

## College of Wooster students volunteer to fix toys for RePlay-for-Kids

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WOOSTER, Ohio -- When student volunteers arrived at the recent RePlay-for-Kids work session in The College of Wooster's Center for Diversity and Global Engagement, they were greeted by dozens of new or gently used toys -- but these students didn't come to play around.

Their mission was to help install alternative switches on the battery-operated toys so that RePlay, a nonprofit organization that repairs and adapts toys and assistive devices for children with disabilities, could redistribute them to organizations and agencies for young people with special needs, including Ida Sue School in Wooster.

"We adapt mainstream battery-operated toys so that a child with a disability who might not ordinarily be able to use the toy can activate an alternative switch to make it work," said Bill Memberg of RePlay in explaining the process.

More than 20 students took part in the two-hour event, during which an estimated 30 toys were reconfigured -- everything from Dora's Talking Backpack to Mickey Mouse's Star Guitar. Also participating were Jen Roche Bowen, assistant professor of mathematics and computer science, and Desiree Lutsch, accounts payable manager in the Business Office.

"We show volunteers the steps to follow," said Memberg. "Not only do they learn about children with disabilities and their needs, but they also learn basic technical skills that they can take home with them. The process is not that complicated. Sometimes, the hardest thing is getting the toy out of the box."

After some initial trepidation, the students appeared to settle in. They were intrigued by the process and energized by the opportunity to help children. "It was exciting to watch (the volunteers) work," said Nicola Kille, assistant director of global engagement. "It was an opportunity for them to provide a service and help children with special needs. It was also nice to tap into a segment of the student population, such as pre-engineering majors who had no prior association with the Center."

Marissa Stover, a senior studio art major from Westlake, Ohio, described the experience as "amazing." "I was so fulfilled after I finished reprogramming (the toy) that a friend and I worked on," she said. "It truly was a great event, and I hope to do it again."

Emma Sullivan, a senior communication sciences and disorders major from Bexley, Ohio, said she participated because she has experience working with children with disabilities and has seen the positive impact of adapted toys on these children and their families. "I had no experience whatsoever with soldering or anything like that, but it was simple and fun to do," she said. "I felt so proud of the toy that I worked on."

The session was the College's third event in a week with a theme of the disabled -- the others being a highly successful power wheelchair soccer event in Timken Gymnasium and a Skype interview with the founders of EnAble India, a charitable organization that teaches workplace skills to disabled adults in India, and helps them find jobs, often with Fortune 500 companies. "We took a global issue (people with disabilities) and brought it to a local scale right here in the community," said Kille. "To me this is exactly what the Center is about - local solutions to global issues."



College of Wooster photo First-year students Lizzy Gonder (left) and Brittany House (right) install adaptive switches on Mickey Mouse's Star Guitar during a recent work session at The College of Wooster with RePlay for Kids, a nonprofit organization that repairs and adapts toys and assistive devices for children with disabilities.

