



Christy Ragulsky/News-Register

Christy Scattarella of Yamhill started the Shadow Project as a family-financed, home-based operation. It is now a thriving nonprofit organization, recognized for success in educating children with learning disabilities.

Yamhill woman wins high OEA honor

By DEE DUDERSTADT
Of the News-Register

A mother's greatest achievement is seeing her child become successful in life, but a learning disability can make that difficult. Just ask Christy Scattarella.

In 1997, when her son, Alex, was in the second grade, he began having difficulty with reading, writing and paying attention in class. What this single mom did to help her son is now helping more than 1,100 children, from McMinnville to Portland.

For her efforts, she was honored last weekend with the Oregon Education Association's Education Citizen of the Year Award. She follows such luminaries, as former Portland Mayor Vera Katz and Oregon Supreme Court Justice Betty Roberts.

By sheer accident, Scattarella found a way to motivate her son.

He came home from school one day with a second-hand stuffed animal. The family puppy, Shadow, promptly claimed the toy store into it.

When Alex came to her, devastated over the loss, she offered to buy him a new one. It would be better, she told him, because it would be new.

But Alex was having nothing to do with his mother's attempts to soothe him.

"You can never get me another one like this," he told her. "Garfield was special because I earned him."

At that moment, she was the cartoon character with the light bulb going on above her head. As she remembers the moment, she becomes animated all over again.

She still feels the pain that her son felt some 10 years ago. But his pain led to her understanding. And it led in turn to the Shadow Project.

She realized that if a child is motivated by such a simple thing as a second-hand toy, how much more motivated he will be if greater rewards are offered. The schools didn't have the resources, but she knew she could find them.

Scattarella went to her son's teachers with the basic idea for the Shadow Project. The children would earn play money, called Shadow Bucks, which they could use to shop at a Shadow Store.

Shadow Project a hit at Grandhaven

By DEE DUDERSTADT
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Ryan Hutchison was destined to be just another learning-disabled kid — someone who struggled all his life with basic reading and writing skills. Thanks to the Shadow Project, though, the fifth-grader is back on the track to success.

Jolene Anderson, his LRC teacher at Grandhaven Elementary School, likes to use Ryan's story as an example of how well the program can work. "His is one that really stands out," she said.

Under the program, offered in several McMinnville elementary schools, participants earn Shadow Bucks when they turn in homework, make an effort to modify unruly behavior or make an extra effort to grasp a difficult educational concept.

They then get to go to the Shadow Store and make purchases. The store stocks educational toys, learning-centered books, art and school supplies, clothing items and even gift items for family members, all brand new.

Ryan used some of his Shadow Bucks to buy books that were well above his reading level at the time.

So Anderson made a deal with him. If he would read a chapter at a time in one of his new books, and write a report on that chapter, he could earn

She would provide the incentives: toys, school supplies, books, art supplies, whatever she could find at an affordable price. The teachers would oversee the program.

The result would be kids turning in their homework, curbing their unruly behavior and applying themselves to difficult educational concepts — in short, making a real effort. Earning money they could use for shopping would have a motivating effect in the classroom.

What began as a family-financed, home-based endeavor has become a thriving nonprofit with a paid executive director.

Scattarella serves in the unpaid post of president. For her, it is a labor of love.

In the past 10 years, she figures she has invested more than



Chrissy Ragulsky/News-Register

Shadow the dog, for whom the Shadow Project is named, is greeted by students participating in the program.

more Shadow Bucks.

The youngster has now read all of his newly acquired books, chapter by chapter. As a result, his reading level has increased dramatically, and so has his writing ability.

"This is positive for him," Anderson said. "He uses the tools to learn more."

The reward system has motivated Ryan to keep setting higher goals and stretching to reach them. He now writes his own stories and reads them to classmates.

With his Shadow Bucks, he has bought a journal and yet more books. "He's been using

what he has bought in the Shadow Store to better himself," Anderson said.

Grandhaven launched the program with the start of fall classes in September. It was founded by Christy Scattarella to help her son, Alex, when he was in the second grade.

The children relate to Alex, Anderson said, because he was also learning disabled, but went on to win admission to the University of Denver.

Like them, he just learned differently. But he made it to college anyway.

It gives them hope, she said.

9,500 hours in the project.

Almost everything the program has comes via donation. Even storage space for donated items is donated, as are printing, copying and other services. You name it and she has found a business or group willing to provide it.

She has collected many stories of children who have been motivated by the program, and she still cries each time she tells one. It's obvious how much helping these children means to her.

The children, she says, relate to the story of Alex, which is now a part of the program.

"He's a kid like them," Scattarella said. "It's their story, too."

She estimates program costs run about \$85 per child per year.

The cost is low, she said, thanks to the dedicated efforts of teachers, community volunteers and supportive business leaders. "We could not do it alone," she said.

Scattarella is "bi-residential," dividing her time between Yamhill and Portland. The project currently serves 130 children in Yamhill County through five elementary schools, and she hopes to add four more soon.

"We've had request for the program from as far away as New Zealand," she said.

And Alex, the child who inspire the program in the first place? He's now attending the University of Denver, where he captains the snowboarding team.

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes.