

Program Shifts focus to positive away from the negative

BY SHANNON PROUDFOOT

An elementary school in Carp is the first in the region to adopt an international program that encourages people from toddler to adult to focus on positive personality traits and co-operative behaviours.

Teachers at Huntley Centennial Public School will take part in a workshop this week that will help them implement The Virtues Project in their classrooms and on the playground this fall.

The program focuses on 52 virtues – one for each week of the year – such as idealism, forgiveness, flexibility and diligence, and teachers can purchase workbooks that help promote these traits in the classrooms.

“I’ve become more and more enthusiastic about this, because it touches every single aspect of life. It’s wonderful for schools, says program facilitator Ros Macdonald, who also runs a private therapy practice.

The Virtues Project was founded in the early-1990s by a pair of Canadians – psychotherapist Linda Kavelin-Popov and her husband, pediatric psychologist Dan Popov - who identified traits admired by diverse cultures and developed a way for parents, educators and caregivers to instill them.

Among the program’s core strategies is using “a language of virtue,” Ms Macdonald says, which means emphasizing the positive in people’s personality and behaviour, rather than the negative.

As an example, she cites a parent who might get a very different response from inviting a child to be helpful and set the table for dinner than from demanding they turn the television off and do so.

“It makes a huge difference for teachers because it becomes a much more positive experience – you have much greater co-operation from the children,” she says, adding the program can also be helpful for couples, adult children and their parents, or any relationship that needs strengthening.

The Virtues Project now operates in 85 countries, and more than 1,000 certified facilitators have been trained. The program is sponsored by community groups, government agencies and corporations, including the boys and girls Clubs of America, the Vancouver School Board, Yukon Youth services and the Healthy Communities Initiative in New Zealand.
