

A Better World and Teens Wade in to Stop Hunger Among Students

On April 9, Central Albertan music lovers gathered at the First Church of the Nazarene in Red Deer for a night of classical music and sign language performance—all in support of the Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS) breakfast and lunch program.

“I thought it would be a good idea to help young people in our [Central Alberta] community,” said Naomi Delafield, director of Rosedale Valley Strings. In previous years, two groups of young musicians—the Red Deer Youth Orchestra and Lacombe’s Rosedale Valley String Orchestra—would join forces to perform in A Better World’s annual “Music with a Mission” concert in support of children’s programs in Africa and Asia. This year their efforts helped fill a need closer to home.

“When you go to Africa,” said A Better World co-founder Eric Rajah, “the needs are obvious. In North America, that’s not the case. We seldom see them—they tend to be hidden, but they’re there.” And so the organizers of Music with a Mission made history: Nutrition for Learning at MANS became their first ever North American beneficiary.

“The teachers were seeing these students coming to school without adequate food,” observed Louise Stuppard, director of the Red Deer Youth Orchestra. “This program is huge for these students for their growth, health, concentration, and general happiness.”

Providing free nutritious breakfasts and lunches is a vital part of the MANS mission. Forty percent of aboriginal children live in poverty, and more than a third of the students at MANS participate in the Nutrition for Learning program at MANS, so raising the \$30,000 annual cost to continue offering supplemental food is essential. The concert, which raised nearly \$8,000, was held in a new venue and community, reaching a new audience that Rajah hopes to expand even more next year.

In addition to orchestral performances of classical selections, MANS’s own Total Praise signing choir preformed. Led by director Cheri Notice, Total Praise used American Sign Language and interpretive movements to convey the meaning behind contemporary devotional songs. Before Total Praise finished their first song, the packed house was on its feet—a standing ovation.

For Jersey, a Grade 7 student and Total Praise performer, it was a special and emotional moment. “When they did the standing ovation, I was really happy, because I didn’t know I was that good.”

“It was really exciting!” said fellow performer Lashay (Grade 7). “We did pretty good. When we went on stage I felt really happy. That was the biggest group I have ever performed for. I was so happy I couldn’t stop smiling and I couldn’t wait to tell my Kokum (grandmother). She was so proud of me.”

Shaunavon, a Grade 6 student, shared Lashay’s enthusiasm for performance, “I really liked it when we got a standing ovation. I’m glad I got to participate in the program in Red Deer. It’s great that they are helping kids get more lunches so their parents don’t have to worry. I have a school breakfast and lunch every day.”

Delafield also noticed that rallying behind a local cause led to a big increase in parent volunteers for the event.

For more information on Mamawi Atosketan Native School, its choir, nutrition program, and ongoing campaign to build a new high school starting this spring, please visit www.mans1.ca. ■



A Grade 2 student awaits the special hot lunch prepared for her and her classmates with wide-eyed anticipation.

“It’s great that they are helping kids get more lunches so their parents don’t have to worry.”—Lashay, Grade 6 at MANS, Performing member of Total Praise

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