

I'm Thumbody

*Winnipeg School Division
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

“**Y**ou’re thumbody!” parents in the Winnipeg School Division told their third graders. The program, designed to increase students’ self esteem, embraces the idea that people are as special and unique as their own, one-of-a-kind thumbprints. The program itself is unique in that parent volunteers receive training in order to present the lessons to third-grade students in their home school.

The overarching goal of I’m Thumbody is to support students to become successful learners by developing their self confidence and self esteem. Through the program, children learn to promote personal development and forge healthy relationships with others. The program’s power draws from its delivery mode— parent volunteers working with children. Children see their parents in a different role as a teacher in their classroom and a member of a school team.

The Canadian Mental Health Association developed the original program, which is now offered by the Winnipeg School Division, Volunteer Services Office. All elementary schools are eligible to participate in the program.

The division coordinator, in conjunction with school staff, recruits and trains the parent volunteers. During the daylong training, parent volunteers learn about the importance of self esteem and the vital role they play in the development of their child’s self esteem. The volunteers become skilled in how to present the program to the children and receive a detailed script that they can use. A tasty lunch, as well as an opportunity to interact with other parents

throughout the day, makes the training a positive event for the parent volunteers.

Parent volunteers present the I’m Thumbody program to third-grade classes in two one-hour lessons scheduled two weeks apart. The first lesson emphasizes the value of each person’s uniqueness. Parent volunteers engage the students in a number of activities during this session, the most exciting of which is the creation of an I’m Thumbody badge. For this activity, the classroom teacher and parent volunteers join the children in making badges bearing their own thumbprints. During the second lesson, parents help students develop the vocabulary necessary to appropriately express their feelings. To enhance the classroom sessions, a booklet is sent home to parents with information about the I’m Thumbody program and tips to support their child’s emotional development.

I’m Thumbody has been a positive program for students, their parents, and the schools. Students have gained an appreciation of their own individuality, and have learned valuable skills for peer relations. They have also enjoyed seeing their parents as respected leaders in their schools.

The program helped teachers and administrators realize the strength of parent involvement. In many schools, I’m Thumbody became a school-wide event, with program information included in the newsletter distributed to the whole school community. Some administrators even took the opportunity to make their own thumb print badges.

Working parents especially appreciated the program’s short, specific time commitment

because it enabled them to volunteer meaningfully in their child's classroom. Parents remarked that they felt honored to be recruited as leaders in the program. And, they appreciated the insights gained from this opportunity to work with the children, other parents, and the school staff.

The I'm Thumbbody program has been a positive district volunteer initiative. In one high-needs school, a team of parent volunteers organized their own wonderfully successful evening workshop for other parents. Many parents who have been involved in the division initiative took an even more active role as school/community leaders. Several parents even remarked that their own self confidence benefited along with the children's.

Winnipeg School Division plans to expand the program to reach more students, parents, and schools in the future.

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