

Wrinkled Heart Teaches Powerful Lessons

In a Grade 1 classroom, students are working diligently and cooperatively on math problems. It's not an uncommon sight at Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS) to see children engaged in learning. What is slightly unusual is the crumpled piece of red paper on the wall.

It's in the shape of a heart. Small and unassuming, it can easily be missed if you don't notice the students pointing to it periodically throughout their lesson.

The wrinkled heart is not mere decoration. Longtime MANS teacher Suzann Self uses the heart to teach universal lessons in Christian values of empathy, compassion, and mutual respect.

Suzanne tells her students that our hearts are the same as that paper heart. When words or physical actions hurt us, our hearts become crumpled just like that piece of paper. Responding to the wrinkles on our hearts with love and compassion can help us smooth out the hurt.

When someone is hurt by words or physical violence, the child can simply point to the heart on the wall, and they are understood at once. It is a powerful symbol of how our actions affect others.

"All I have to do is put my hand on my heart or point to the

wall," Suzanne says. Children in the class immediately know what it means.

It's a lesson that kids have easily adopted, using it to overcome their daily challenges. One child explains that she and her classmates use it when they are kicked, punched, or are the target of cruel words. The compassion and empathy symbolized by that small paper heart is changing how children respond to all manner of hurts. Students use the wrinkled heart every day to resolve conflict in their lives, embodying the values of compassion and empathy.

One paper heart on the wall and the dedication of a teacher are showing the transformational impact of the Christian values taught at MANS. The proof is with the paper—literally! Wrinkles in our daily lives can be hurtful, but MANS children have proven that empathy and compassion toward ourselves and others can help everyone's crumpled heart be stronger. ■

Alison Bottomley was Communications Assistant for the Bridge Campaign for Mamawi Atosketan Native School when she wrote this story. She now lives and works in Jordan.



>> Learn more about Mamawi Atosketan Native School and our students at MANS1.ca. You can also find out more about how The Bridge Campaign is changing the future of education among youth.