

Article Last Updated: Wednesday, September 08, 2004 - 11:42:23 AM EST

Kids get a snapshot of other cultures

By STEPHANIE COYNE, Sun Correspondent

TYNGSBORO Ever since Stephanie Murray was 2, she has dreamed of being the first female president.

She also plans to be a teacher and writer.

Now at the ripe old age of 8, the Tyngsboro resident is well on her way to getting her message out, and people around the world are taking notice of just who she is.

Stephanie is part of an organization that teaches kids about diversity and gives them the opportunity to meet people from different parts of the planet.

Everyday Joy is a grass-roots effort that creates programs to bring people together across oceans, cultures and generations. Participants create artistic projects to send to new friends as they learn about different traditions and customs from around the globe.

The program Picture Us gives children an opportunity to learn about diversity through a photographic exchange.

Kathleen Geraghty, of Tyngsboro, along with her 8-year-old son James, started the program last summer.

During the months of July and August, a group of local children created homemade photo albums to share with children in a different part of the world.

The children each created a page that included photographs taken by them of family and friends, pets, their schools and homes, and other important reflections of their lives.

The pages were bound together and delivered by a volunteer to a group somewhere in the world where, hopefully, they will create another album to send back to the group in Tyngsboro.

"We want kids to meet kids from around the world," Geraghty said. "We combine photography and diversity to generate an understanding for children."

The program has brought albums to and from Ireland, Portugal, Mexico, Zambia, Nepal, Morocco and Iraq.

"It was fun to learn that other kids in different countries are the same as us," said Stephanie, a third-grade student at Tyngsboro Elementary School.

Stephanie's pages included pictures of her dog and poems about dance classes, the beach, friendship and families.

She said she utilizes her photography, writing and scrapbooking skills to put together her pages in the albums that are being sent around the world.

"I like sending scrapbooks to other places," she said. "It's fun to learn about people from around the world."

Will Pumyea, of Chelmsford, likes the idea of Picture Us so much he became an official "friend" of the organization and received recognition last night at an event put on by the group at Town Hall.

"I really like the way they break barriers for the kids," said Pumyea, a National Guardsman who spoke to the group of kids about the culture in Afghanistan and Iraq. "It's nice to open their eyes that kids everywhere are the same as the kids here."

Cindy Hanna of Tyngsboro enrolled her two sons, Sean, 8, and David, 7, in the summer program and watched last night as they presented their pages, which are scheduled to be sent to India in the near future.

"It looked like a really good program," she said. "It's neat that they could get to know people from different parts of the world."