

Cancer

Essential question: “How does childhood cancer affect families and how can we help?”

School: Clara Barton Elementary School, Philadelphia, PA

Appropriate for grades: 4-6

Year of project: 2002-2003

Subjects: English language arts, social studies, science, math

What can kids do to impact a problem as looming and uncontrollable as cancer? Fourth graders at Clara Barton Elementary School asked Alex Scott, the courageous little girl with the lemonade stand who raised more than a million dollars for cancer research before her death at age 8.

Alex was the inspiration for Barton Bald & Beautiful Day—the culmination of their yearlong project. This spunky seven-year old, who was living with a form of cancer called neuroblastoma, set up a lemonade stand when she was three-years old to raise money for pediatric cancer research.

In the course of learning more about cancer, the students met with an oncology nurse and an oncology resource coordinator from Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, both of whom shed light on the challenges faced by families of cancer patients. But it was Alex’s story that fueled enthusiasm for their project.

Encouraged by her example, the students decided to create their own fundraising event. The idea came from the National Childhood Cancer Foundation’s (NCCF) St. Baldrick’s Day, a fundraiser held each year close to St. Patrick’s Day. They decided to name their event Barton Bald & Beautiful Day.

As part of their campaign, they challenged James Nevels, chairman of the Philadelphia School Reform Commission, to shave his head in a gesture of solidarity with children who lose their hair during cancer treatment. He accepted the challenge, as did the principal of their school and the Deputy Director of Communications for the School District of Philadelphia.

Eighteen boys volunteered to be “shavees” and four girls agreed to have their long hair cut and donated to Locks for Love, which makes hairpieces for children who lose their hair due to medical reasons. Barbers and stylists from four hair salons donated time and expertise to the cause. A professional DJ provided the

entertainment.

Students in two of the fourth grade classes complemented the head shaving campaign with a toy drive for the oncology unit at Children's Hospital. Barton Bald & Beautiful Day more than exceeded expectations. The children collected 700 toys for Children's Hospital and raised over \$9,000 for the National Childhood Cancer Foundation.

"We chose Children with Cancer as part of our service-learning project because we were touched by Alex's story; her determination and positive spirit moved us."
-- 4th grade student

"I felt like I had a great experience. I am proud of myself for what I did."
-- 4th grade student

"My experience of learning about cancer changed me because I thought it was no big deal having cancer but now I know what it is like. Knowing about cancer taught me that when you have cancer you don't always have to die. It really taught me to respect people more for what they have. People shouldn't be treated differently just because they have cancer."
-- 4th grade student

"Having cancer is hard for people, but people have to deal with some things, sometimes. I learned to care for others."
-- 4th grade student