

Brittany Webster Interview Glashan Public School ELL Volunteer



When you meet Brittany Webster for the first time you immediately wonder, “How young is she?” Her bubbly personality, youthful demeanour and love for children are a gift that translates into the ability to relate easily with children making her a favourite teacher and volunteer.

Brittany has always loved to work with children. Being the oldest in an after school program for many years, she developed her leadership skills with the younger children. “I have always been good with kids so it made sense to become a teacher.” Brittany graduated from the University of Windsor’s Faculty of Education program in May 2013, and has been volunteering and taking professional development workshops offered through the Ottawa Volunteers in Education program ever since. Brittany assists in the English Language Learning classroom with students who have recently arrived in Canada at Glashan Public School.

When asked to share a funny story about volunteering Brittany relates, “The kids always want to know how old you are. I always tell them to guess—they usually say 16, which I think is very funny.”

Nevertheless, Brittany is wise beyond her years and provides this advice for other volunteers, “You can get discouraged if you don’t see the results from your support, but what we need to keep in mind as a volunteer is that you are a small part of the larger picture that supports students in the community. You may not see the results of your individual impact but your help is part of the bigger impacts that add up to positive results. Over the course of several months you will see the difference in a student and know you’ve been part of it.” She continues, “When I run into students in the community, outside of the school environment, and they’re happy to see me, I feel the impact, that I have been part of helping them become who they are.”

Volunteers often say that volunteering provides meaning and purpose in their lives—they like knowing that they are making a difference. Brittany is passionate about volunteering and helping teachers. “I’m motivated to volunteer in schools because as a society, we have a lot of ideas about what education should be. We want each student to have an individualized education, to have their personal needs discovered and met, to have each lesson adapted to suit their learning style. This is what we ask of teachers, and they are good ideas, but it is like asking a contractor to build 20 houses at once all alone. Teachers physically cannot give every student the individual time and focus they need. They need our help. Students need our help. If we really care about education, then we need to not only come up with the ideas but be there in the classroom to help implement them.”

Volunteering is not just about giving—the cliché ‘you get more out of volunteering than you put in’ is very true but volunteering also provides volunteers with many opportunities to learn—not just teach. Brittany articulates this phenomenon perfectly, “As a teacher, it’s the students that teach you. You can read all you want about the theory of teaching but you don’t know how to teach until you watch someone learn.”

When asked, “What is your favourite flavour of ice cream?” Brittany is embarrassed and I have to encourage her to tell me because now I really want to know! She shyly replies, “Bubble Gum, because it is a nostalgic flavour that reminds me of my childhood. I suppose that’s why I love teaching and volunteering with children so much—I loved being a kid and I love children!”

“What do I like most about volunteering? Feeling involved in the community.”

The Ottawa Volunteers in Education program, a program of the Ottawa Network for Education, safely screens community volunteers for schools in Ottawa. For more information about volunteering in schools, please visit our website www.onfe-rope.ca/ovie

February 2014 | Written by Lee-Ann Scott, Director of Volunteer Programs