



**Kathy O'Hara Fielding Drive  
Public School Community  
Volunteer**

It is a bitterly cold January Monday morning, just after sunrise. It's -27 degrees Celsius outside. The school is completely deserted, except for the front office admin staff. I am here to interview Kathy O'Hara, a community volunteer assisting at Fielding Drive Public School.

Kathy is a retired public servant who easily balances her many roles: she is mom to a teenager, she is an active volunteer, she works part time, and she organizes social events for her friends and family, along with being active in many sports. Since Kathy's career was in policy analysis and public administration, she envisioned her volunteer work would consist of sitting on boards or helping in an office environment. However, she has found that it is helping on the front lines with direct contact with those she supports that keeps her motivated.

New to her role as an Ottawa School Breakfast Program volunteer, on Monday and Wednesday mornings from September to June, Kathy rises before dawn to prepare breakfast snacks for students at Fielding Drive Public School. However, she is not new to volunteering! For the past six years from September to November on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, she has volunteered at the Snowsuit Fund, fitting families with snowsuits. In addition, for the past seven years during December, she volunteered daily at Toy Mountain. There is a theme to her volunteer work— helping underserved children.

Kathy heard about the Ottawa School Breakfast Program from Hot 89.9 (radio station) during an awareness campaign talking about the importance of nutrition and the connection to success at school. Being an early riser, the volunteer position with the Ottawa School Breakfast Program appealed to her because she could continue with her other volunteer work and activities the rest of the day.

Kathy starts early to prepare the food for the children before they arrive by bus at 7:45am. School starts at 8:00am at Fielding so it's a mad rush as the children arrive, their snowsuits swishing loudly. They give her a quick hello or a good morning, eat their breakfast and head off to start their day. Kathy says, on the days when the buses are cancelled, she gets precious time to have one-on-one conversations with the students who walk to school, as the majority of students take the bus. She appreciates the opportunity to build relationships with the children, to learn more about them—what they like, what they think is funny and to help start their day on a positive note.



With the help of her daughter Annie, Kathy organized a waffle breakfast as a special treat before the winter break. One of the students looked at her with big eyes and said, “I LOVE WAFFLES!” Waffles were very popular and the children keep asking her when she will be serving waffles again? Serving waffles requires borrowing toasters and finding additional volunteers to help (and being careful not to blow a fuse in the electrical system!).

Building relationships with the children and their families is also important in her role at the Snowsuit Fund. She enjoys talking with the families and likes to give them lots of choice and works hard to get the perfect fit, colour and pattern, so everyone is happy. According to the Snowsuit Fund staff, Kathy is the only volunteer who can carry 26 snowsuits at a time!

Kathy plans to expand her volunteer work and continue on the theme of helping newcomer families. Her advice to others considering volunteering, “Think outside the box. Get out of your comfort zone. Try something different and be adventurous. But be sure to volunteer for a charity experienced in managing volunteers—it makes all the difference.” Nevertheless, we all know, volunteers like Kathy make the difference!



*13,000 Ottawa children in 166 schools begin each school day with a nutritious meal provided by the Ottawa School Breakfast Program. Students, given nutritious breakfasts daily, make significant improvements in learning, school attendance, behaviour and self-esteem.*

*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--a donated value of over 4.6 million dollars!*

*To learn more about these and other Ottawa Network for Education programs please visit [www.onfe-rope.ca](http://www.onfe-rope.ca)*

*The Snowsuit Fund is an Ottawa-based charity, now in our 33rd year, that raises funds for the purchase and distribution of snowsuits to needy children, 15 years and under. In our 2013/2014 season, we distributed over 16,000 new snowsuits meeting the challenge of keeping underprivileged kids warm during our cold winters.*

*Visit <http://snowsuitfund.com/> for more information.*