Can children really make a difference?

It's the kind of thing we like to talk about. We make vague, general statements about how children can change the world. How often, though, are they given the chance to do so – how often are they given the chance to lead?

Thanks to Penny Harvest, students at Cedar Valley Community School in Lynnwood are getting a real opportunity to become youth leaders and community change makers. The yearlong program starts in the fall, when student leaders bring the school together to gather pennies.

Cedar Valley sits in the center of a low-income community, with 80% of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. That didn’t stop students from collecting pennies. They found creative ways to reach their goal. “We took our time and my mom helped me find pennies on the street,” said fifth grade Penny Harvest leader Jessyia. When asked why she donated her time to gather pennies, Jessyia answered, “Some people are struggling with different stuff and they need our help.”

All together, Cedar Valley students raised over $800 in pennies, and received a scholarship to reach $1,000. So where does all the money go? Diego, a fifth grade leader, responded: “We can help people – help organizations so that they can do something good where they’re at and help somebody.”

Twenty student representatives from fourth to sixth grade are quickly discovering that the easy part is over. Now they must begin the long process of making responsible decisions on how to best help the community with the money they raised. The program generated enthusiasm in Cedar Valley students, eager to help their community. “It helps other people,” said smiling fourth grade leader, Paola. “By working together we can fix stuff up.”

During the next few months, Kathleen will be reporting to us on the Cedar Valley youth Roundtable’s process and progress as they turn from fundraisers into...
community grant makers and problem solvers. To get email reminders about her posts, please use the box on the upper left side of the blog and sign up!