Susan Ekstrom of the Eagle Eye Institute, left, talks to Sabiha Miahjee, center, and Olivier Cazimir as she leads kids at the Mystic Learning Center on a scavenger hunt about conservation, recycling and the environment during sessions with the Eagle Club in Somerville on Monday, March 4. For more photos see page B1.

WICKED LOCAL PHOTO BY ZARA TZANEV

Learning to conserve the world

By Corinne Segal
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In a small classroom on the edge of Somerville, a group of kids is trying to change the world.

They begin by describing it as dirty. One child calls the Mystic River full of trash and another points out a plastic bag caught in a tree yards away.

This may be surprising to most of Somerville, which in recent years has made efforts to "green" the city with farmer's markets and community gardens. But the Eagle Club, an awareness youth program of environmental nonprofit Eagle Eye Institute, knows that there is room for improvement. Every week, about a dozen children gather to learn about environmentalism and how to care for the planet.

The club, which began in September, has two sections that meet at the Mystic Learning Center and the Somerville Boys and Girls Club. It was organized through the Eagle Eye Institute, a nonprofit based in Somerville.

The members of the club have seen the effects of pollution firsthand. Many of them live in the Mystic River Housing Development, where residents do not access to recycling, according to Mystic Learning Center site coordinator Heather McCormack."Other people in Somerville get to have recycling bins, and we don't," one child said.

The development is located on the Mystic River, where activities such as fishing and swimming used to be popular but are no longer safe due to pollution, according to McCormack.

The members of the club, aged eight to 13, understand the effects of pollution, according to Bruce Bausk, a freshman at Tufts University and volunteer with the club.

"I think they're really, really good at grasping a lot of the concepts," he said. "They're capable of thinking critically, and they can really understand a lot of great benefits of recycling."

At a club meeting at the Mystic Learning Center last

SEE EAGLE CLUB, B3

EAGLE CLUB

From Page A1

Friday, the children were eager to name their favorite animals: giraffes, penguins, and dolphins. But they know, even at a young age, that human actions are killing these animals. If sea creatures eat trash, one child noted, "they'll die and be pushed to shore."

They also know that many people do not care, a hard lesson about human nature that they seem to understand already. Some people are too "lazy" to recycle, even though their actions can wipe out whole species, they said.

Pollution that occurs today will have future consequences, one child said.

"If you want your kids to have somewhere to live in, you have to keep the earth safe," she said.

When McCormack asked in response, "So what can we do about it?" one child shouted, "We'll keep trying!"

The club has learned how to spread the word, according to Eagle Eye Institute Program Manager Susan Ekstrom.

Their lessons on environmental awareness have taken them into the natural areas surrounding Somerville, such as the Mystic River, where they picked up trash, and the Middlesex Fells, where they took a field trip.

They drafted letters last month to the housing authority at the Mystic River projects to ask for recycling bins, Ekstrom said. The group will also participate in Community Cleanup Day in Somerville on April 27.

SOMERVILLE SQUARES

QUESTIONS? Contact Editor Dan Atkinson at somerville@wickedlocal.com or 617-629-3385.

ENERGY OF CONSERVATION

the Eagle Club meet at the Mystic Learning Center to talk about preserving the environment Here's what we saw at the club's Monday meeting at the Eagle Club.

Heather McCormick, Mystic Learning Center site coordinator, top, helps Karina Morales with her shroud as Nevaeh Schanke yelps animal sounds for the other kids to identify.

Susan Ekstrom of the Eagle Eye Institute, left, leads a scavenger hunt at the Mystic Learning Center.

Sara Greller of the Eagle Eye Institute, below left, teaches kids at the Mystic Learning Center about conservancy, recycling and the environment.

Below right, Sabiha Miahjee, right, and Daniela Mendoza watch Darien Rodriguez, center, try on a duck hat. He also had to imitate the sound of the animal since his name starts with the letter D.

WICKED LOCAL PHOTOS
BY ZARA TZANEV