

## **Character Development in Action – Showcase 2008**

### **Outdoor Experiences for Character Development at the Centre for Urban Ecology and the Humber Arboretum**

The Centre for Urban Ecology provides outdoor experiences for students from Kindergarten to Grade 10. Although the programs are designed to address specific curriculum expectations, there are always learning opportunities during these activities for character development. Visiting this “urban oasis” is an exhilarating experience for all.

From the Key Beliefs and Principles found in the summary of the Ontario Ministry mandate, *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Summary) (n.d.; p.1)*, there are some statements that are particularly relevant to the outdoor programs at our Centre.

*“Education at its best is essentially education for character.”*

At the Centre for Urban Ecology, we strive to promote respect for self, others and the natural environment. Our group investigations provide opportunities for students to work cooperatively, to develop leadership skills and to persist with tasks while exploring their natural surroundings. Participation in these outdoor activities also gives opportunities for developing self confidence and a sense of accomplishment.

*“Character development strives for an ever growing depth of self-awareness, self- discipline and understanding;...”*

In a natural setting, there are beautiful and unpredictable sightings, challenging pathways to negotiate, and new experiences to engage children and provide opportunities for risk taking and growth. Rising to the challenge of negotiating a winding, hilly path or stepping over a log builds self-esteem. Completing a long walk develops self-confidence and self-awareness. Quietly observing wildlife in the forest or feeding the chickadees by hand fosters self-discipline. The overall experience contributes to a child’s sense of self and, thereby, helps in the development of a sense of independence.

*“Student engagement is essential in the character development process. The initiative will not be successful without the meaningful participation and involvement of students.”*

Active, hands-on, real learning experiences in a safe, natural setting engage students of all grade levels. There are always sights, sounds, and smells in the outdoors that will spark a genuine interest and involvement in learning about their surroundings.

*“Character development is about community development. Engaging the community in sharing the responsibility for character development is an essential component.”*

The Centre for Urban Ecology at the Humber Arboretum is located in a 250 acre urban setting adjacent to Humber College and the University of Guelph Humber. It includes a deciduous forest, meadow, river valley and formal gardens with ponds. The Arboretum can be reached by TTC. The Centre is staffed by community members and local college or university students. The schools that visit are from the surrounding community. While visiting the park, students will see staff interacting with each other, the environment and, frequently, with members of the community visiting the park. As they become more familiar with their local community, they will develop a sense of community and care for their local environment.

*“Because we care about our youth and the future well-being of our communities, we all share the responsibility to model the universal attributes upon which we find common ground.”*

Our staff genuinely cares about the environment and models good practices for respecting the surrounding ecosystem at the Centre. We openly discuss respect for each other, the living things around us and the community in which we live and study. We endeavour to create positive learning experiences for all visitors while allowing them to make new discoveries about themselves and their community.

To learn more about the programs offered for student groups or families, visit our website at [www.humberarboretum.on.ca](http://www.humberarboretum.on.ca) , call 416-675-5009 or email [Naturecentre@humber.ca](mailto:Naturecentre@humber.ca) .

