



Lighthouse guides the peace train

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There is a group of students smiling about peace. They are thinking about the good things to come and believe it could be that something good has begun.

Known as the Peace Peeps government group, about 20 Big Bear Elementary School students meet regularly to talk about what they can do to make a difference at their school and in the community. Part of the **Peace Builders** program instituted by The Lighthouse Project, this group helps guide the philosophy.



Fifth-grader Jaimi Brown, standing, listens to fellow Peace Peep Gary Neitz during a meeting at Big Bear Elementary School Nov. 20. (JUDI BOWERS/Big Bear Grizzly)

At the group's Nov. 20 meeting, student Charlotte Haston told about kindness journals. The Lighthouse Project purchased journals for Peace Peeps and staff members at the school. "If you're kind, write it down," Haston said.

The idea is to journal your kindness, said Nicol Erdmeier, teacher and advisor to the group. A kindness will be written in the journal then passed on to another person. The journal will be passed on each time a kindness entry is made. Hopes are that the journals will make their way around the world and back. Erdmeier reminded the students to make sure their names and the school's name and address are included inside the journals.

Besides kindness journals, just what do Peace Peeps do and stand for, fifth-grader Jaimi Brown asked the group. Helping others, handing out Peace Paws, keeping the school free of problems, spreading the peace, came the answers.

Asked about modeling behavior, Mary Olsen piped up. "It's contagious," Olsen said of **Peace Builders** behavior.

Spreading peace is catchy, and hard to miss at Big Bear Elementary School. Students at the meeting were polite and courteous. No idea was discounted, each student listened with focused attention. Each month, the **Peace Builders** program focuses on a different value. Students throughout the school are encouraged to behave accordingly. December's focus is helping others.

Then there is the peace train winding its way down the hall's walls. Riley Voss said a yellow ribbon is being painted on the wall. The words to "Peace Train," a song by Cat Stevens, will be inscribed on the ribbon. Pictures of the students honored monthly for their **Peace Builders** efforts will be placed on the ribbon.



The Peace Peeps stay true to their mission, reciting the Peace Builders pledge at the end of the meeting. (JUDI BOWERS/Big Bear Grizzly)

That's where the smiling and the dreaming about the world as one comes in. The lyrics of "Peace Train" speak about a peace train taking the country home to peace and the good things that have begun.

Peace is what the group is all about. Mary enjoys her role as a Peace Peep and the **Peace Builders** Program, she said. "I really like it, this group will change the school," Olsen said. The 10-year-old fifth-grader said people are always putting each other down, and "it gets worse every day." Olsen said recognizing the conflicts matter to everyone.

Jaimi joined Peace Peeps at first because she wanted to be in a club. But she quickly realized she enjoyed helping the school. It was the right choice, she said.

Peace Builders has been in place for a couple of years, and Jaimi said she believes the program will carry on long after she leaves Big Bear Elementary School.

Sharon Congdon, the school's former principal who retired two years ago, remains involved in the **Peace Builders** and Peace Peeps programs. Erdmeier calls Congdon the program's life breath. Erdmeier is the on-campus advisor and oversees meetings and programs in Congdon's absence.

But the students deserve the credit, Erdmeier said. "They're awesome kids; I'm fortunate to work with them."

They've jumped aboard the peace train and are gliding toward building peace in their school and community.

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