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EAST LEYDEN STUDENTS KNIT AND CROCHET SCARVES FOR THE HOMELESS

Teresa French, an English teacher at East Leyden High School, decided to clean and rearrange parts of her basement for easier access to her Christmas decorations. “Skeins of yarn kept popping up,” says French. “Some mostly used up, some brand new. I thought I could find some use for them.”

And she did.

“On Twitter I read about the idea of tying scarves on trees for homeless people to use when they needed them,” she recalls. “I decided to begin an informal club. I could teach kids how to crochet, we could distribute the scarves to the needy, and we could put the yarn to good use all at the same time.”

French reached out to student service clubs and also put an announcement in the daily student bulletin. In one week more than 25 East campus students and two other mentors, Judith Condren, librarian and Beatriz Porro, modern language department teacher, were involved in the project. As of right now student participants have stabilized to about ten per session.

A modest trendsetter, French says she “should mention” that she isn’t an expert crafter. “I learned by watching my Mom crochet,” she recalls. “So we’re not using any pattern for the scarves. We’re sort of ‘feeling’ our way through them. The kids are making some mistakes, but I told them that doesn’t matter at all. It proves they’re handmade.”

By December 15 French estimates the group will have crafted 15 scarves. As of yet they haven’t decided how they will distribute them, but they’re working on it.

"As the weather turns cold, more students are brought to the realization that a scarf is a beautiful necessity," French notes. "The fact that the students show their love for the needy through this craft is honestly a moving experience.

“They put the scarves around their own necks to make sure they are long enough and wide enough. The smiles on the students' faces surely mirror the smiles on the faces of those who will receive them,” she adds.

In addition to the scarves, students pin a new pair of warm socks to each of the handmade scarves. “Each gift will have the name of the person who knitted or crocheted the scarf plus a cheerful note,” French says.

For the students there is an added bonus as many of them have remarked on how relaxing it is to knit and crochet. And, it’s also about acquiring a new skill. “Two freshmen boys who joined us want to be engineers. They caught on very quickly,” she adds.

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