

## Students show class with meals for families

**Gerard Young**

Times Colonist

*Monday, December 16, 2002*

Christmas hasn't always been easy for single mother Sue Palmer and her teenage daughter Sharise. But they know what a little innovation and a lot of love can do to make it a happy holiday.

They saw first-hand Sunday what a group of Reynolds secondary school students could do to put a little more merry in Christmas. They and 11 other families from the Single Parent Resource Centre were treated by the students to a Christmas dinner and evening of entertainment.

"I thought it was really great all the hard work they put into decorating (the cafeteria) with the fireplace and the stars," Sue Palmer said as families were about to sit for dinner.

The dinner may be a class project that counts for marks but it was apparent the students were enjoying the evening as much as their guests.

For some families it might be the best Christmas dinner they have this year, Palmer said.

For others it is a chance to feel special at a time in their lives when they're struggling a bit.

Palmer has been a single parent for 15 years. Three grown children live in Montreal where the family originally resided.

Sharise, 18, lives with her mom. They also are living with one of Sharise's friends until the two teens can find their own apartment. Sharise is about to graduate from high school.

"It's frustrating and sad cause you want to give to your children," said Palmer, who recently lost her job with a street outreach program that shut down due to funding cuts.

Sharise admits some Christmases were tough when she was growing up but there is no doubt who she credits with making them meaningful every year.

"It never bothered me," she said, saying her mother always made Christmas special and found a way to make sure there was something under the tree. "She really improvised for me."

The dinner was the idea of Alana Marks and Nicole Hilbourne. They decided such an event would be perfect for the project they were required to do for their leadership class.

"We saw in the newspaper that a school in Vancouver did it and we thought it was a good idea," Marks said.

They enlisted some 50 students for the planning and had 20 serving, cooking and greeting at the dinner.



**CREDIT: Darren Stone, Times Colonist**

**Adrian Peskor, 17 months, enjoys a Christmas cracker in the Reynolds secondary school cafeteria Sunday night.**

They had so many volunteers they had to turn some down, Hilbourne said.

Students taking the leadership class do a variety of projects, including organizing school dances and putting together hampers for the Christmas Bureau.

Though the leadership class has a budget, students often raise money for specific projects or through events such as school dances. Students canvassed donations for the dinner.

After their project was approved, the two Grade 10 students contacted the Single Parent Resource Centre for names of families they could invite to their dinner.

They were given a list of 12 families -- 30 people in all -- with children ranging in age from 16 months to 18 years. All the parents volunteer at the centre.

"Their vision was to put on a very classy dinner," teacher Stu Rhodes said.

He and fellow leadership class teacher Heather Coey are very proud of the class and what this group has done with the dinner project, he said.

"We work with 120 of the best kids you can have," Rhodes said. "This is an extreme example of what they do."

The evening began with cheese and crackers as well as smoked salmon and punch. Then the guests sat down to salad, turkey with all the trimmings and a desert trolley.

The guests were also treated to singing accompanied by piano. A donated fireplace, handmade stars hanging from the ceiling and white Christmas lights provided the ambience.

The children were given loaded Christmas stockings made in the school and mugs filled with goodies supplied by a student and her mother. The parents received a variety of coupons for products supplied by local businesses.

"We hope it is not the last (dinner)," Hilbourne said.

© Copyright 2002 Times Colonist (Victoria)

CLOSE WINDOW

---

Copyright © 2002 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest Global Communications Corp.](#) All rights reserved.  
Optimized for browser versions 4.0 and higher.

