

Students seek to serve; find friendships as well

by Joey Hadden
Features Editor

Some find that helping others can be beneficial in more ways than one. The Best Buddies Club, which is run individually by schools across the globe, gives students a chance to create friendships with teenagers who have IDD or Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

The current president, junior Haley Welch, has been interested in the Best Buddies Club since she was a part of PE Partnership in eighth grade.

"I thought it was right up my alley," Welch said.

On November 11th, the Best Buddies Friendship Walk, or "Buddy Run" charity event took place at White Rock Lake in Dallas. Participants walked or ran five kilometers for a cause. The event raised money for the Best Buddies organization.

In this club, each member is paired up with a student who has IDD in order to create individual friendships.

"We have an online survey made by Best Buddies International and I look at their answers and match people up accordingly," Welch said, "and after a pair has been buddied, we normally keep them that way until one of them graduates."

The members have a meeting and a party once a month. In addition, each member hangs out with their buddy twice a month and talks to them once a week.

In the middle of last school year, Mrs. Julia McTaggart, Functional Academics teacher, became the club's sponsor. A lot of the activities were with her stu-

dents and she was already involved.

"This club has allowed me to be involved with kids with special needs," Mrs. McTaggart said, "It gives them the opportunity to be involved."

The Best Buddies Club has several events each year. Mrs. McTaggart especially enjoyed the Bowling Party last February.

"The student involvement was really good," Mrs. McTaggart said, "February was the time when the buddies really became best friends."

This club is unique compared to all other clubs at Rockwall High School.

"This is the only club that is all about inclusion," Welch said, "You don't have to be anything but nice to come join us."

Although this club is extremely open, the commitment has its challenges.

"All of our buddies really enjoy our events," Welch said, "but there is an off chance that it's just a bad day and it becomes too overwhelming for a buddy."

Overcoming these challenges and getting to know each other helps both buddies involved.

"It has made me more patient, more aware, and more selfless," Welch said. "Overall I have been taught by my buddies how to be a better person because they're all doing much better than me."

Welch said Best Buddies Club is rewarding in more ways than one.

"The most rewarding experience was definitely last year watching our buddies walk across the stage at graduation," Welch said. "Hearing the roar of applause and the smiles on their faces almost brought tears to my eyes."

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