

Community Corner



Amazing Inventions at Good Shepherd Hospital

Each year, as part of their “Then and Now – Inventions” unit, second grade partners with **Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Hospital** residents, who share their knowledge and experiences with inventions that have changed their lives. A pen pal relationship is developed in January with students and residents corresponding twice per month. Both writers start by asking questions about age and hobbies, but by February very moving letters are written, discussing struggles and triumphs both writers share, as well as challenges that once held them back. Maybe they can't use their legs or hands. Maybe they struggle with reading or writing or math, but it is through such shared adversity that students and residents begin to connect. Realizing they both have strengths and weaknesses, they begin to talk about the amazing inventions that help them overcome many of their daily obstacles.

While the second graders might discuss what they are doing in the classroom - learning about simple machines, historic innovations and the scientific method; hosting Inventor Book Clubs, or taking on real-world problems and proposing solutions – their pen pals tell them about assistive technologies that enable them to be as independent as possible: picture or letter boards that help people communicate without speech; infrared head control and eye-gaze technology that operate a computer when someone is unable to use her hands, or even a bionic exoskeleton that can lift a paralysis patient from a wheelchair and set him walking again.

The partnership ends when the class travels to the hospital to finally meet their pen pals. The children get to see the inventions they read about in action, with wheelchairs, computers, and communication devices in full swing as the new friends tour the facilities and discuss their letters over lunch. The students share pictures of inventions they created for the Second Grade Science Fair. They explain the problems they had to overcome when they developed their new creations and how they work, eagerly demonstrating how innovations such as the Bye-Bye Mud Shoe, the automatic Shirt Folder, the Sock Recycler (“Never Lose Socks Again!”), the “No Mess” Dog Bowl, and Extreme Fire Starters solve everyday problems and make life a little bit easier.

Teacher Amanda Frick notes that the partnership with Good Shepherd is one of the highlights of the second grade year. Not only is it a perfect example of the creative, hands-on nature of Seven Generations’ EIC curriculum, “the experience allows students and residents to see beyond someone’s exterior - in this case, physical disabilities and youth - to connect with each other on a deeper level as individuals.” The partnership goes beyond academics and learning: a bond is formed and our writers leave the project feeling like they have gained so much. Several students continue to write to their buddies long after the school year ends. Hopefully, this wonderful and authentic experience will continue for years to come.