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## Peer Witnesses

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## Peer Witnesses

BY WENDY KEOUGH

**T**he Peer-to-Peer Outreach mini-course helps Ruth Murdoch Elementary School junior high students touch the lives of many in their community and spread a positive Seventh-day Adventist message. Peer-to-Peer is designed to give junior high students the experience of working with special needs students who are their own age.

Blossomland Learning Center provides special education services. According to their website, “Blossomland Learning Center, located in Berrien Springs, provides comprehensive programs and therapeutic services for students with severe multiple impairments and students with moderate to severe cognitive impairments, ages 3 to 26.”

Chris Davisson, RMES junior high teacher, organized the course along with Blossomland officials. RMES students visit Blossomland two days each week and interact with their peers approximately one-and-a-half hours weekly. Activities include attending Blossomland assemblies, playing on the playground, taking photographs, participating in a field day on the RMES campus, learning about nature, cooking and more.

RMES students see the special needs other students have and use creative ways to reach those kids and help them learn. To prepare for this unique challenge, Blossomland teachers gave RMES students a three-day training session, covering topics such as physical and emotional disabilities, and led them through activities to make these disabilities more “real” for them.

While this may not be a traditional mission field, RMES students are deeply and spiritually affected by the experience. “This is what I would call ‘religion in shoes,’” says David L. Waller, RMES principal. “Our students aren’t just studying the Bible in a classroom and memorizing Scripture, but they



Kaily Iwasa (left) and Maya Turon, former RMES junior high students, participate in a training program to learn how tasks such as lacing and tying may be more difficult for those with special needs.

Wendy Keough

are actually out in the community, connecting with students who need that human connection. It’s a great mission opportunity for our students and for the Blossomland students as well.”

RMES parents express how they see improvements in student attitudes, grades and acceptance of others. “I distinctly remember having a parent recently thank me for helping to change their child

and make them less selfish,” Chris said. “I told them it was because of their student’s involvement with Peer-to-Peer.”

“Staff and teachers at [Blossomland] don’t know very much about the Adventist message,” Davisson continues, “but they are constantly impressed with our students and the courteous way they relate to the students there. I know that our group is sending a positive Adventist message to the adults involved as well.”

James 2:14–16 says, *What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, ‘Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’ — but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? (NLT)*

RMES students are learning, through practice, to have that faith and give to others as well.

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Wendy Keough is the assistant to the principal at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School in Berrien Springs, Michigan.