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Earth Week takes center stage

Activities include special screening of 'The Lorax'

Marisa Petrich/Northwest Guardian

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Helping the environment can seem like an enormous task, but it turns out nothing (and no one) is too small to help.

That's what kids from Joint Base Lewis-McChord's Child, Youth and School Services programs learned last week at a special Earth Day screening of "The Lorax" at Carey Theater.

The show, which was part of JBLM's annual run of Earth Week events, was the first-ever attempt specifically aimed at getting kids involved.

"I've noticed that kids kind of get it, sometimes better than their parents," JBLM Sustainability Outreach Coordinator Miriam Villacian said.

In the past, the week has emphasized volunteerism and education, classically featuring opportunities to help out at the installation's community garden, clean up at Solo Point or learn how to cut costs in an environmental way outside of an exchange or commissary.

Those opportunities were still around this year, and even got some extra funding from JBLM's Qualified Recycling Program this time around. But this year two sponsored screenings (each attracted hundreds of kids and their families) of "The Lorax" were added to engage a younger audience.

As Villacian pointed out, getting adults to start changing their lifestyles usually involves finding the right motivation (e.g. changing your habits could lower your power bill). But when talking to kids, the biggest selling point is probably the most important one — taking care of the planet is simply the right thing to do.

It's a lesson the characters in the movie had to learn as well. Based on the classic children's book by Dr. Seuss, "The Lorax" is set in a world where everything is plastic, including the bottles that are the townspeople's main source of breathable air.

The film's hero, Ted Wiggins, sets out to find a real, live tree, a thing he's only ever heard of. When he's given the last truffula tree seed in existence, he's told to plant it where everyone can see. At first, Ted can't imagine what good that will do.

"I know it may seem small and insignificant, but it's not just about what it is," he's told by the mysterious Once-ler. "It's about what it can become."

It's an idea that organizers are hoping will stick with kids.

Berit Lewis and Yesenia Ajtun prepped their groups of 4 and 5-year-olds from North Fort Youth Center's Strong Beginnings program with a unit on recycling and by reading "The Lorax" before they came.

Kids like Chase Washington and Alexis Schauer were ready for the idea that helping the planet helps them, too. "The trees make our air," Chase said when asked what he learned from the movie.

Alexis went for some broader themes.

"(Planting trees) helps the earth," she said.



Scott Hansen/Northwest Guardian
Strong Beginnings members Alexis Patane, 5, left, and Alexis Schauer, 5, wait for a screening of "The Lorax" to begin April 20 at Carey Theater. Scott Hansen/Northwest Guardian

These are the concepts that Lewis and Ajtun were hoping to get across, and want the kids to keep thinking about for years to come. Why?

“They’re our future,” Lewis said.

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