

Project builds connections

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MORNING STAR STAFF

What started out as a class project turned into a community initiative as three Fulton Secondary students followed through on a commitment to build a playground at Casimir Court.

Fallon Smith, Emma Firlotte and Kari Stephanishin, all in Grade 12 at Fulton, successfully raised over \$2,500 for a new playground at Casimir, a household complex in East Hill for pregnant and parenting women between the ages of 15 and 24.

The girls started the project last spring, while they were still in Grade 11, as part of the Independent Studies component of their Global Education class.

"Trying to figure out what we were going to do was the hard part," said Smith. "It had to be a project that was important to us and be useful to the community."

Their decision to support children and young parents was twofold.

"There's a huge gap between teenagers and young kids in our community," explained Smith. "We thought it would be good to work with kids and bring back that connection."

Smith feels the Casimir program is somewhat overshadowed by its umbrella group, the Women's Transition House, and part of the trio's goal was to generate awareness about the issues facing young teen mothers.

"Everyone knows about it, but no one really wants to talk about it," said Smith.

Titled 'Teenz for Totz', the girls scraped together the playground money by selling chocolates and by holding bake sales, a garage sale and a silent auction.

To give themselves a little promotional pizzazz, they dressed in bunny suits when going door-to-door selling chocolates. In hindsight, Firlotte said it turned out to be a wise marketing strategy as all the business owners remembered who they were when it came time to make a donation later on.

The girls used the money to purchase a sandbox, climber set, teeter totter



GRAEME CORBETT/MORNING STAR

EMMA FIRLOTTE and Fallon Smith have fun assembling a complicated climber set.

they could set up the playground, they helped pour a five-inch thick concrete pad for the foundation.

They may not be the most mechanically inclined individuals, but they didn't hesitate to roll up their sleeves and pitch in with the work.

"You know those little Kinder Surprises," asked Firlotte as she assembled the climber equipment. "That's what this is."

Smith was quick to point out that the project wouldn't have been possible without in-kind support and other donations from local businesses. In particular, she thanked Cotton's Chocolates, Castle Home Design & Contracting, M&K Builders, Cooperative Insurance, Pryce Development, Farrer Rentals and Grand Valley Excavating.

"If you want to do something in the community, there are a lot of businesses there to help you out," said Smith. "If three girls can make an impact, what can other people do?"

Sharon Day, the coordinator of the Support for Young Parents program that operates Casimir Court, is thrilled with the girls' effort.

"They've done a wonderful job. They've really been working since the spring raising money for this," said Day.

"We were in dire need of a playground area for the kids. We didn't have much there before that and it wasn't all that safe for the children."

Day added that the new playground would augment the daycare program that operates from one of Casimir's converted apart-

ments.

In addition to parenting support, the young women who live in Casimir receive life skills training once a week. They're allowed to stay there for up to one year, which gives them a chance to prepare for life in the community, said Day.

Although the Fulton girls received a mark for their global education course, they continued to work on the project throughout the summer.

Said Smith: "We didn't just want to leave it hanging after we got our report cards in June."