



Education Foundation of Niagara executive director Julie Densham says the organization's Poverty and Emergency Relief Fund provides help for students whose families are struggling financially. The foundation is holding a Toonie Tuesday fundraiser May 6. STAFF PHOTO BY DENIS CAHILL

A little coin, a lot of change

Education Foundation of Niagara to hold Toonie Tuesday fundraiser to give hope to students from low-income families

By SAMANTHA CRAGGS
Standard Staff

A severely disabled student with one parent in jail and the other in adult education receives help to continue her swimming lessons.

A young elementary school student skips lunch every day, not wanting to cost his parents money. The school quietly buys some groceries and allows the student to use the kitchen every day to make his own lunch.

A student whose only joy is basketball longs to go to basketball camp, but he needs a second pair of shoes. The school quietly gives him the money to fulfil his dream.

These are a few of the acts already performed by the Education Foundation of Niagara, which established a new Poverty and Emergency Relief Fund in February and will hold its first fundraiser, Toonie Tuesday, on May 6.

Until now, compassionate principals and teachers have reached into their own pockets to cover the costs, executive director Julie Densham said. Now, when they see a low-income student struggling, they have somewhere

to apply for help.

Since the program's launch, the foundation has spent \$5,000, one-quarter of the \$20,000 it hopes to raise with Toonie Tuesday, Densham said. Students at most of the District School Board of Niagara's 119 schools will contribute \$2 coins. Some businesses and other organizations are also having employee drives, such as PenFinancial and the Wainfleet firefighters.

Densham would like to see this spread, but she knows the foundation is a new non-profit organization.

"The Education Foundation of Niagara is new," she said. "This whole incidence of people talking about poverty is fairly new. We only started reading about it in the papers in July. This is only the beginning."

Maywood School principal Gary Osmond has seen first-hand what the fund will do. At Christmas, he applied for Maywood to be one of the schools

to attend a production of *Beauty and the Beast*. The foundation chose Maywood, which meant students who otherwise wouldn't experience musical theatre were able to go.

Maywood has some low-income families, although "we don't highlight that," he said. He sees it more as a fund to help all children.

"This will help fund a lot of things schools would never be able to afford," he said.

School trips — particularly year-end ones that students remember for the rest of their lives — tend to highlight a separation between the haves and have-nots, Densham said.

But experiences such as class trips and healthy lunches are as important as books and chalkboards.

"Poverty relief for kids is really tantamount," she said.

Densham encourages other businesses to take collections May 6. Those who do can contact her at 905-641-2929, ext. 4104 or by e-mail at efn@dsbn.edu.on.ca.

Toonie Tuesday will be an annual event, she said.

"This will help fund a lot of things schools would never be able to afford."

Gary Osmond
Maywood School
principal