

Teddies for Teddies: Sharing and Being a Friend Around the World

We all know that service is an important part of the Guiding program. We tend to think of the older girls, the Pathfinders and senior branches, when it comes to completing service projects that give back to the community. But a group of Sparks have given an amazing gift to a group of empty-handed girls in South Africa. These incredible Sparks truly illustrate the Spark motto "To share and be a friend."

This story began last year on Thinking Day. Heather Walker's group of Sparks in North Vancouver, B.C. were circulating around the room, visiting different countries and learning about what girls their age were doing in those countries. One country that the girls visited was South Africa, where they learned that Teddies - the South African equivalent to Sparks - lived in poverty and owned virtually nothing. One girl piped up and said, "But everyone has a Barbie!" She was surprised to learn that in the village of Kwa-zulu Natal, the girls didn't even have one toy to play with. Then, in true sharing mode, this Spark offered a suggestion: "I have lots. I should give them one!"

Heather was amazed at how quickly the girls became excited about their special project. Each of her Sparks brought in a teddy bear and they packaged them all into a box. The Sparks added personal notes with the teddies, including a request that the teddy bear receive a name from its new owner.

There was one girl in the unit whose mother was originally from South Africa, and had been a Teddy herself. When the little girl realized that her mother had a teddy bear from South Africa, the Spark insisted that "it should go back!" This bear had traveled with the mother to Canada, and had been kissed so much that its nose was rubbed off. In the true spirit of giving, the bear was included in the box of bears to be sent to South Africa.

Forty teddy bears later, and \$159 in shipping funds, the teddy bears were on their way to South Africa. It took them four months to arrive, but when they did, the bears were "incredibly well-received," said Heather. Renera Prins, the Teddy leader from South Africa, sent a package back to the North Vancouver Sparks, which was filled with letters from the South African Teddy group, expressing gratitude over the teddy bears.

"It started with a Spark driven idea and blossomed into an international spine tingling experience with the happiest of endings...that was just a beginning. I have a sneaking suspicion that this project isn't over," Heather commented. "We *will* do this all over again in a heartbeat."



by Melissa Jones