning how to do this through adult coaching during 'active' friends helps children learn in a hands-on way.

How does it help to reinforce our school's PAWS code of conduct?

The Wolfe code of conduct is PAWS: polite, accountable, welcoming, and safe. The ACTIVE Friends program gives the children at Wolfe another way to learn and live these concepts. Most importantly, the program takes abstract concepts, and through **coaching in real situations**, allows the children to get tangible, hands-on experience.

The program creates circles of children who learn the concepts of playing well together. Also, they are in a **'fishbowl' where they get coached in real situations** so that they become more masterful at knowing how to handle situations where higher levels of social and emotional skills are needed.

On the playground and in the hallways, children learn from each other. By working with some of our children to learn more expertise, we have more children modeling more highly skilled behaviour which spins off to other children. We have seen that once a few children worked with our more isolated children in year one and two, the skills spread and more children knew how to better connect to children previously isolated. All of the children gained the benefit of feeling more connected to each other.

By having children learn how they can be more empathetic, kinder, have better boundaries, treat others with respect, we have less risk of bullying, teasing, and the things that make school so hard for children at times. And as children or adults, we



are all capable of responding to situations with anger and we are also capable of responding in ways that affirm ourselves and others. We all feel better when we have the tools to respond well and this is what we are focused on developing during these critical elementary years.

How our Active Friends Goals merge with General Wolfe's PAWS goals:

1. Teach all of the children in the social group how to interact Politely with each other.
2. Help our 'active' friends understand how they can make a difference through their behaviours, and thereby becoming Accountable for promoting our PAWS code of conduct
3. Helping our 'active' friends understand how they can be Welcoming to other children in the school.
4. Help our focus children feel more Safe as they will have more people to turn to if they are in trouble.
5. Meet the IPR for healthy relationships in the health and career module.
6. Help children who are isolated on the playground and are missing the friendships that make childhood joyful.
7. Help typical children to learn the skills needed to interact with children who are socially challenged.
8. Realize and act on the fact that children learn social skills best from each other, not from adults.

Friendship as part of the IRP – Health and Career Healthy Living

These benefits match the Ministry of Education's objectives (IRP) within the Health and Career Education section that relate to 'active' Friends in the section of Healthy Living. There are specific objectives for each grade and a summary of education from K to 7 is:

- qualities of friendships and healthy relationships
- ways family members care for and support each other
- interpersonal skills
- recognizing and responding to stereotyping, discrimination, and bullying
- safe and caring schools (for our school we could add social inclusion/supporting isolated children within this section...)
- social inclusion (added by Wolfe)

What are the intended outcomes of the social groups?

The intended outcome of the programs is to develop friendship skills for both the typical children (the 'active' friends) and the focus child so that they will all enjoy a lifetime of rich friendships.

In the case of our school, the mother who initiated this program (Kim Pemberton) didn't want it only to benefit her child, she wanted it to be set up so there would be

opportunities to support all our isolated children and help all the peers learn new inclusion skills. Our school administration and parents agreed so our plan was to keep expanding the program.

So our Active Friends committee's plan has always been focused on helping as many children as we can, both to transform the experience of our isolated children, but also to have a safer, happier and more inclusive playground and school atmosphere.

Life Skills that will benefit them in everything they do:

1. Empathy (how we are all similar and different, how we all have strengths and can help each other with our weaknesses, what motivates 'different' behaviour)
2. Respectful feedback - how to give feedback in a way that preserves dignity
3. Boundaries - how to speak up when something isn't working and ask for what you want
4. Managing conflict - how to work through conflict and stay good friends
5. The joy of contributing to teach other - we all have strengths and weaknesses and the joy of helping each other
6. How to coach each other in respectful enrolling ways.
7. More experience creating healthy new relationships

Year one and two results at Wolfe

1. Isolation was reversed. The two children who had 2 years in this program experienced dramatic changes and left surrounded with friends and some happy memories of school.
2. The other children in the same age group also started interacting with the formerly isolated children so the benefits were not limited to the 'active' friends group. Children and SSWs (student support workers) model these new behaviours on the playground.
3. Peers at first were reluctant to provide feedback initially and with achieving results and through adult support; they gradually gained more confidence learning and coaching friendship skills.
4. The entire grade took pleasure in seeing the success of the focus children (share examples). Rather than have uncomfortable memories of children isolated and being unsure how to help, the children were empowered and shared in the success of the focus children.
5. Our year end surveys in year one and two
 - 95% of participating children said they want to participate in the program again
 - All the children surveyed all said they felt more confident working out problems with friends because they have done it before

- All the children reported seeing positive changes in the focus friend and their comments showed they felt good about that
 - 95% of children reported they felt more able to speak up when they see inappropriate behaviours and reported more confidence in working out problems with all their friends
 - There were some comments that they wished they had more time in the groups each week
 - Parents want their children to be part of these groups
6. A quote from the SSWs surveys was, 'this should not be voluntary, when we have something that works, it should be extended to all children who are isolated as we know with this support, their whole school experience can be transformed' We'd like all our children to have this chance.

The purpose of these written materials

1. To make this program easy to run by having the information, training materials, forms like parent letters all in one place. Roots of Empathy is a gold standard because of their excellent materials and research.
2. To continually get better results by recording our results and updating what will make the program better for next year
3. To assist other schools who would like to set up this kind of program
4. To support us to expand this program so Wolfe becomes a leader in friendship (social and emotional) development.
5. To 'programize' this concept so that when administration staffing changes at Wolfe, we have a better chance of keeping this program and the expertise built up within the school community. Administration changes has led to this program being cut at some schools where it was very successful.
6. For anyone to be able to review the program and understand either the big picture or a specific area they are looking at.

HOW TO SET UP AND RUN THE ACTIVE FRIENDS PROGRAM

Overview of key steps

1. Determine the children who could most benefit from having a social group, set some baseline benchmarks (forms attached) and agree on one or two measurable goals
2. Select 3-4 typical friends or potential friends who have the aptitude, interest and personality combination in learning to become 'active' friends
3. Train the 'active' friends and develop the relationships between the adult facilitator ('active' friends' coach) and 'active' friends

4. Begin the weekly (30, 45 or 60 minute) social groups with the adult facilitator coaching ONLY the 'active' friends
5. Record data, assess the impact, and get help if results are not meeting goals. It is key that adult facilitators do NOT interact with the focus child.
6. Get regular reviews either from CBI or some other peer group expert to maximize the impact of the groups' success so the adult facilitator is continually ensuring the skills of all the participating children are being enhanced.

Selection criteria for the 'active' friends only training

Selecting the adult facilitator to run the groups

The following is the ideal criteria for group leaders:

- Believe in the possibilities for the focus child. Although they have not experienced shifts in the focus child, they need to be open to the possibility that their behaviour can dramatically shift and with support from peers they can enjoy a richer social life;
- Most effective if the adult knows the child well;
- Must be available on a regular basis;
- Flexibility and the ability to adjust their role from prompting the focus child to prompting the 'active' friends;
- Is flexible and dynamic so can increase or decrease support to the team based on the situation;
- Is open to asking for and getting help/support so the group doesn't get into bad habits and figures out how to readjust the situation;
- Can plan goals and monitor results of the playgroup;
- Spends time with the focus child outside of the playgroup to facilitate integration of skills learned;
- Is proactive and can figure out how to customize the group, visual cues and other support and play materials;
- Has an understanding of the motivations for the focus child's behaviour so can help teach empathy and connection to the 'active' friends.

Selection criteria for the focus (target) child and 'active' friends or circle of friends

Focus (target) friend

- Has social issues, particularly experiences isolation at Wolfe
- Has good attendance
- Child is interested in attending this program
- Parents have an understanding about the program and support their child's participation
- Struggles with social interactions
- Repeats activities and appear unable to initiate new games on his/her own
- May be a loner or withdrawn
- May display negative attention-seeking behaviour

- Doesn't initiate interactions or they are unsuccessful
- May have trouble with conversations due to some communication difficulties

Active friends selection criteria

3-5 'active' friends for 1 focus friend

- Same sex tends to be ideal if that is how most of the children on the playground currently play
- They have play or conversational interests in common
- Finding children of different personality types can make a group more successful as having a group of easy going people, there may not be anyone initiating. A mix of personalities that would work well may be:
 - a) Caring and nurturing - takes the time for the focus child
 - b) Initiator/leader - someone who likes to tell everyone what to do sometimes (makes sure the group gets going)
 - c) Funny – someone who will play with the rules in a good-hearted, fun way and likes to laugh
 - d) Easy going – someone who is a great team player

Suggestions from CBI

- Similar age as the focus child
- It is useful if some of all of the following personality traits: patience, maturity and persistence
- Shows an interest in the focus child and focus child shows an interest in the 'active' friend"⁴
- Typical student attending wolfe
- Has good attendance
- Child is interested in participating in the program
- Parents have a full understanding about the program and support their child's participation
- Has the ability to be patient and caring with others
- Demonstrated good communication and play skills
- Has show an interest in interacting with students who have special needs
- Has some connection to the focus child
- Would be beneficial if the 'active' friend is in the same classroom as the focus child; however, it would also have merit if one of the 'active' friends was in another classroom
- If the focus child is in gr 7, it would be beneficial if the 'active' friends will be going to the same high school as the focus child

Added notes:

- In one social group from another school, a child who was being bullied and the child who was bullying were put in the same social group. This worked well and needs to be carefully and well supervised.

⁴ Expert Friends Role CBI Consultants 2004 p13

- There may be an opportunity to support a child who is more shy to learn to become an 'active' friend so their social skills strengthen which requires a more skilled facilitator
- If there are clique issues within the grade, the adult facilitator must either be well supported or children who are not part of the clique behaviour should be selected

Objectives for the Active Friends Only Training

Before the focus friend joins the social group, the 'active' friends receive some specific training to prepare them to:

- Strengthen their understanding and commitment to the program
- Normalize the 'focus' friend's behaviour by seeing the shared fears, needs and interests underneath the behaviour
- Outline and role play ways to support the focus friend and begin outlining friendship skills that will be developed through this program
- Decide on the logistics and activities of the social group
- Develop the relationship so the adult facilitator/trainer can move into the coach role and data recorder with 'active' friends

The organization of the playgroups (or social groups)

With an adult facilitator, a playgroup comprised of the active friends and focus friends meets once or twice a week for 30 minutes to an hour, usually during lunch hour (or it can be during class time). The active children have three training sessions to prepare themselves as the 'active' friends. The 'active' friends are helped to understand why the focus child does the things they do and they are given strategies that will assist them successfully interacting with the focus child.

At the beginning of each playgroup session the group is reminded of the group norms they have created together, and they play. The facilitator (play group guide) encourages and supports the 'active' friends to coach the focus friend. The adult facilitator is encouraged NOT to coach the focus child, only the 'active' peers.

Setting Goals and Measuring Results

See associated forms in the appendix

What not to do in the Group

There are a few things that are not encouraged:

- Providing children with sweets or junk food (encourage them with activities or other methods) at the play sessions
- No TV or movies as interaction is encouraged
- Adult facilitator is not to talk with focus child unless it is an emergency
- Adult facilitator is to use encouraging language and tone with all the children and to get support from other adults involved with the program if that becomes difficult

Running of the Group

The groups become increasingly self run but in the beginning, the adult facilitator is very involved, particularly in helping find creative fun activities that help the children look forward to their time together.

Documenting Results – Video and Data Collection

See associated forms. If you cannot do data collection (we didn't do much except for some written updates), regular videotaping allows for review and to see the shifts and changes since the beginning.

Videotaping is also critical for knowledge transfer to your staff. By having footage from the training and groups, it is an excellent tool for future years and to help increase the speed of knowledge transfer and decrease consulting costs in future years.

More work needs to be done by our school baselining and tracking our typical peers so we can talk more specifically about the impact to those children and what skills we noticed changed most dramatically for each child.

Dealing with Issues within the Group

In our case, the adult leader was a key part of the group bonding, however, as they are 'on' with the children and in many cases learning a new skill with new children, having resources like the Vice Principal and CBI to help them identify what will make the group run much better was critical. They'd help look at how they can do their role even better, how to solve issues within the group was important, what kinds of facilitation may help the bonding or may resolve underlying patterns.

On days when Bonita from CBI came to our sessions, the skill level of the facilitators was enhanced and knowledge transfer increased, so it was a wonderful learning opportunity for the school staff and supportive to help them make the groups run better.

Roles

Steering committee role

The primary role of the ACTIVE friends steering committee is to ensure that the ACTIVE friends program gets started, is funded, and has the resources needed to be successful. The committee is to be of service to the school.

The steering committee ideally is comprised of the Principal and/or Vice Principal, resource teacher(s), teachers of the children involved, parent volunteers, and any other interested staff. In its first two years at Wolfe, it was comprised of two parents (Kim Pemberton, Nancy Bradshaw), and the Vice Principals (initially Catherine Jamieson, then Luanne Kerry) with periodic attendance of the Principals (Denise Johnson and then Isabel Grant).

The current role of the steering committee is

- to make sure the group is set up as early in the year as possible
- to provide input for decisions to be made ultimately by the Vice Principal
- to determine funding needed, secure funding and other resources for the program from PAC and outside sources
- to support the celebrations and acknowledgements of the group
- to handle issues that arise outside of ones handled by staff
- do reviews of the success of year and present to PAC
- do presentation to the VSB to expand this to other schools
- to liaise with the parents of the school on this subject

Program initiator role

Adult facilitator of the Active Friends group

It is required that the facilitator have expertise in running peer groups and knows how to lead from behind to help the group feel closer to each other and to quickly deal with inevitable group issues that can cause the group to become dysfunctional.

If that expertise is not within the person leading the group, that is fine but we strongly recommend having an expert who has this expertise helping set up, train the adult facilitator and regularly visit the group to observe the underlying dynamics and plan how to resolve them quickly.

The overall goal is to support the focus child and the rest of the group to have joint experiences or group focus on a game or conversation. The focus child is often learning about unspoken rules of behaviour, the order of play, shifting from one play activity or conversation to another, and how interaction goes back and forth. At times this may mean slowing the pace down and taking some extra time to really understand each other and build empathy.

Having fun activities and props to choose from can make this time even more special. Even older children enjoy drama games if there are some good props and they can make their own films and do all kinds of creative versions of dress up.

The key is that the adult does not interact with the focus child but instead helps guide the typical peers.

1. Set up the environment for the children to play (places, games etc) and help with logistics in getting all the children there.
2. Create the visual cues (or coordinate the group to) for the group
3. "Teach 'active' participants to understand focus child particularly initiation attempts.
4. Teach 'active' participants to keep including the focus child and try new things together.

5. Track results (we hadn't done the recording in year one/two, hopefully for year three)
6. Provide guidance/ideas for play as needed
7. Set goals and evaluate progress⁵

The ideal is to continue moving from very involved with the group in an increasingly less directive way until the adult is truly just a coach for the typical peers.

CBI or Expert Role

We strongly recommend hiring someone who has expertise and experience of running peer groups for the age level you are working with. Groups can become dysfunctional (we found this) and solving this early in the cycle is important. Also the consultant can be helpful in setting the goals, selecting the peers and training especially in year one when you want to make it successful so it continues in your school.

We were hoping to become self sufficient after year one, but even with all the procedures documented, so much of running peer groups is simply experience so we have continued to keep CBI involved to keep us learning and deepening our skills as well as training new staff. We are also trying out Friend to Friend's systems this year to expand our experience.

CBI's role initially at Wolfe was to teach us everything about the program including leading our staff and all the initial training of the children. CBI (Bonita Holman) also came to many of our sessions (at least once a month, sometimes more) and did most of the troubleshooting. Her observations, insights and recommendations were extremely valuable and showed her years of expertise in running and troubleshooting peer group dynamics. Our initial cost in the first two years was \$1500/group using our staff as lead and CBI as support.

Our plan this year (our third year 2009/2010) is to do most of the training internally and our cost per group is about half of our previous budget (\$750/group or less). CBI (Bonita's) observations are incredibly valuable so we are including her for continuing support/troubleshooting as well as for some initial training/observation. We have the additional cost of having Friend to Friend leading a group (\$2,000) and we'll have staff involved with knowledge transfer.

Vice Principal and/or Resource Teacher's Role

Our success has been dependent upon having an active Vice Principal running this program and having the principal's support. Although originally it was a parent initiated program, its success has been because it became supported at the Principal and Vice Principal level since our inception.

⁵ CBI Consultants 2004 page 16-18 with some notes in italics by Nancy

This means that our program and number of children in the program is able expand and continue to benefit not just the students who have parents who are either able to advocate or pay for this service, but we can provide it to our most in need students.

The Vice Principal or school leader works with the staff to decide and coordinate

- the scope of the program especially the number of focus children
- the budget and works with PAC for funding
- gaining teacher/staff buy-in and involvement
- which SSAs will work with the children
- which active friends will be chosen
- coordinating CBI support (or Friend2Friend)
- expanding the benefits to other children (through supervision aids, other friendship teachings)
- parent liaison
- setting up or leading all the training for staff, parents, children etc
- troubleshooting the groups to ensure they get results
- overseeing the SSAs to help them become proficient at these new skills
- doing evaluations
- observing and collecting results
- summarizing results for the year
- overall program/project management

In our case, we have a parent helper (Nancy – me) who acts like a project administrator to help offload this role.

Classroom Teacher's Role

Ideally the classroom teacher would

- help identify the child
- list out issues and ideal changes
- review criteria for active friends
- provide feedback on potential active friends based on our criteria
- provide feedback over the year on shifts of focus and active friends

Active Friends Role

The Active Friends role is guided by the leader for their group and includes

- attending the training
- participating in the group each week
- working with the focus child outside of group at their discretion – it is hoped that they will spend some playtime with the focus child
- doing the year end evaluation and attending the year end party (if there continues to be one)

Parent Volunteers Role

There have been peer programs at other schools, but sometimes they completely disappear after the regular administrative staff changes. The principal, vice-principal, SSAs all change schools regularly which means that much of the expertise accumulated in the program leaves as well as the understanding of the benefits.

By having parents involved whose children are often at the school for years, you have a piece of continuity to lobby and ensure the program stays and if possible expands. Also these programs need initial funding so if they aren't included as part of the teachers' wish list, having parents able to advocate for them is excellent.

In our case at Wolfe, it was very helpful to have both a parent of a daughter with special needs who benefited from this program as well as a parent of a typical child whose was not in the groups (me). I was able to lobby about the benefits to all children and the kind of playground/school atmosphere as there wasn't a perceived self gain for me or my child. In fact, I feel strongly that there is a gain for me and my child for this program, and I feel like having this program anywhere is a gain for us as it makes for a more compassionate, caring world. But I was the one bringing forward and communicating the benefits that typical parents (the majority) could relate to.

The key pieces our committee of two parents have been involved in has been:

- initiating the program
- when VP and Principal changes we lobbied to get the program restarted amongst the many priorities facing new staff
- create presentations and lobby for funding from PAC and talking to parents about the benefits of these kinds of programs
- securing funding from the Variety Club
- educate themselves on the program by taking the training
- videotaping the training in year one
- writing up training materials for staff and children
- organizing all the food/gifts for the year end party
- initiating VSB presentations for lobbying to make this kind of program available to all isolated children and inviting VSB people to our presentations etc
- coordinating food/invitations for a teacher lunch to get them more involved 2009/2010 year
- updating PAC
- acting as program admin support as it is so much extra for VP to do
- creating this binder
- helping organize a free lunch for teachers to help them better understand the benefits of the program
- now setting up the drama friendship club

PROJECT PLAN AND CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS

Checklist for Success

Question for Luanne - Where can parent volunteers offload staff?

Sample Project

This is one of our original plans and just gives an idea of what yours could look like.

SAMPLE PROJECT PLAN
Set Up
Assess resources and decide what the outcomes the school wants this year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) how many playgroups to set up (financial, adult facilitators, staff/admin support, parent support) b) how to roll out the friendship training to the other classes (share the learning)
c) Secure funding and staff leadership
Set up team and roles (helpful to have extra volunteers for extra support as needed). Also consider one adult facilitator is needed for each playgroup.
Selection and Permission for Students
Use selection criteria to identify potential novice candidates in connection with teacher and have initial conversations with the parents.
Assess the novice friend and determine behavioural measurable outcomes for the playgroup and fill out assessment forms
In connection with selection criteria feedback from novice child's teacher, family (if possible), watching who they play with, select potential expert friends.
Send out letters of permission to the parents. Ideally offer a 1 ½ hr orientation for parents to learn more about the program.
If the benefits of the program are to be shared with the rest of the school, have presentations and information presented to the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PAC (parents) - Teachers and admin staff - Students
Train all involved with playgroups and school wide friendship training
Train the adult facilitators and other people associated with the program. Ensure the adult facilitators have a support to help with the data collection, planning for each playgroup and enhancing the learning/dealing with issues in the playgroups.
School/classroom wide friendship training can be planned here linked with the Healthy Living (relationships) IPR for each grade.
Select the places each group will meet
Begin playgroups and friendship training/programs
Facilitator and/or the playgroup participants set up visual cues to remind them of their playgroup's agreements (see samples - take turns etc).

Having an expert drop in and support the adult facilitator in each group, review how well the novice child is reaching the targets, review how well expert friends are doing in learning and coaching friendship skills and providing feedback to help the quality keep increasing

Reviews, support and feedback to teacher/parents

Ideally a quarterly review between the classroom teacher, the facilitator, the adult expert (if external), the lead coordinator and any volunteers to review how the group is going, adjust goals and agree on the information that will be shared back with the parents.

Update the parents outlining the kinds of skills the students are learning and a very brief summary of how things are progressing.

Half way and final review amongst all adult facilitators on what is working, what is not, sharing information and identifying how to continue making the program better

Celebrate, thank, evaluate and do some preliminary plans for next year

Evaluation forms to go out to all student participants, their parents, the teacher, the adult facilitator, parent volunteers and any involved staff

Year end party – ideally funded from the neighbourhood grant program. Time to celebrate the children and to give them a certificate. Variety Club gave our kids teddy bears which was great....pizza

Thank you letters/cards to any sponsors. PAC review to summarize results and to begin setting expectations for next year.

Budget and Budget Management

Our costs in year one and year two were about \$1500 per playgroup plus training costs and equipment. In year three our costs were reduced to half of that per playgroup (\$750), however we have a few extra costs of

- Doing Friend 2 Friend training \$375/person
- Having one Friend 2 Friend Group (\$2000)
- Video camera for data collection (before/after and other school events)
- Drama Club for friendship skills to expand benefits of Active Friends

In year three we invested in Friend2Friend training as we felt it would give us additional expertise and provide some extra pieces to augment our CBI learning.

Financial Options

In year one PAC funded us about \$3,000 (2 playgroups). In year two PAC was willing to fund \$6,000 for 4 playgroups but as Variety Club funding was secured (2:1 ratio), PAC only had to pay \$3250. In year three we needed about 3,000. (Background – this covered the four playgroups plus the extra amount for Friend2Friend, drama group and video which was covered from leftover money in year two.

Key Components to Minimize Costs

Using CBI's time on high impact items is the key way to minimize costs.

- Minimizing their travel time,

- using CBI to observe and help with set up and goals of groups (poor set up of wrong teams or unclear goals leads to much more troubleshooting time needed)
- CBI to troubleshoot issues early
- Short meeting between VP and CBI after viewing sessions to highlight what changes need to be implemented by SSAs to get better results so VP can ensure SSAs receive that information and can adjust.

EXPANDING THE PROGRAM

Class-wide and school-wide implementation of friendship skills

'Active' Friends has a number of benefits that naturally transfer to the other children including:

- having more children on the playground who have the experience and capability of modeling friendship skills such as empathy, good boundaries, and speaking up with respect which spins off to other children
- observing an child treating a more focus or more socially challenged child well, inspiring other children to reach out more to the focus children (particularly during year 2 of the program), so we have more children treating each other well
- making our playgrounds safe so that fewer children are at risk for bullying as the ones most likely to be bullied/teased are the isolated children. With 'active' friends they now have a circle of friends watching out for them so all children do not have to face the trauma or experiencing or watching bullying or severe teasing.
- By having two groups of our four in the older grades they made the Active Friends 'cool' so all the younger kids wanted to be part of it too.

This year Friend to Friend as part of their offering will be providing puppet shows on autism demystification (in January) for a number of our classes.

See below for future potential ideas. We'd need a teachers to play leadership roles to help those kinds of programs get going in our school.

Drama Club for Friendship Plays

Initially, as a way to implement the benefits of Active Friends to more children in our school. we are going to be setting up a lunchtime drama/acting club this year (Jan 2010) with the theme of friendship. We will be setting up learning objectives linked to Active Friends.

We have been collecting donations from parents for costumes and props. The Gr 6 or 7s playing leadership roles within the drama club.

Our support team will be the Vice Principal, a teacher support (classroom), our counselor, an drama teacher/actor, and hopefully we'll have some support from high school students.

Future Ideas

A future idea for expanding into the classrooms could involve teachers. For each grade, the 'active' Friends program could support classroom learning for teachers who choose to participate. A way of making the learning even higher impact is having children 2-3 grades ahead teach the module. By having a teacher/expert friends team work with the children 2 grades older on creating experiential curriculum, the benefits are:

1. Children learn social skills best from other children, particularly those they want to emulate so they will be more motivated to copy their older peers teachings/behaviours
2. The children teaching will learn the IRP materials at a much deeper level and as these social behaviours all build upon each other, it will provide a much more solid foundation for adding social and emotional skills each year.
3. Like the buddy reader program, this direct interaction helps develop stronger connections at different grade levels helping create a more safe and caring school.

With some excellent materials and support as required, the classes would be partnered up so that the older classes provide the younger classes with friendship education linked with the IPR for that age range and related goals of the school.

The Steering Committee of 'active' Friends would classroom preparations materials and in classroom support which the teacher can use or can create her/his own - The 'active' Friends committee would provide classroom support materials to make it easier for the teachers to implement. Also by making sure that the program is tightly linked to the IPRs, then it is also achieving the goals of that grade. In addition, the materials would link to some of the latest research in friendship development/social skills appropriate for the grade level of the children.

Ideally a meeting with some interested teachers and the counselor to outline what would be most beneficial to them and as a general outline the classroom preparation materials would include:

- Ministry of Education IPR, prescribed learning outcomes, planning for assessment and assessment strategies
- Classroom materials to help the older children deepen their understanding of these concepts including sample questions
- Materials to support the older children in creating learning modules for the younger children (e.g. outline for the teacher on break out group size recommended, what to have each breakout group do, teaching the children how to teach a lesson, then specific recommendations for each break out group relating to the IPRs as well as creating material for different learning styles

with an emphasis on kinesthetic learning style as it tends to be more fun for the children.

- Support materials to do a follow-up visit that addresses the assessment and reinforces the learning later in the year.

Multi-School Implementation

We are advocates of multi-school implementation so no children spend their childhood isolated when there are solutions and all children have a chance to strengthen the emotional and social intelligence.

On a very pragmatic sense, the more people trained in this, the more chance we have support aides, teachers and lead administrators who as they rotate amongst schools, will have this peer group expertise so our training costs go down.

Ideally if the VSB gains expertise, we can be supported by the VSB rather than schools having to raise their own funds. In many cases, these kinds of peer programs have been requested by parents for their child so they didn't get school wide implementation and the associated benefits. By having this expanded to numerous schools

How Many Groups to Set Up

Our principal and Vice Principals have been encouraging us to start small (two groups) and keep building. So we started with 2, then had 4, and this year have 5. It is a balancing act as our staff changes, and all the other priorities of the school.

PROGRAM MATERIALS

Parent Permission

For the 'active' Friends:

Date: _____

Dear Parent/Guardian of: _____

Your child is being invited to help others at Wolfe by participating in a program called 'active' Friends. 'active' Friends is designed specifically to help students who are not always included with their peers. The program will also benefit your child by teaching invaluable skills that can be used in all peer interactions and which continues to develop their emotional and social intelligence.

Some of the students at Wolfe have very few friends to play with during recess and lunch. Although they are highly motivated to play with their peers and to develop friendships, due to some social difficulties, most of their free time at school is spent alone on the playground. These students would benefit from peers, such as your child, taking a more active role in encouraging social interaction.

The 'active' Friends Program is based on research that shows that children with social skill difficulties learn social and play skills best from their peers. This program will teach students ways to include their peers and help them to participate in games and activities while on the playground. Your child will learn such important skills as:

- *Empathy (how we are all similar and different, how we all have strengths and can help each other with our weaknesses, what motivates 'different' behaviour)*
- *Respectful feedback - how to give feedback in a way that preserves dignity*
- *Boundaries - how to speak up when something isn't working and ask for what you want*
- *Managing conflict - how to work through conflict and stay good friends*
- *The joy of contributing to teach other - we all have strengths and weaknesses and the joy of helping each other*
- *More experience creating healthy new relationships*
- How to encourage and teach a variety of playground and free-time games
- How to model critical social skills and
- How to better interact with students who have disabilities and differences

Teaching will consist of games, role-playing and some instruction. School personnel will conduct the small groups in consultation with a private agency called CBI (Communication, Behaviour and Instruction). We are very thankful that this opportunity has been generously funded by our PAC and by the Heart of Variety Club.

As part of this program, we will be videotaping our training sessions, so that this model of peer-mediated support can be used again. This videotape will be used for in-school training *as well as shared with other educators and media interested in this program.*

It is hoped that your child could help us by being a part of the 'active' Friends Program this year. By participating in a peer mediation group, the 'active' friends will be given an opportunity to further develop their own communication, listening and social skills. It will involve approximately 40 minutes of time each week, usually over the lunch hour. Please talk with your child about his/her willingness to participate in this valuable program.

Please return the enclosed form by _____ If you require any further information or have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the school.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. Luanne Kerry
Vice Principal

Wolfe Elementary 'active' Friends Program 2009-2010

Please return this portion to Mrs. Kerry by _____

Student's name: _____

Grade: _____ Classroom Teacher: _____

Parent/Guardian's name: _____

- Yes, I give my approval for my child to participate in the 'active' Friends *and for pictures/videos to be taken for the purposes of educating staff, parents and the public. I understand most of the videos/pictures are for training but they may go to the media as well.*
- No, I am not interested in having my child participate in the 'active' Friends Program

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Please share some information about your child to help us prepare the groups.

Favourite real or imaginary games: _____

Favourite sports: _____

Favourite conversation topics: _____

Favourite friends: _____

Strengths in friendships: _____

Areas where child could benefit from development: _____

Any hopes you have for this program with your child: _____

I would like to attend a parent training night to understand more about this program and how I could support this learning at home. Wed Nov 25th is tentative date 6:30-8pm.

- Yes
- No

Parent Update

Parents in their evaluation said they'd like a better understanding on what is happening and how they can support it at home. So this year, we plan on doing an update this year and will add this when it is done. This would have content like:

'Active' friends this term have been focused on learning:

- Empathy – understanding and empathizing with underlying motives rather than behaviours
- Conversation skills – looking in the eye when talking

You could see if you are noticing any more of these behaviours in your child in other relationship....

Ways of reinforcing this at home are:.....

Parent Training Materials

Nancy to write these from student training materials. Use video footage for real examples.

Sample PAC Presentation Material

See appendix 1 for year 2 PAC presentation

Nancy Bradshaw has master

See appendix 2 for year end PAC Update after year 2

Nancy has master

Training and Curriculum Materials

Teacher Materials

So teachers know what is happening in the school

Setting Target Behaviours for Focus Child and 'active' Children

In order to focus the groups, prioritizing what will best support the focus child is critical. The first step is to observe the focus child and determine why they are not interacting well with their peers. It may be because they have not learned to initiate or respond, they may not know how to carry on a peer conversation or other issue. There may be specific bad habits they have developed that have created alienation.

So setting out target behaviours in specific criteria and doing an initial data collection estimate of how often you see that behaviour occur so that one can compare the pre/post results of the group. Also you can observe the 'active' children before and after to notice how they are interacting with the focus child and other children before and after the experience.

Initial Training Sessions (3) without Focus Friend

Session One:

1. For the active friends without the focus child.
2. Setting the context to understand why they are here, what they are offering and the kinds of things they'll be learning. How this applies to stronger life skills.
3. Gaining commitment of the 'active' friends. Initially it is the recognition that they are excellent friends, later it will be the pleasure they will receive seeing how this peer group is transforming the experience of the focus friend
4. Understanding how we all are different and support each other (normalizing differences).
5. Begin the observations and understanding of the focus friend
6. Help the children understand they will be the led with the facilitator's support. Unless there is something big, the facilitator will not interact with the focus child during these sessions, that is now their role.

Here is a sample outline of session one (leader could ask the questions below):

Lead Question or Comment and Purpose	Potential Second Level Questions if Needed
<p>Why do think you were invited here? <i>To make sure we all have the same understanding that they are here because they have shown they are good friends. They are here to support another friend in xyz ways.</i></p>	
<p>When we meet and what is a friendship social group all about (describe) <i>To clarify the expectations that they meet weekly and it is an inclusive time together</i></p>	
<p>Are you all committed? <i>Verify they are committed and available to come for the weekly time</i></p>	
<p>Share about themselves <i>Getting information (facilitator to begin create activity and subject topic list) on potential common interests for the social group and highlighting similarities and differences</i></p>	<p>Favourite food, favourite subject, favourite things to do, talk about. Also things you don't like</p>
<p>Outline how what one person is strong at, another may find challenging. In every class usually someone who loves one thing that someone else could use support in. Friends support each other and that is what this group is about <i>Show that we are all like the novice child, we all need help in certain areas so it makes us more the same.</i></p>	
<p>What can you tell me about the novice child? <i>Start understanding areas of potential shared interest and also what issues they children</i></p>	<p>This is what you think or your perception is what we want to know. Is she/he good at it? Give me an example of that? For ones that aren't complimentary, asking why do you think she/he does it so we can understand her/his motivation for that behaviour</p>
<p>Reason we are setting up this social group for novice person...she/he is a good friend and she would like to be a better friend. there are some areas where she would benefit from support. Outline how each child, one may get support from someone else in this group in one area, give in another....</p>	

Session Two and Three:

1. Observations about the focus child, find out why and the why is something we all feel (normalize), what the need is underneath, and figure out ways to accomplish ways of working with that child
2. Outline what you are doing with the child – break into smaller steps that you don't have to for most friends
3. Brainstorm an initial list of activities to do. Before the session, it is very beneficial to have prepared some exciting options for the children (costumes, fun games they may not normally have etc). This helps make this time a bit of a treat.
4. Providing strategies for working with the focus friend. "For example, 'when you want to get the focus friend's attention, look at him and say his name. Gently touch him on the shoulder if he isn't looking at you. Keep trying if he doesn't respond right away. Here is a poster that shows a boy getting a friend's attention. He is looking at her and makes sure she is looking at him.'"
5. Give good examples and poor examples of each strategy and lots of positive feedback to the group. Specific peer skills should include:
 - a. Standing close to child and putting face at child's level
 - b. Tapping lightly on the shoulder to alert child; saying child's name
 - c. Talking at a level that is most easily understood by child
 - d. Talking about things that the two children can see
 - e. Observing child to find out his interests
 - f. Modeling simple common activities
 - g. Encouraging conversation when taking turns
 - h. Having fun and using lots of positive language
 - i. Encouraging/praising child"⁶
6. Role playing providing feedback. "Actions to correct include:
 - Trying to get attention from behind child
 - Giving a little extra time (for some children) for a response
 - Asking a question or delivering a prompt from far away
 - Raising voice to excessive levels
 - Talking in long sentences or too quickly
 - Getting caught up in play (and not remembering purpose here)
 - Giving child a preferred toy/game after he has ignored peer's request
 - Forgetting to give child a turn
 - Taking too long in between to describe actions

⁶ Summarized from CBI Consultants Bonita Holman Training Manual on p3 and 4 of 5 pages

7. Teach 'active' players to
 - a. Initiate play with the focus player
 - b. Respond to the initiations from the focus player
 - c. Encourage the focus player to join in the play
 - d. Keep the play going
 - e. Use visuals to teach them what to do and what to say

8. Establish basic rules of the play group – go over the rule of the playgroup as follows:
 - a. Treat each other nicely
 - b. Treat the games/toys/props nicely
 - c. Stay in the play area
 - d. Ask if you need or want anything
 - e. Include everyone in the playgroup

9. Give them an outline for what happens at a play session
 - a. Develop a beginning – a song, chant, or greeting for each beginning
 - b. Have members decide on a name for the playgroup, can also use secret codes, poster for the group or photo book
 - c. Introduce child to the play group and tell 'active' players to use strategies learned in the training sessions. How we decide what we are doing etc.
 - d. Verbally praise 'active' play members when they use a good strategy regardless of the result of the interaction
 - e. Clean up play area
 - f. Discuss the playgroup with the children. Get feedback on likes and dislikes and how we did in interaction and plans for the next playgroup
 - g. Exchange goodbyes"⁷

10. More role playing providing feedback

11. Prepare for beginning of first session with focus friend

Sample outline of Session 2 and 3

Lead Question or Comment and Purpose	Potential Second Level Questions if Needed
May have had homework observing friend or interacting in some specific way applicable....What did you observe about focus friend? <i>Getting them to know the person and see them</i>	What activities have you done with ? What did she tell you? Can you tell me a little more about that?
Let's try and figure out why she is doing something. Like detectives, may not be obvious	Do you think she is nervous? Do you think he wants to play with you?....

⁷ Summarized from CBI Consultants Bonita Holman Training Manual P 4 and 5 (of 5 pages)

<p>we need to guess <i>Uncover why she does it? How we all may do something for similar reason (nervous)? What is the common need she has (belong etc)</i></p>	
<p>We talked about how we all learn differently, then explain why they may do that behavior that way and still has to work on it and you can help. May not always know how to interact. Wouldn't it be great for her to fit in.... <i>Enroll them in helping and begin showing them how they can help. CBI has information, this is where some coaching is needed. Very important that positive feedback is provided to the focus child from the 'active' friends as well as other friendship components</i></p>	<p>Often it is breaking down the steps that other kids take for granted</p>
<p>Role play the scenerios <i>Provide feedback</i></p>	
<p>Decide on activities to do with the focus child, having lunch etc. Talk specifically about how you will collect the child for the group, the opening ritual/song/game, and how you decide what you will do <i>Make the first steps very clear so it sets the tone for the group and keeps the adults out, empowers the 'active' friends (which providing support for 'active' friends – they can always go to an adult for support)</i></p>	
<p>For the session outline - Here is what is going to happen. You are the people in the friendship group. Summarize the pool of activities and conversation topics (whatever is applicable) <i>Help them feel very prepared</i></p>	

Grade Specific IRP Information that links with Active Friends

Please see Appendix 6

Social and Emotional Development Grade Specific Information

Samples of Visual Cues etc.



Mid Year Assessment and Final Assessment

Planning the time mid year to do an assessment rather than waiting til year end is valuable as it is a chance to set back and assess.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Year 2 PAC Presentation

Expert Friends Program Developing Exceptional Social and Emotional Skills for Wolfe Children

Friendships are one of the greatest gifts in life. And yet developing relationships and handling conflict or challenges can be a struggle. This Peer Mentoring Program or helps us address that need.

It also builds life long skills in emotional and social intelligence for our children, a key indicator of long-term success in school, work and healthy relationships. *“Early social and emotional competence is becoming recognized as being a key indicator of success in the future showing up as early as grade 8.”*⁸

Goals:

This year we are proposing we double the amount of playgroups from two to four groups and train all the SSAs so that they can use this ‘active’ise on the playground and in our classrooms to benefit more of our children.

1. Facilitate Wolfe students developing even stronger emotional and social skills for their own growth as individuals, better friendships, supporting more isolated children, and as an anti-bullying program.
2. Have an ever-increasing pool of Wolfe children with exceptional social and emotional skills that they use that naturally spins off to all children.
3. Have all SSAs trained in the school so that they can use these methods with all the children they interact with on the playground and in the classrooms. Also so that even with staff changes next year, we should have a few SSAs still in our school with this training who can be our leaders next year.

⁸ Academic achievement in Grade 8 can be better predicted from knowing **children’s** grade 3 **social emotional competence** than from knowing **children’s** grade 3 academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2000).

Prosocial behaviours exhibited by students in the classroom **are better predictors of academic achievement** than are standardized test scores (Wentzel, 1993).

Social emotional literacy reduces violence and promotes prosocial behaviours (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, & Zaidman-Zait, 2002; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

4. Enhance the school culture where acceptance and diversity are valued (realizing every child has strengths to offer the community).

The Program – Significantly Strengthening Social and Emotional Competence of Children at Wolfe

Our goal is for our typical students to have the opportunity to learn skills that help them excel in social emotional competence, and for those who are struggling socially and emotionally to experience their peers supporting them to be more successful socially.

Also as a school community, the more children on the playground with strong social and emotional skills, the more welcoming and safe it is for all children. These children naturally help prevent and diffuse some of the problems in the schoolyard and have skills at dealing with problems that naturally come up in relationships.

A Peer Mentoring Program relies on the focus **children taking the lead**. What is noteworthy about this approach is that the focus friends are asked to **accommodate only minimal behavioural adjustments with the focus friend**, but rather to see what is possible for them and guide them to behaviors that will inevitably lead the focus child into social behaviours that will help them play more easily with other children.

The results are positive social behaviours from children who likely have had difficulties in the past - results that their parents, teachers or caregivers may never have imagined possible.

The 'active' friends have facilitated this through developing exceptional social and emotional skills, which can be applied to all their relationships with other children in the school.

Is this Needed at General Wolfe?

For the 'focus' children: Currently at Wolfe we have at least 46-51 children who would immediately benefit from being the focus friend in the group. (10-15 children identified by the school that are withdrawn or struggling emotionally plus 36 who are listed as special needs).

In addition to the more obvious children, we expect there are some whose parents/ teachers would identify them as needing some extra support so could be either a focus or an 'active' friend. For example at the patrol meeting this week, three of the children said that they would have trouble finding a partner.

For the 'typical' children: All of our children benefit the more children we have on the playground and school community who can connect with a wide variety of other children, help during conflict and provide feedback in respectful ways that maintain dignity.

In addition, **our success as a school is enhanced as the emotional and social intelligence of our children rises**. All children can highly benefit from enhanced social and emotional development. In fact, Neuroscientist Richard Davidson outlines that not only does enhanced social and emotional development help children achieve, it also positively changes their brain so they are set up for excelling.

How did the Pilot Program Go Last Year?

Pros:

1. We did lots on half the budget of a regular program. (a grade six girl and a grade six boy and six typical children) for \$2,000 plus some parent money towards initial, overall training. We implemented two groups for \$2,000 plus some parent money
2. Our children have an interest in learning in this area - The children participants really liked the program - 100% of the friends invited to join were interested and 100% of the children wanted to be part of this again
3. The 'active' friends with the support of Bonita and SSAs demonstrated increasing skill at:
 - a. why the focus friend may act in some ways that seemed unusual (more advanced empathy),
 - b. how to give the focus friend feedback in a respectful way that maintains dignity,
 - c. how to handle conflict,
 - d. how to see strengths in people that initially seem different from you,
 - e. how to support a friend in deeply meaningful ways –

All skills that will benefit all of their relationships and those of all the children they are in contact with.

4. With no budget we put together a video of the program as well as the specific training so we have background materials for staff and parents (huge volunteer effort creating the video footage by Catherine Jamieson)
5. The 'active' friends had a generous hearted approach. Comments from the 'active' friends included "to have fun, be of help, learn the way others think." The positive results are often gained quickly because children are excited and highly motivated to listen and learn from their own peer group. The best teachers of social behaviours are not adults but rather children themselves, and the focus friends have a wonderful opportunity to make a significant difference in someone's life as well as develop stronger social skills themselves.
6. Focus friends changed in ways that adults cannot easily facilitate. The most dramatic improvements were seen in the playgroup where the facilitator received the full training. The focus child in that group experienced a dramatic improvement in speech and language and began learning how to have a proper two-way conversation. The focus boy appears more confident and comfortable socially with his peers including some of who used to walk away.

Cons:

1. No staffing left from last year - The program was being piloted so when it was being designed, it was planned as a test rather than for sustainability. (all fully trained staff are gone).

This year will train all the SSAs available so we can reasonably hope some are still here next year. Programs where this has been most successful have teachers, parents, and community members involved in all the training.

2. We trained a limited number of staff and did not have a long term champion within staff. We did individual training at CBI as we were seeing if we liked the program so we did not train many staff. Not designed for sustainability last year.

For the same cost investment, we could train all the SSAs and teachers/parents who want to participate by doing it on site. We therefore have a reasonable chance

that some will return next year.

3. Proper training and tracking results wasn't done due to budget/staffing limitations. We did not have the resources nor the budget to train and measure against goals so we could not report on our results

This year we recommend extra staff be trained to accommodate last minute changes and having an support staff per group when possible, one to lead coaching the other to at least periodically track outcomes so we can continually enhance the program

4. Unclear on widespread benefits to school. No planning was done on how to make sure the whole school got the benefits.

Train all the SSAs so that this expertise is used in the playgrounds and in the classrooms. Two of the four focus children will be new this year (two existing) though there will be some new focus friends in the existing groups.

Program Costs:

\$6,000 (\$1,500 per play group)

While we are asking for a commitment of \$6,000 from PAC, we expect that we will be able to receive some funding from other sources. We can use the extra funding we get to:

- a) repay some of this back to PAC to help fund next year
- b) do some extra on site training for on the playground
- c) bare bones budget so where extra help is needed we provide some extra training

Expert Friends Program Developing Exceptional Social and Emotional Skills for Wolfe Children

Friendships are one of the greatest gifts in life. And yet developing relationships and handling conflict or challenges can be a struggle. This Peer Mentoring Program or helps us address that need.

It also builds life long skills in emotional and social intelligence for our children, a key indicator of long-term success in school, work and healthy relationships. *“Early social and emotional competence is becoming recognized as being a key indicator of success in the future showing up as early as grade 8.”*⁹

Goals for 2008/2009 School Year:

This year, double the amount of playgroups from two to four groups and train all the SSAs so that they can use this expertise on the playground and in our classrooms to benefit more of our children.

5. Facilitate Wolfe students developing even stronger emotional and social skills for their own growth as individuals, better friendships, supporting more isolated children, and as an anti-bullying program.
6. Have an ever-increasing pool of Wolfe children with exceptional social and emotional skills that they use that naturally spins off to all children.
7. Have all SSAs trained in the school so that they can use these methods with all the children they interact with on the playground and in the classrooms. Also so that even with staff changes next year, we should have a few SSAs still in our school with this training who can be our leaders next year.
8. Enhance the school culture where acceptance and diversity are valued (realizing every child has strengths to offer the community).

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Prosocial behaviours exhibited by students in the classroom **are better predictors of academic achievement** than are standardized test scores (Wentzel, 1993).

Social emotional literacy reduces violence and promotes prosocial behaviours (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, & Zaidman-Zait, 2002; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

The Program – How did we do this year?

A big thank you to all who participated in Expert Friends – the SSAs, the children (focus and expert friends), the parents, our Vice Principal and Principal. We had a very successful year.

1. 4 groups (double from last year's 2 groups) started Feb 17th
2. The two groups that were in the second year of the program got dramatic results that spun off to other children in that grade and it would be difficult to recognize that these two children were even a year ago much more isolated. The two newer groups achieved some of their targets.
3. What kinds of goals did the **focus friends** have around building friendships “eye contact, reciprocal conversation skills, initiating interaction with other children, taking turns, greeting.” The biggest change is that our focus children are dramatically more integrated into the school – from feeling more isolated to feeling like they have friends. What a gift.
4. What kinds of learning did the **typical children** have:
 - a. Empathy - how to be more understanding and enjoy people who are different from you (diversity)
 - b. respectful boundaries - practice telling your friend if they are doing some thing that is not OK
 - c. coaching people on what they do want in friend's behaviour- helping them find a better way to do something
 - d. how to take turns and be a good sport
 - e. eye contact and conversational skills
 - f. how to engage people who aren't engaging with them This is a very significant bonus as it will affect all the children around them.
5. Funding \$3,000 from PAC in Oct, \$6,000 Variety Club allocated (PAC agreed to \$6,000 if we couldn't get outside funding but Kim P got Variety) We have left over funds mostly because we started late (it was delayed as we had new administration this year) and because Ms. Grant got free videotaping for next years training.

How are we moving forward for next year

1. Steering Committee to meet in early July with Ms. Grant and Ms. Kerry to plan for next year
2. Take all the learning from this year and make the program even better
3. Turn this from a good idea with a few materials to a true program. This involves setting up a program binder with all the materials for more efficiency, better training etc.
4. Hopefully have a plan for PAC for next year in Sept. so we can start off early and continue creating even more of a great friendships culture.

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE – WELCOME TO TALK TO KIM PEMBERTON OR NANCY BRADSHAW, THE PAC PARENTS FROM EXPERT FRIENDS.

Nancyb@joyfilledproductions.org (604)873-3586

Appendix 3 - VSB Presentation to VSB Chair and Committee 3

Why Does This Kind of Friendship Program Work So Well?

1. This program results in special needs and/or isolated children creating **real lasting friendships**.
Despite excellent programs like ROE, excellent school codes of conduct, support workers helping children, we still see major issues with special needs children not integrating very well with other children.
2. **Peers learn social behaviours best from each other.**
3. Typical children do not have the skills to help an isolated child integrate and **this program focuses on training the isolated child's peers**. This also involves a different way for the support workers to learn to help the isolated child as instead they work with the peers.
4. **The benefits are as rich for the expert friends** and the school as they are for the formerly isolated child. At Wolfe, both typical and isolated children want to be in this program.

What do the Children Learn?

Life Skills that will benefit them in everything they do

1. Empathy (how we are all similar and different, how we all have strengths and can help each other with our weaknesses, what motivates 'different' behaviour)
2. Respectful feedback - how to give feedback in a way that preserves dignity
3. Boundaries - how to speak up when something isn't working and ask for what you want
4. Managing conflict - how to work through conflict and stay good friends
5. The joy of contributing to teach other - we all have strengths and weaknesses and the joy of helping each other
6. More experience creating healthy new relationships

What did we find in Year One and Two at Wolfe?

1. Isolation was reversed. The two children who had 2 years in this program experienced dramatic changes and left surrounded with friends and some happy memories of school.
2. The other children in the same age group also started interacting with the formerly isolated children so the benefits were not limited to the expert friends group. Children and SSWs (student support workers) model these new behaviours on the playground.
3. Peers at first were reluctant to provide feedback initially and with achieving results and through adult support; they gradually gained more confidence learning and coaching friendship skills.
4. The entire grade took pleasure in seeing the success of the focus children (share examples). Rather than have uncomfortable memories of children isolated and being unsure how to help, the children were empowered and shared in the success of the focus children.

5. Our year end surveys in year one and two
- 92% of participating children said they want to participate in the program again
 - All the children surveyed all said they felt more confident working out problems with friends because they have done it before
 - All the children reported seeing positive changes in the focus friend and their comments showed they felt good about that
 - 92% of children reported they felt more able to speak up when they see inappropriate behaviours and reported more confidence in working out problems with all their friends

There were some comments that they wished they had more time in the groups each week

Parents want their children to be part of these groups

6. A quote from the SSWs surveys was, 'this should not be voluntary, when we have something that works, it should be extended to all children who are isolated as we know with this support, their whole school experience can be transformed' We'd like all our children to have this chance.

Could All Our Isolated Children Have Access to This Kind of Program in Vancouver?

How can other schools avoid our start up costs?

- Train and build VSB expertise so the VSB can support the schools setting up these programs in house (vs. having to spend \$1,500+ per group until the school has in-house expertise). Even if a school gains expertise in house with the Vice Principal and SSWs, they all move regularly so again schools need outside support.
- Train SSWs in this new way of working and make this a standard practice (coach peers rather than main focus on isolated child)
- At Wolfe, we are happy to leverage our resources and learning
 - Binder to systemize this process
 - Training video
 - Share how to build expertise (hiring support like CBI, F2F)
 - Piggy back on our training
 - How to extend the benefits to more children in the school
 - How we reduced our costs of delivering this program
 - How to have parent involvement so as staff changes, the program continues

Appendix 4 – Vancouver Sun Article

Learning and teaching how to be a friend

At General Wolfe elementary, 'expert' kids help their special-needs classmates communicate

BY KIM PEMBERTON, VANCOUVER SUN JUNE 25, 2009



Hannah Pemberton (left) and Jennika Erickson put balloons together for Fun Day at Vancouver's General Wolfe elementary school. The school has run an innovative Expert Friends program for two years.

Photograph by: Ian Lindsay, Vancouver Sun, Vancouver Sun

'The better part of one's life consists of his friendships.'

Abraham Lincoln

- - -

I have a photograph of my daughter Hannah posing with her kindergarten class at the teddy bear picnic eight years ago.

The other children are in little clusters with their friends, while Hannah is sitting by herself, in front, grinning widely and holding her teddy bear high.

What struck me then about that photo was how separate Hannah was from her classmates. Her challenges forming friendships were obvious from the start.

The reason is that Hannah is a special needs student who has difficulty communicating. When she started school, she had very little language and primarily used pictures and sign language to communicate.

This set her apart from her peers.

As the primary years continued, the isolation from her peers widened further.

There were no play dates, no phone calls from girlfriends, no slumber parties. The one time she was invited to another child's summer birthday, I rescheduled our family out-of-town holiday so that she could attend. Invitations were that few and far between.

In those early years, much effort went into helping Hannah communicate appropriately so she could make friends. One way we did this was to make social story books for her to learn effective communication skills. One dealt with how to approach a friend.

"Tap them on the shoulder and ask 'Can I play?' "

Hannah learned those skills, and her ability to talk improved immensely with weekly speech therapy.

But except for a handful of children whose parents were receptive to inclusion,

most of the interaction Hannah had with her peers consisted of the occasional "hello."

It occurred to me then that it was no longer Hannah who needed the training on being a friend. It was her peers. They needed to be taught how to be friends with a child with differences, so that when someone like Hannah did "tap them on the shoulder and ask 'Can I play?'" they would answer "yes" and know how.

Hannah's story isn't unusual. I haven't yet met a parent of a child with special needs who hasn't shared similar stories of watching their children alone on the playground at recess, while other children played all around them.

Or going to the lunch hall and seeing all the kids crowded together at one table, oblivious to the special needs child eating alone.

Hannah is now in Grade 7 and about to "graduate" from her elementary school.

I have a recent photograph of my now 13-year-old daughter, with many of these same children from her kindergarten class, posing for the official Grade 7 photograph. But this time, Hannah is not sitting alone. She is sitting front and centre, with friends smiling.

Hannah attends General Wolfe elementary school, which for the past two years has been running an innovative program that not only benefits children with special needs, but typical children as well. Its goal is to stop the isolation children with special needs often experience and help teach typical children effective communication skills so they can form valued friendships with children they might otherwise have overlooked.

The program, called Expert Friends, is the only one in the Vancouver school district that trains staff on how to build bridges between typical children and those with special needs.

The parent of another child in public school in Vancouver is doing a similar

program, but unlike Wolfe's Expert Friends program, there is no staff commitment and the concern is that it will end when her child transfers to another school next September.

Wolfe's program shows no signs of ending, and in fact, was able to continue to grow and prosper despite an administration change.

The program was initially championed by former vice-principal Catherine Jamieson, who even made a training video on the program with her son Brett in order to help educate others on its benefits.

When she was transferred to another school, she ensured her replacement, incoming vice-principal Luanne Kerry, understood the program's value. Luckily for Wolfe, Kerry was equally passionate about Expert Friends.

"The impact has been huge, especially with our two intermediate students [with special needs]. Real friendships have come out of it, not orchestrated friendships. To me, that's my hope for all the kids," says Kerry.

Under Kerry, the program expanded from helping two children with special needs at the intermediate level to also helping two primary school children, bringing the total number of children involved directly this year to 27. There are four special needs children involved and each one has four to nine "expert friends."

Also critical to the success of the program is Nancy Bradshaw, the parent of a typical child who attended the school in 2007 when the program first started. Bradshaw joined me on the "Expert Friends committee" which consisted of just the two of us, and was instrumental in garnering support from the Parent Advisory Council.

"The social envelope the children are in at school is the most critical element of them feeling well and happy. Part of childhood is friendships, and while the

majority of children do pretty well there are some who are slipping through the cracks [and not able to form friendships]," says Bradshaw.

"Even when I was a kid I remember children who were left out. We didn't have the skills to know how to help. This [Expert Friends] creates an environment to help those children. And the potential group shame [of ignoring children who are different] becomes a potential group joy."

Bradshaw is helping create a training manual for staff at the school to understand how Expert Friends works, so if the staff changes in the future the lessons learned from the program will not be lost.

Besides being backed by Wolfe's PAC, Variety the Children's Charity gave the school a grant of \$6,500 to help with its second-year expansion, on the provision that the PAC also pay for one-third of the costs of the play groups.

To run one play group for the year costs about \$1,500. This pays for an outside consultant to come into the school and train staff and the "expert friends."

The school contracts with CBI (Communication Behaviour Instruction) Consultants, which has been offering integrated play groups, they're call Peer Power, for the past five years, but primarily on an individual basis with families.

CBI consultant Bonita Holman has been facilitating the groups for the past two years at Wolfe, and most importantly training the school's special education assistants on how to run the groups themselves.

"Prejudices we are not born with. All kids want to play, but they're giving up after trying the conventional way to interact [with a special needs child]. This teaches them how to figure out a different way. They feel good about that. I literally see kids wiping their brow now they are taught how to respond," says Bonita.

As an example, she says, if a child has autism and isn't initially responding to a typical peer, that peer is taught to make eye contact, use a different tone of

voice and show them the object of play -- a ball, for instance -- to get the child's attention.

One of Hannah's expert friends is Else Mikkelsen who says the program helped give her a better understanding of my daughter.

"The best part of being an expert friend is playing with Hannah and getting to know her better. There were not very many difficulties as an expert friend, although sometimes it was hard because Hannah was not very talkative in the beginning but that changed," says Mikkelsen.

"Hannah has gotten better at having a conversation."

Parent Susan Erickson, whose daughter Jennika is another one of Hannah's expert friends, says she believes the program also helped her daughter and other children more accepting of differences and improve their own communication with all peers. They are taught how to tell a child who may be demonstrating inappropriate behaviour to stop while keeping the child's dignity intact in the process.

"I truly have nothing but good to say about Expert Friends. I'd like to see it expand to other schools," says Erickson.

Hannah's one-to-one aide, Mylene Olivier, says the program has been great for the entire school community. The expert friends end up becoming role models, on the playground and in the classrooms, and many children not specifically trained have become more inclusive of children with special needs.

"It creates a climate of kindness and acceptance. I think they [the typical students] are acquiring skills that will serve them well throughout life -- empathy, compassion and an understanding that it's okay to be different."

Olivier pointed out many schools have embraced the Roots of Empathy program, which is aimed at the primary school-aged child. This program teaches

younger children empathy skills, and has a mother and baby visiting the school regularly in order for them to connect with the infant. Expert Friends, she says, which is geared towards the special needs children in the school is the next logical step.

Vancouver school board trustee Jane Bouey agrees with Olivier. She says that after she first heard about the program -- from Kerry, Bradshaw and myself, when we made a presentation to the VSB's Special Education Advisory Council -- she became equally enthusiastic about it.

"I'm certainly championing it in the district whenever I get the opportunity. There's strong support from those who know about it," she says.

But the challenge is to raise further awareness and find ways to bring it to other schools when school boards are already underfunded.

In the fall, she plans to bring it to the Vancouver school board through a committee made up of school trustees, teacher representatives, parent representatives and senior management staff.

kpemberton@vancouversun.com

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Appendix 5 – Forms used with permission

Appendix 6 – IRPs Relating to Active Friends and Healthy Living
From the Ministry of Education’s Website (2009/2010 year)

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