

Star-Telegram The Colleyville Courier

Posted on Fri, Feb. 23, 2007 HMS Students Help at Special Needs Clubhouse By Noor Elashi Contributing Writer

Logan Mayfield of Colleyville cracked a big smile as she gracefully played the piano during the Valentine Party Feb. 17 at the Clubhouse for Special Needs in Bedford.

Seventeen-year-old Mayfield, who has Down syndrome, listed several good reasons why she adores being at the clubhouse.

"It's fun," she said. "Piano. Basketball. Games. Soccer. Lots of friends."

Many of her friends include the STARS, a group of 24 gifted and talented Heritage Middle School 8th graders. Since October, the STARS (Students Teaching and Reaching Special Needs) have made it a habit to volunteer at the clubhouse every Friday and Saturday.

Eules resident Darlene Hollingsworth — who opened the non-profit clubhouse in January 2006 to spend more time with her 15-year-old son, Jonathan, who also has DS — said the STARS are what made the clubhouse what it is because of their frequent interaction with the special needs teenagers.

"They're like role models for them," said Hollingsworth, who added that the clubhouse is the first in Northeast Tarrant County to provide an after school program for ages 13 and up.

A New Perspective

STARS students — such as Catherine Chambers, Sheena Patel, Katie Giberson, and Benjamin Brockett — have learned plenty of valuable life lessons of their own from their volunteering experience.

Chambers, 14, of Grapevine, described her special needs peers as being full of life.

"I think they're some of the happiest people that I'll probably ever meet in my life," she said.

Patel, 14, of Eules, enjoys the clubhouse parties.

"It's so loud and happy and everyone's dancing all the time the music is on, so it's a really fun place to be instead of sitting at home or talking on the phone," Patel said.

"It gives you a new perspective on things," said Giberson, 13, of Grapevine, "because they have such a different perspective from us, just like taking life as it comes."

Making a Difference

The clubhouse, which started on a \$2,000 grant, is now 85 percent funded by donations. To be independently funded, the clubhouse needs at least 20 daily special needs members. It currently has seven members.

The HMS volunteers have also helped decorate the clubhouse. During the Christmas break, they painted the walls according to the themes of each room and helped re-organize the board game area, ping-pong room, computer room and television lounge.

Caris Fawcett, 13, of Grapevine, said the project has helped her create a lot of new friendships.

"And more importantly, it's the satisfaction of knowing that you made them happy and that you're making a difference," Fawcett said.

Teenagers of this generation tend to be self-centered, said STARS sponsor and teacher Pam Jones, of Colleyville.

"But my ... students prove completely otherwise. They care about others. They've learned that the special needs kids are not different from themselves. They want friends, social activities, parties and all the normal things that teenagers love to do," Jones said.

The Clubhouse for Special Needs

Where: 800 Brown Trail, Suite C, Bedford

Hours: 3 to 6:30 p.m. Monday – Thursday; 3 to 9:30 p.m. Friday; 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Saturday

Cost: \$6/hour

Information: 817-285-0885 or www.theclubhouse.org