

Ottawa Volunteers in Education provides crucial one-to-one support in local schools

Floralove Katz was reading the Ottawa Citizen when an article caught her attention: it was about an Ottawa police officer who regularly reads to children at a local school as part of a program called OttawaReads. She was moved by the positive rapport he'd built with the kids and the constructive impact he was having on them. In this classroom setting, the uniformed officer, who might otherwise have been perceived as an intimidating figure in a different context, instead became an ongoing friend and trusted ally.

Around the same time last fall, Floralove, like many Canadians, was witnessing the Syrian refugee crisis unfold in the Middle East and Europe, and wondered if she could increase her current, extensive volunteer commitments also to include reading to children of new Canadians living in, and soon to arrive in, Ottawa. Katz contacted the Ottawa Network for Education to join the OttawaReads program; but, given the skills she'd developed during her lengthy career in the federal government, as an educator, and professional musician, she was instead placed with Ottawa Volunteers in Education (OVIE).

In January 2016, Floralove arrived at First Avenue Public School to meet six young boys that she would help with English Literacy Development (ELD). The boys' personalities, strengths, needs and life experiences were as different as were their original homelands: India, Kuwait, Syria and Ethiopia. So while Katz's early volunteer sessions were focused on letter identification, phonics, grammar and reading, Floralove soon adapted her lessons to include essential social skills, mutual respect, music and rhythms, story sharing and developing a deeper appreciation of one another's personal histories.



Floralove Katz (above) loves to share her passion and knowledge of music with students.

Floralove says she was surprised and thrilled with the joy that the boys and OVIE brought her. *“Without question, I learned a great deal from them, and benefitted as much as the children from my volunteer time.”*

Floralove also realized that like the police officer she had read about months earlier, her presence in the school and in the boys' lives was helping them to make positive connections to their new friends, and extended communities. The breadth of their

ability to articulate, and to share their thoughts, their understandings, interests, and those of their classmates, also grew palpably over time.

Ottawa Volunteers in Education is now recruiting volunteers for the 2016-17 school year to work in elementary classrooms in the OCDSB for a minimum of 1 to 3 hours per week. To learn how you can make a difference, by providing learning support to a young student, please contact Lee-Ann Scott by email at lscott@onfe-rope.ca or by phone at (613) 366-3085 x253.