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The Herald

## Green Kids celebrates 25th anniversary

More than 1 million children reached

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An education program that has taught more than one million Canadian children about the environment is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

Green Kids marked the occasion with a gala event on June 16 at the Manitoba Theatre for Young People (MTYP).

Elmwood resident Theresa Thomson keeps returning to Green Kids each year because she loves their message. The MTYP assistant theatre school director first performed with Green Kids in 2001.

"It's been in my life ever since," Thomson said. "Any education that involves theatre speaks to me."

Thomson was a gala co-host. In preparing for the role she wanted to learn what the world was like when Green Kids was born.

"I googled 1991, and it was the year that literally changed the world," Thomson said. "1991 saw the public launch of the internet."

Children now have more access to information, Thomson said, and that gives them influence. The key is to get them the right information at a young age, properly explain it, and show them how they can make a difference.

"Green Kids teaches children about what is going on around them," she said. "Changes they can make that may not seem like a lot at the time but which end up making a big difference."

Meet children on their level and illustrate key points through the medium of theatre, with living creatures and nature as great starting points, Thomson said.

"For example, we tell audiences the importance of leaving dandelions in until other flowers bloom. They're breakfast for bees."

Green Kids also covers the three R's — reduce, reuse and recycle, with the most important being reduce, Thomson explained. Unplugging items when they are not in use, living local by buying locally made products and starting a garden, reducing water consumption by learning about the water cycle, all make a difference.

"Reduction eliminates problems before they start," Thomson said.

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TONY ZERUCHA

Theresa Thomson returns to Green Kids every year because she believes so strongly in the group's message.

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Thomson said her work with Green Kids has changed her life for the better too.

"I've taken up the flag, and believe in local and sustainable living. I am always looking at what I can get locally and at second-hand stores."

One way for children to learn is by going on a walking tour featuring Green Kids performers who present topics such as gardening, recycling and energy conservation, Thomson explained, while adding a soft approach works best.

"It's never judgmental, never harsh," Thomson said. "It's about balance and awareness."

"The win is when kids feel cool if they can do it. If we can inspire and spark those imaginations, it inspires conversations. Those kids will be in a great position to do something."

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