

'Tech Time for Seniors' at Spruce View School bridges intergenerational technology gap



Senior citizens and teenagers are making important connections thanks to a new program being offered at Spruce View School. Tech Time for Seniors, regularly offered by Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) in Red Deer County was altered slightly - to include youth as the technology mentors for seniors, rather than adult volunteers from the community.

"We operate Tech Time for seniors in a number of locations, to provide residents living in rural areas with access to technology, by supporting their learning about it," said Kevin Velthuis Kroeze, an FCSS worker with Red Deer County. "When we approached Spruce View School, we were thinking that youth would be really good mentors for seniors, and that by involving youth in this program, we would build intergenerational relationships that would benefit not just the seniors but the youth as well. So far it's going really well. We have an amazing group of volunteers."



"When Kevin approached us, we could immediately see this would be a great fit with our school values of: 'pride in self, pride in others and pride in community'," said Scott Stefanek, Vice Principal, Spruce View School.



The chance to volunteer is currently offered to Grade 8 to 12 students at the school. There are 16 students who have participated so far, which is almost 20 per cent of the school's population in those grades. About 15 to 20 seniors have attended including a handful that have come each time. The group began meeting in September 2023 each month, with three meetings to date.



“We’re pleased with how well this is going,” said Stefanek. “The best form of feedback is the smiles that are on the seniors’ and students’ faces. Also, when you listen to them talk, you’ll hear conversations that may start out focused on technology but drift into other topics too. It’s amazing to watch the positive connections happening.”

“I’m enjoying it a lot,” said Thatcher Usciski, a Grade 11 student at Spruce View School. “I volunteered because I want to be a part of the community. I’m enjoying it. I do feel more connected and it helps me feel that our community has lots of people who are ready to help each other.”

“It makes me feel amazing,” said Jake Buhler, Grade 8 student at Spruce View School. “I was surprised by how many seniors might not know things about their cell phone. I also know they need it for calling their family and grandchildren, so it makes me feel good to help. It has also helped me become more confident talking with people, and it helps me feel welcome at school.”

Jake’s Mom, Reba Buhler, said her son and others in his generation might not know that technology isn’t a universal language understood equally by all generations, and this opportunity creates a stronger understanding for youth.

“It’s a fantastic program,” said Reba Buhler. “I think what may have started as a few students enjoying some free pizza has turned into an amazing experience of multi-generational connection.”

“It has been excellent,” said Jean Kaiser, a Spruce View area resident and senior. “I usually bring a list of questions that I’ve written down over the month and I get lots of answers here. The kids have been great. They are patient and they aren’t judgemental. I think it’s good for them to see seniors are smart and can learn, and it’s good for students to volunteer. It gives seniors a better perspective about students. There are good kids coming up - and that’s a good feeling.”

Sundre High journaling club fosters positive thinking and gratitude among students

Sundre High School has a new club that is pointing its members to increased social emotional wellbeing. The journaling club started in September with the goal of encouraging gratitude practice and positive thinking within students.

“There is so much research behind the benefits of practicing gratitude and positivity, and one of the best ways to do that is through journaling,” said Emily Smith, Family School Wellness Worker, Sundre High School. Smith said sometimes people think of journals as a space for venting and getting out negative thoughts, but that ***“this might not always be helpful as it leads us to focus more on the negative. When we intentionally journal about positive things we are training our brain to find and focus on the positive.”***



Leanne White, the School Librarian, is running the club with Emily Smith. White said, ***“We started the club because we want students to gain the wonderful benefits of gratitude journaling. We hope it will help them reduce stress and boost wellbeing, and to develop healthy habits. Positivity leads to more positivity, and we hope the impacts of that will be felt throughout the whole school.”***

The club currently is small but mighty. In addition to White and Smith, there are six students who attend, as well as one teacher. They meet during one lunch hour per week.



Typically White and Smith provide the students with a prompt to help them focus their thoughts. For instance, one prompt was to pick a photo from their phone that made them happy, and then journal about that. Another prompt involved writing about a particular person they were grateful for. The group also talks about goal setting and how to track progress towards their goals.

“It is a super fun environment where we get to laugh and chill,” said Giselle Lisonbee, student.

Student Nora Blatter said, ***“It helps to think about what you are grateful for.”***

“I love journaling club because I can laugh and have fun with my friends,” said Natalie Brink, student.

Teacher Kris Kowaliuk said, ***“It helps me sleep!”***

“Most of our students tend to continue with their journaling during the week at home, which is great,” said White. ***“Our hope is that this time together helps them relieve some stress, and provide an outlet for their thoughts and feelings, and some encouragement to take notice of the things that they have to be grateful for.”***



Top right: Journaling club members.

Above left: Emily Smith, Family School Wellness Worker

