

Students help raise funds for area's homeless children

SPECIAL TO NEIGHBORS

DAYTONA BEACH — Amid celebrations of their improved FCAT writing test scores recently, students at Westside Elementary School also completed a two-week "Coins for the Children" project aimed at raising funds for homeless children.

From April 14 to April 30, students in all classes and grade levels collected coins to donate to the Community Foundation Volusia & Flagler: Homeless Children Fund. The coins will go to support services to prevent or reduce homelessness among children in Volusia and Flagler Counties. After counting all the change, Principal Judi Winch announced that the students had raised \$703.35.

In Volusia and Flagler Counties, more than 2,000 people on average are homeless on any given day. Nearly half of all homeless in the community are children, most under the age of 6. In fact, this year in Volusia County Schools alone, more than 900 children are living in homelessness, either sheltered or unsheltered, according to school officials.

"Here at Westside, we get so much support from our community," said Winch. "We teach that it is important to give back and this project was a great example of service learning in action."

The student body at Westside is 85 percent minority with 90 percent of the students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch.

Guidance counselor Gail O'Leary coordinated the Coins for the Children service learning project. As part of the project,



Photo provided

One of the top performers in the "Coins for Children" campaign was 10-year-old Micah Ingram, a Westside Elementary School fourth-grader, who emptied his piggy bank and donated \$14.32 to the cause.

students in Westside Elementary's Nights Alive program also read *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein.

Students in classes that collected the most coins will enjoy lunch catered especially for them courtesy of Red Lobster in Daytona Beach on May 12. Several members of the Homeless Children Fund committee have pledged to match the funds raised by Westside students.

One of the top performers in the Coins for Children program was fourth-grader Micah Ingram, 10, from Jennifer Dietz' class. Micah emptied his piggy bank and donated \$14.32 to the cause, money he said he had been collecting since he was 6

years old. Asked if he had considered simply donating a few coins from his piggy bank instead of the entire amount, he said the thought never crossed his mind.

"I just wanted to help all the homeless kids," Micah said.

But wait, there's more.

After learning of Westside's fundraising efforts, several Homeless Children Committee members offered to match the money raised by the students. Mori Hosseini, Maurie and Dr. John Johnson, Gale Lemerand, Bob Davis, Rodney Cruise, Dr. Trudie Kibbee Reed, Ali Babazadeh, Ray Salazar, Mansour Babazadeh, as well as the founder of the initiative, Forough Hosseini, all pledged to match the funds raised by Westside's students.