

## **Caritas Schools Dragons' Den Event**

Following the success of the "Dragons' Den" initiative last year, Caritas Diocese of Portsmouth and the Catholic Academies and Schools Office organised another event this year with the support of the Catenians. This year six of our Catholic schools took part, three primary and three secondary schools from as far afield as Jersey, Farnborough and Newbury.

Briefings were sent to Head Teachers in October and schools then started thinking about their projects, developing plans and finally preparing their presentations ahead of the big day. The Catenians again played a big part in the process, not only providing mentors to help schools with their planning but raising over £1100 towards the investment fund of £2500 available on the day.

The Dragons' Den event itself was held at St Bede's church, Basingstoke which is a great venue for this kind of event as it has good-sized hall with excellent audio/visual equipment and plenty of outdoor space for the breaks during the day.

Thursday 30 March dawned with warm sunshine and the schools arrived at St Bede's full of excitement if not a little nervous. The panel of big, friendly Dragons was led by Fr Mark Hogan (Episcopal Vicar for Evangelisation) who was joined by Catherine Hobbs (Director for Education), Kevin Gallagher (Director of Caritas Portsmouth) and Pat Feighery (President of the Catenians in Southampton). Gerry Penfold from Caritas was MC for the day and Bishop Philip sent a message of welcome and support to all involved.

The primary schools all presented in the morning, each followed by Q+A from the Dragons. All three schools had chosen projects to develop prayer gardens on their premises, each with different designs developed by the students. The presentations were all very good and the students handled the questions really well leaving the Dragons very impressed. As a result the panel made awards totalling £1250 to help get these projects started.

After a relaxing break in the sun, the three secondary schools presented their projects which were all focussed on helping the elderly. One school plans to hold tea parties with singing and music, the second school plans to work with those suffering from early stages of dementia to develop scrapbooks of precious memories and the third school plans to develop workshops to help the elderly better understand technology and better able to use computers, tablets and smart phones. Again the presentations were excellent and after questions the panel made awards to all three schools totalling £1080.

Beaulieu Secondary School from Jersey found a creative way of participating even though the cost of travel from the Channel Islands prevented them from making the journey. They sent in a video of their project in advance and asked

the Dragons for questions. They then videoed their presentation and their answers to the questions and all three videos were shown at the event. It was great to see that the school were not put off by a practical problem and found a way to take part using technology.

The next stage of the Dragons' Den initiative is to turn the plans into reality in the months ahead. Again the Catenians have kindly offered their help and guidance through the mentors. Later in the year, Caritas and the schools department will follow up with each school to see how the projects are progressing, how the money is being spent and what lessons have been learned.

All in all it was an inspiring day, seeing students motivated by their faith and the example of others to reach out and help those in need in their community. The links to the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy were highlighted by every school and it was clear that the spiritual and social benefits will greatly outweigh the modest costs of each project.

Congratulations to all who took part and grateful thanks to all who worked so hard to make this year's event a success. Particular thanks go to the panel of Dragons, to Roger Lillie for co-ordinating the involvement of the Catenians, to Mary-Anne Gaskin from the Catholic Academies and Schools office who managed the technology and photographs on the day and finally to Fr Chris Rutledge and his team at St Bede's (Liz Murphy, Jan Hughes and Liz Flitcroft) for hosting us and making us so welcome.

For more information, contact Gerry Penfold ([gerry.penfold@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:gerry.penfold@yahoo.co.uk))  
Caritas Portsmouth

### **Participating Schools**

St Joseph's Primary, Newbury  
St Finian's Primary, Thatcham  
St Bernadette's Primary, Farnborough  
Bishop Challoner Secondary, Basingstoke  
Salesian College, Farnborough  
Beaulieu Secondary, Jersey