

15 Years of Rainbows at Woodstock Middle School

"Mr. Metcalf, when is Rainbows going to start this year? Why can't it start now?" I've heard that several times already this year. I can hardly believe that Woodstock Middle School has been open for 15 years, and Rainbows is stronger than ever. In our first year, the staff at WMS voted to support Rainbows. Within one week after our vote, the staff had raised enough money to cover the start-up fees. Rainbows has been a solid part of the WMS Counseling Department ever since.

I'll never forget my first experience as a Rainbows facilitator. The group I worked with consisted of six 7th grade students who had all experienced the death of a parent. A sweet 7th grade girl shared about her excitement of being invited to go on a vacation with her best friend. She asked her mother if they could go to the store to get a few last minute items for the trip. She said, "I was walking with my mom in the store and told her 'this is the best day of my life.'" She recounted that on the way home from the store their vehicle was hit by a truck. She went on to say, "I looked over and realized my mom was dead and this wasn't the best day of my life; it was the worst day of my life." She felt tremendous guilt and told her group members repeatedly that if she hadn't wanted to go to the store, her mom would still be alive. She thought it was her fault. The other students in her group worked hard to help reassure her that her mother's death was not her fault. As a group, they supported each other while working to cope with the losses they had each experienced.

On another occasion, an 8th grade student shared this with her Rainbows group. "All of you know, I am the 8th Grade Class President. A lot of kids say I am popular. I do have lots of friends. It is all of you in my Rainbows group; however, who really knows me. I'm not comfortable sharing with most of my friends about my parent's divorce and the fact that my dad is an alcoholic. I'm afraid what others might think if they knew that. With all of you in this group, I can really talk about how I feel and I know that you will truly understand because you have experienced some of the same things. I'm thankful that I have this group to let out some of my feelings."

The last couple of years, due to the economy, it has been harder and harder to secure the necessary funds to continue Rainbows. Because of countless stories like those mentioned above, and hundreds of WMS students who have been helped by Rainbows, we continue to work hard to find those funds. A recent "jeans day" for staff members raised just over \$600. That tells me they really believe in the program. Sometimes staff members will donate to Rainbows in memory of a family member or friend who has passed away. At other times, we still are able to get small amounts of money from various community organizations. All of this together keeps Rainbows going.

This year so far we have 11 groups with almost 80 students being served. I have six 8th grade boys in the group I facilitate. If you know anything about 8th grade boys, "being cool" is the main focus. This group of boys, however, have put that aside and are committed to supporting each other and dealing with their hurts head-on. They are even missing their gym class to participate. During our first session, one of the boys began crying. Not one of the group members, smiled or made a negative comment. Each of them understood exactly how he felt. One of the group members even got up and found a box of Kleenex. In our second session, four of the six were shedding tears and knew it was a safe environment to do so. When we closed, I asked the question, "What surprised you about today's session?" One boy shared, "when I see you guys in the halls, you look like you have it all together. I'm surprised that you are all hurting just like I am." Another one shared, "I'm not glad that you guys are going through the same thing that I am, but I'm glad to know that someone else understands how I feel."

A lot of people ask me, how I justify having our students miss class time to be in Rainbows. I simply tell them that at WMS, we believe that if students are allowed time to heal, they will eventually be able to focus on their academics even more. When students come back to Woodstock Middle School to visit, the number one question I get asked is "do you still have Rainbows? That program really helped me." Doesn't that say it all?

Rod Metcalf
Woodstock Middle School Counselor

