

February 18, 2015

## The Belle in Bells Corners Public School

*Written by Lee-Ann Scott Director, Volunteer Programs Ottawa Network for Education*

For over 17 years, Joyce Guilbeault has been volunteering at Bells Corners Public School in Nepean. She considers working with children her calling in life and feels very much at home in the school environment. From assisting children one-on-one, helping reorganize the library, assisting in the classroom and with a special art program—you name it Joyce is offering to help with a big smile and warm heart. When you consider the number of children Joyce has supported over the years, the number is in the 1000s!



*When I arrived in Mrs. Ramsay's kindergarten classroom to interview Joyce, the entire class was celebrating her birthday with a huge card, ice cream and cookies.*

Joyce turned to volunteering during a difficult period of her life. She needed to find something meaningful to give purpose to her days. Mustering up her courage, she walked into the school near her house and offered to volunteer. As with many of the Ottawa Volunteers in Education program matches, it is all about being at the right place at the right time and

Joyce's match was no exception. New librarian Penny Shurson was in the school office the day Joyce offered to help and Penny immediately engaged her to help reorganize the library. (The library is a model of organization and efficiency.) Joyce soon after offered her time to other teachers and now volunteers every day. "If I miss a day the teachers will call me at home to see if I'm okay. They treat me as if I was their Mom. I get lots of love from the students and the teachers."

Joyce likes to keep busy and thrives on routine. She manages an impressive daily schedule: Breakfast at Local Heroes—all staff knows her by name—volunteering at Bells Corners Public School daily, tending bar and calling bingo at Stillwater Creek Seniors Residence three times a week. When I asked incredulously, "So Joyce, Sunday is your day of rest?" she quickly responded, "Yes and no, my cousin and I crochet hats for CHEO cancer kids and preemies on Sundays! We label our hats, "Made with Love by the Cousin Club".” Joyce also makes boot cuffs and beach sandals as gifts for her teachers and many others in her community.



*Educator Debbie Millett successfully nominated Joyce for the City of Ottawa Civic Appreciation Award and parent Tracy Price successfully nominated Joyce for the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award. Bells Corners Public School gave Joyce her own OCDSB nametag!*

Joyce's love for children goes beyond the classroom. Over the years, she has become foster mother to several neighbourhood children who needed extra support and love. She gave Mark, a child with a cleft pallet and hair lip whom she was baby-sitting, his daily speech exercises so he did not need to see a speech therapist. For four summers, Joyce tutored children in the neighbourhood who needed extra help. "I help special children who need extra attention. All the families I have helped remember me as their second mother."

In the 1950's Joyce had to leave school to help support her large family. It was one of her life dreams to have a high school diploma. A few years ago, the staff at Bells Corners thanked Joyce for literally thousands of hours of volunteer work, by presenting her with her high school diploma organized through the Adult High School. Joyce was 66 years old when she got her high school diploma and her message to others is, "It's never too late!" Joyce is very proud of her diploma and finished the interview by saying, "You don't need a degree to get somewhere in life—you need love and caring and volunteering provides me with that."



*Thank you Joyce—you are definitely a local hero and the Belle in Bells Corners!*

*Through the Ottawa Volunteers in Education Program, more than 1,882 community members are volunteering over 232,224 hours in 195 local schools to support over 60,475 students annually. To volunteer or to learn more about these and other Ottawa Network for Education programs please visit [www.onfe-rope.ca](http://www.onfe-rope.ca)*