

# EMERSON STREET SCHOOL

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
2417 West 29<sup>th</sup> Ave. Denver, CO 80211  
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**When Cathy Smith contacted me about doing the activity of Bessie's Hope, I was extremely skeptical. The students in our school have all been expelled, are on probation and are considered the most difficult within the school district to manage behaviorally. We all maintain a belief in our students but to put the elderly in harm's way was a very risky proposition. We tried talking to our kids and of course they were interested but also wanted to know what they would get (credit, money) for it. We approached the orientation with Cathy and our kids with some fear and it proved to be well founded. When she talked to them, they were just barely civil. The girls were rude and the boys kept interrupting her but her experience with this population really came through. She was able to be firm and patient and the kids did get the message and understood the program.**

**The fateful day came for the visit to St. Elizabeth's and I confess that I was incredibly nervous. When we actually started walking up there I had kids cussing like wharf-workers and saying the most rude and inappropriate things walking at the front of the group. I kept wondering if I was going to have to send a lot of them back or exactly how to handle it. When we got there, it took a few minutes to divide them into two groups but then we set off toward our meeting. When we walked into the room with the residents, I was shocked at how several of our kids just walked up to tables and sat down. Before I could absorb it all, I saw two students sit with two residents and take a hold of their hands. They continued to hold their hands for a long time. It was as if the kids were transformed and they joined immediately into the singing, clapping and dancing with the residents.**

**When we were ready to leave the students said goodbye and were just as positive as they could be. I know they were upbeat and excited but it was genuine. Some of the most hard core kids, who treat us fairly rudely on a daily basis, were smiling and enthusiastic about what they had just done. One of our guys said "I knew I was coming here to make some old people feel good but I never expected how good it made me feel" ! As the kids walked off toward the city buses to go home, one of my co-teachers came up to me. We looked at each other and I said "how did it go?" She started crying and said it went just wonderfully. She has a dear friend who is a resident there and this was very emotional for her to witness. It made me cry to see her cry so we both stood there crying and then laughing alternatively. We agreed that it was an amazing experience and as we stood there we agreed that it would probably take us all weekend to believe how wonderfully it all went.**

**Kathie Jackson, LCSW  
Emerson Street School**

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