

WWJH English students taking part in Philanthropy Fridays

Written by George Browning

Wednesday, 02 January 2013 00:00 -

The Washington County commissioners were treated to presentations by West Washington eighth-grade students from Jennifer Stahl's English class at their regular meeting Dec. 18.

Stahl said her students spend four days a week learning the required information for junior high English, but on Fridays, they leave the books in the lockers to take part in Philanthropy Fridays.

"The students leave their books in their lockers and focus solely on a charity that they've chosen," Stahl said. "Eighth-grade standards cover reading, writing, speaking and listening. So we are working to meet those standards while raising awareness and money for a charity."

Stahl said each of her classes have chosen a charity they want to focus on.

"They spend Fridays writing speeches, practicing speeches, designing power points, handouts and flyers as well as planning and organizing fundraisers," she said. "It's more real-world skills. I was an English major and never in my life has someone walked up to me and handed me a novel and said read this and write a report on it. It just doesn't happen, but very often I've had to write letters asking for things. I've had to write speeches to deliver to groups and I've had to design power point presentations.

"So what they are doing is more of the type of English skills they will use as adults," she said.

Three groups of students were on hand to share about the cause their class has chosen to help.

The presentations were set to include power-point, but much like real life, the computer was not cooperating and they had to adjust on the fly.

The first presentation was given by two students in Stahl's first period class, Bryce Farmer and Alyssa Owens – H2O For Life.

Owens asked the commissioners to imagine they had to walk 3.7 miles a day while carrying a 60-pound container just to get water.

"This is what many girls in Africa skip school to do every day," she said. "There is a lack of clean water in most third-world countries, which causes problems with disease, dehydration and sanitation."

Owens said 3.4 million people die every year because of water-borne diseases and another 2 million will die because they don't have clean water to drink.

Farmer explained what H2O for life is.

"In 2007 Patty Hall received a call for help from a small village in Kenya that was desperate for a water project," he said. "She introduced the idea to her middle school and the students and staff embraced the project with open arms and in the end raised \$13,000, which is twice the amount requested for the project.

"Now, due to those efforts, the village has water year-round."

Farmer said H2O For Life is a non-profit that has set its focus on helping kids in third-world countries throughout Africa by giving them access to clean water.

The organization pairs schools in the United States with schools that need help in the third-world countries.

"Clean water is such an issue that a lack of it is the leading cause of death in the world and it is occurring in third-world countries," Farmer said.

Farmer said his class is attempting to tackle the problem by raising \$3,750 by the end of the school year to provide new bathrooms and water fountains for a school in Malawi.

"We have four teams working for a common goal of helping these desperate children," Owens said. "If we achieve our goal, we will not only learn many valuable lessons, but we will also save

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1,176 lives and make a difference in the world.”

Owens said every 20 seconds someone dies because they don't have clean water.

“That's like a tsunami twice a month, five Hurricane Katrinas a day and a 9/11 every four hours,” Owens asked. “So I leave you all with this question, where is our community?”

Morgan Keltner, who is in Stahl's third period class flew solo in her presentation of her class's project – Embrace Baby Warmers.

“A mother's worst fear – losing a child because it's just too cold,” Keltner said. “What if there was something we could do to silence the fears. That's the mission of the Embrace Baby Warmer program.”

Keltner said in many developing countries like India low-birth weight newborns often do not live past one month old, which leaves mothers to not even name those premature children.

She said the lucky babies who make it past one month, live with the burden of life-long issues, like low IQ and heart conditions.

“In these developing countries they don't have the resources, the doctors or the money to afford incubators to care for their small children,” Keltner said. “That's where Embrace Baby Warmers comes in. These amazing warmers developed by students at Stanford University are safe for the babies and easy to use.”

Keltner said the sleeping bag's design allows the temperature to stay at 98 degrees for four hours.

She said the warmers can be re-used.

“Why is this such an amazing cause?,” Keltner asked the commissioners, “These small warmers can be produced and shipped to developing countries without the parents needing any kind of health insurance.”

She said the cost of the baby warmers are \$200 compared to an incubator which cost around \$20,000.

Keltner said saving the babies does not have an adverse affect on over-population in those areas where the lack of incubators is a problem.

“When more children survive, parents feel more confident about using birth control,” she said. “Parents no longer believe they need to birth five or six children with the hopes of raising one.

“With a donation from you, these mothers and families will no longer fear losing their children thanks to the Embrace Baby Warmer.”

Jasmyn Price and Mackenzie Hopper talked about their class' project “Nothing But Nets.”

Price and Hopper used an intro that got the commissioner's attention immediately.

“People are always asking for something all the time like, ‘Will you pave my road?’ Will you approve my land for farming?’ ‘Will you put more gravel on our road?’ ‘Can we rent this land to other people?’”

Price and Hopper said all of those things are important in our society, but what their class is asking for is a matter of life and death.

Their class is trying to raise awareness for malaria.

“Our class has discovered a campaign called ‘Nothing But Nets.’ Donating just \$10 can purchase a net and save a small family's life,” Price said.

Hopper said the nets keep mosquitoes from biting those who live in infected areas and thus keeps them from contracting malaria.

Sports Columnist Rick Reilly started Nothing But Nets after he took a trip to Africa, where he found out that each day 750 African children die because they don't have mosquito nets over their beds.

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Doctors guarantee that for every \$10 at least one life is saved.

“That means that for less than what you spend for three gallons of gas you can save at least one child’s life, if not more,” Hopper said.

Any money donated goes directly to the purchase of nets.

The nets cover the beds and are covered with a repellent that fights off mosquitoes and they last three to four years depending on how well they are taken care of.

“We are asking for you to make a donation,” Hopper said. “There are 750 people dying everyday and for the cost of about two meals at McDonald’s to save an entire family!”

The goal is to send 250 nets to Africa.

The girls said in unison, “If we work hard enough, together we can cover a continent!”

Commissioner David Brown said the groups have also been active at events at West Washington in collecting money for their various causes.

“They’ve hit me up every time I’ve been to the school,” Brown said.

Stahl said the students have sold concessions, coffee, hot chocolate and bracelets – anything they can to raise money.

Anyone wishing to donate to any of the causes should contact Stahl at West Washington. The students are also looking to get in front of other groups, whether it be civic groups or church organizations.