



# Healing Heart Waldorf Dolls

*making a world of difference*

Parent-driven effort provides deserving children with handmade toys

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When classes let out for holidays in June 2009, one parent didn't want to let the strong community spirit of Cedar Valley Waldorf School in Squamish, British Columbia, wilt over the hot summer months. So she took matters into her own hands – quite literally.

Jennifer Thompson stitched together a dedicated group of volunteers, approximately 18 moms, who met almost every Tuesday night throughout July and August to create 35 Healing Heart Waldorf Dolls – beautiful handmade dolls that will go to local social worker Allison Clarke, who primarily handles guardianship and adoption cases. Clarke will in turn offer one to a child to keep, when he or she needs comfort and reassurance during crisis.

“A big part of our school is teaching through example the amazing effect one person can have on a community,” said Thompson, adding she had always wanted the chance to learn the skill of doll making. “We have an incredibly talented and supportive parent body and this was an opportunity to stay connected over the summer.”

Thompson, who is head of the parent initiative council at Cedar Valley Waldorf School, said she initially considered sending the dolls overseas to underprivileged

children but quickly realized they could make just as significant a difference right at home.

“There are many children here in our own community who could benefit from receiving a healing doll to call their own,” she said. “When a situation arises where a child is in great need of love, security, or something to simply call their own, we can pass along a handmade doll and hopefully help in a time of difficult transition for that child.”

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*– Jennifer Thompson*

As a social worker with the Ministry of Children and Family Development for the B.C. communities of Squamish, Furry Creek, Britannia Beach and Whistler Clarke couldn't agree more.

“The dolls will go to children who are facing some kind of a transition and in need of something to cuddle. These dolls are really unique and while very young children may not understand the significance of a handmade



*Jennifer Thompson gathered a group of dedicated volunteers to produce 35 Healing Heart Waldorf Dolls for needy children in July and August, 2009.*

doll, the natural materials, colour and texture make them really appealing,” Clarke said.

“Once we receive the dolls, it will be our job to tell the child the story about them, that someone made the doll just for them during this time in their life.”

Waldorf dolls are traditionally made using wool, cotton and other natural materials and are based on traditional European doll making methods. A doll's appearance is intentionally simple, which gives the child playing with it room for creativity and imagination,

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explained Thompson, whose sons Ben, 6, and Kai, 4, made regular appearances at the hands-on sessions, picking their own favourites to play with.

“These dolls are meant to be something a child can love and cling to in a difficult time, it can become their confidante or alter ego. Waldorf literature suggests that not only is a handcrafted doll one of a kind, but it’s an individual which carries the spirit of the maker in its stitches and absorbs the spirit of the child who loves it.”

Parents and experienced doll makers Yoko Haga, Christine Martin, and Shannon Johnson not only participated in making dolls for the project but got the group into the swing of things with basic instruction, supplying patterns and being close at hand when things went awry.

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— Shannon Johnson

“I was happy to take part in this project, it was good to be together with a group of mothers, talking, laughing, and sharing. This is the spirit that went into each doll that was made with our hands,” said Johnson, who is also the Cedar Valley Waldorf



School preschool teacher.

“And I applaud Jen’s effort and initiative to make a positive impact on a child – to bring love to a child who may be suffering. This sort of project is exactly the sort of thing the world needs more of, the grassroots effort, spreading love, it’s what raises our consciousness.”

Clarke agrees.

“Jen emanates commitment to her project and she genuinely wants to make a difference in a child’s life,” she said.

But while the project was definitely Thompson’s baby, she is fast to point out that it was an effort of many.

“For some of the parents it has been a real challenge to create something by hand, but everyone has done beautiful work, and it is wonderful to see all these people taking such pride in their work,” said Thompson. “It’s been a community effort and I’m thrilled with what we’ve accomplished.”

Thompson said she hopes that others in communities around the world find inspiration to do something similar.

“Wouldn’t it be amazing if this just caught on and we heard of stories like this from all over North America? The world?”

“Now *that* would be incredible.”

*Below: Shannon Johnson teaches fellow volunteer dollmakers how to fashion a head. Right: Jennifer Thompson’s kitchen table is transformed.*

