

News Release

Club G at Highlands Elementary to receive a 2015 National Inclusive Education Award



NORTH VANCOUVER, May 6, 2015—Inclusion BC announced today that Club G at Highlands Elementary will receive a National Inclusive Education Award from the Canadian Association for Community Living and Inclusion BC.

Club G began as a Grade 4 friendship group at Highlands Elementary in North Vancouver that adapted and created activities to include “Ges” a student with learning, communication and mobility challenges. Since its inception in 2011, Club G has become a compelling model of what inclusive education can be for all students. It not only enriches the student members’ day-to-day school experience, it helps them prepare for the future as citizens of the world.

“Club G is a remarkable social and friendship group that fosters understanding, compassion and improved learning outcomes for all its participants” says John Lewis, Superintendent of the North Vancouver School District. “We are grateful to Inclusion BC and the Canadian Association for Community Living for recognizing the Club with this award. We believe it is proof of what is possible when children think beyond themselves.”

Through the Social Emotional Empathy Development (SEED) Society, the Club G model is helping to inspire similar friendship groups in other schools. Students need to be able to communicate their thoughts, respect the ideas of others and appreciate diverse perspectives. Club G succeeds because it engages all of these values in children, enriching their development as considerate, collaborative learners.

.../2



"I believe that Club G thrives because the social connections between the students are based on mutual enjoyment and creativity," says NVSD Director of Instruction Julie Parker. "Club G members share a common appreciation for what makes them unique as individuals and all that they have in common."



"Club G not only creates sincere friendships through play and interaction, it also infuses a spirit of cooperation and compassion throughout the entire school," says Todd Henderson, Principal of Highlands Elementary. "Teachers and administrators can set the standards of respect for their school. But if a school community is to be deeply welcoming and inclusive, at some point, its students must take the lead."

Created by the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), the National Inclusive Education Awards bring attention to the many positive examples of inclusive classrooms and schools across the country. Through the program, a national certificate of recognition is bestowed upon recipients who have made positive contributions to inclusive education in their province or territory. BC award recipients will be recognized at Inclusion BC's 60th anniversary conference in Vancouver on May 28, 2015.



Photos by Jessica Johannesen, courtesy of the North Vancouver School District © 2015

Learn more at:

<http://www.inclusionbc.org/inclusive-education/whats-new/empathy-project-north-vancouver-receiving-national-inclusive-education>

Social Emotional Empathy Development Society <http://www.seedsociety.ca/clubg.html>

Club G on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FwuMHnR9BU>

For further information or to schedule an interview, please contact:

Victoria Miles, Communications Manager
North Vancouver School District
604.903.1254 vmiles@sd44.ca



Fourth grade friendships that bring out the best in everyone

February 28, 2012

Last fall, parents of Grade 4 students at Highlands Elementary were asked if their children would like to volunteer for a special recess and lunch time play group. The group was conceived to help a classmate, "Geoff",* who is on the autism spectrum and has some mobility challenges. The answer came back when forty-one children volunteered to help Geoff learn social skills in an inclusive friendship group.

While friendship groups are not uncommon features of school life for students with autism, the one at Highlands had several key requirements. It needed to be: *active* to suit Grade 4 energy levels; it had to be *social* to give Geoff the people practice he needed, and it had to *match* Grade 4 interests and abilities. As well, because Geoff can't speak intelligibly, communication with group members would be supported with his iPad.

To get things off to a good start, school and district staff met with the students and asked them what kinds of things they wanted to play with Geoff and how they thought they could help him. Lots of ideas came forward, because most of the children have been together with Geoff since they were in Kindergarten. "They re-invented their playground games so he could participate," commented



District Autism Support Worker Wendy Holtan who's been overseeing the playgroup from the beginning.

The students dubbed their group "Club G" and got down to business: tag, California kickball and iPad games were part of their early activities. Club G has quickly become a popular part of playtime—even students in other grades have shown an interest in joining the fun. But for now though, this inclusive club is exclusive on one thing: Grade 4s only!

"Yes, these are really great kids," says Learning Support Teacher Barb Oswald-Allen. "But I think they're that way because they have this classmate. He helps them to be great."

-30-

*not his real name