

Learning and giving – refugees, Matthew Flinders College and Buddies

by Lesley Wilcoxson



During the second half of this year, Year 6 students in Matthew Flinders Anglican College have been on a journey, undertaking a 10-week unit of study “Think Globally, Act Locally’ that involved them in researching factors that cause people to become refugees and questioning what they could do to make a difference in the world.

Three refugees who’d taken part in Buddies’ Learn English Holiday program opened their eyes to the reasons people leave their homelands and the consequences of this and, with input from the Romero Centre, the students began thinking about products and activities they could develop to help young refugees in Australia and elsewhere.

They created and showcased prototypes of these products and activities - ranging from care packs for young refugee women to bilingual dictionaries and educational websites building Australian cultural, social, financial and transportation awareness - then were tasked with using their entrepreneurial and business skills produce real outcomes for refugees.

This resulted in the holding in late November of a market day where other students, parents and teachers could buy homemade Christmas gifts, such as baubles, cards, chocolate, biscuits, lip gloss, bath bombs etc. The market stalls buzzed with the energy and enthusiasm of their young stall holders intent on raising money to support the outcomes they had chosen: ‘Buddy Bags’ for 50 young refugees (containing a beach towel, drink bottle, first aid kit, hand sanitiser, small ball, baseball cap, playing card, elegant notebook, and a personal note to the recipient), and money to support Buddies’ Learn English Holiday program.

In total, the students raised just under \$3,700 for their Buddy Bags and for Buddies, and also gathered a large amount of food and toiletries to be given to Romero for pre-Christmas distribution.

Beyond these wonderful and caring contributions to the lives of refugees were the other truly notable outcomes: these young students now have some sense of what refugees go through, an increased awareness of the need to be involved and willingness to help, and the realisation that each of us can make a difference. From the contact made by some of their parents expressing interest in Buddies’ programs, it seems that they have also spread that message widely.