

Volunteering in the Community: Wendy Swalwell - ELSA 5, Coquitlam Continuing Ed.

As an ELSA teacher who has taught levels 1 to 5 over the past 17 years, I couldn't be prouder of my ELSA 5 class. Rather than focusing on a single unit of volunteering, we have continually implemented the concept throughout the past two years. Fieldtrip and guest speaker ideas have often been exhausted for students moving up through the lower levels, so volunteering opens up a huge array of each. At this level and higher, they are totally capable. Everyone's confidence was boosted and their apprehension was hugely reduced by this experience.

Probably the most important component of successfully getting your class to volunteer is **your attitude** as their teacher. Just remember...

- you can't force them!
- combine volunteering with something fun
- don't overwhelm them by doing it too often
- do as much of it during class time as possible
- don't pressure them, but occasionally post a volunteer opportunity on the board and ask anyone interested to speak with you at break time or after class
- remind them that by learning the process, they will know how to get their children involved as they may need volunteering hours to graduate high school

The following are some of the ways we contributed:

Terry Fox Run: Who could be more motivational to your students than Terry Fox? We had the privilege of having his coach, Bob McGill, speak to our class. Although not many students volunteered for the run itself as it's on a Sunday, many were able to post flyers by asking business's permission or they helped at their children's schools.



(ELSA 5: Floyd, Daniel/ EASE: Cameron, Zohra)

Food Bank/Christmas Hampers: Our class volunteered to collect food for the Food Bank at Christmas time. They decorated boxes and presented them to each class in pairs. They had to tell them what was needed and explain vocabulary like "non-perishable goods". This gave each class a guest speaker and the students regularly monitored the donations. The class that brought in the most food won pizza as a prize. At the deadline, we collected everything and took it to the Share facility where we sorted it for the Christmas hampers.



(Vivian and Ali decorating) (Eko and Yelena sorting) (class sorting at Food Bank)

Tzu Chi Foundation: As one of our Taiwanese students was heavily involved with the Tzu Chi Foundation, he arranged for a leader to speak to our class. They are extremely organized and did a presentation on their volunteering which is recognized world-wide along with Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Although their foundation is based on Buddhist principals, their main focus is on volunteering and giving 100% back to the

community. It's difficult to find an opportunity for the entire class to volunteer, but they arranged for us to cook the soup and prepare the food for the Soup Kitchen in Port Coquitlam which is combined with the Food Bank. The students then served the food to 150 homeless/less fortunate people and were able to communicate with them; some of them were fascinated by this outreach.



(Tzu Chi Foundation in class)



(Making vegetable soup)



(Preparing the desserts)

Volunteer to teach something to another class: The lower levels are always struggling to get guest speakers, so why not have your class present something to them? This could be a skill, a field trip we'd been on, a tourist promotion of BC cities, etc. The students had time in class to make posters and prepare their presentations. In small groups they practiced presenting in class where they were given feedback and encouragement. This gave them more confidence to stand up in front of the other classes where they had to answer questions afterwards.



(Making posters)



(Teaching how to play Mahjong)



(Presenting a field trip)



(BC tourism presentations)



(How to play golf)



(Answering questions)

Furniture Pick-up/Distribution: We had three students in our afternoon young-adult course whose families needed a sofa + loveseat. We kept looking in the Craigslist "Free" section for local items and found 3 sets. As I have a pick-up truck, we were able to retrieve the furniture from the donors and deliver it to the students' houses. We told the donors a little about the recipients of their sofas, took a picture of it in their home and forwarded a "Thank you" and a link to pertinent information that would help them to relate to their donees, (<http://www.bhutanese-refugees.com/>). This completed the circle and encouraged the donors to continue their generosity while being more knowledgeable of who is in their community.



(Kids on new sofa)



(Bhutanese family recipients)



(Carrying sofa pillows)

Municipality Volunteering: We are fortunate that the City of Coquitlam has an awesome volunteering website. A coordinator came to our class to do the orientation and he gave us an application for a criminal record check. These checks were paid for by the City; we went to the RCMP station to ensure that everyone filled it out and submitted it correctly. The City website helps volunteers to sign up for activities, log their hours and gives reference letters. Here are some options:

Rec Centre Aquatics - (Swimming lessons, birthday parties, special events)

Special Events - (Canada Day, Grand Openings, Community Days)

Community Centres - (Sports, arts and crafts, dance, theatre, cooking, camps)

Inspiration Garden - (Mentorship programs, gardening workshops)

Others include: **Senior's facilities**(working as a cashier, host, or in the kitchen), **Snow Angels** (shoveling snow for elderly and people with disabilities), **Ice Programs** (skating and curling), **Environment** (Adopt a Trail, Bad Seed, Treefest), **Coaching sports** (soccer, lacrosse, baseball, hockey)

Many opportunities: There isn't any event that doesn't need volunteers. We have looked into Blood Donor Clinics, the Legion, charities, Craigslist Volunteer ads, the 211 referral line, municipal elections, the newspaper, www.govolunteer.ca , www.volunteerbc.bc.ca, and have also Googled it. As mentioned, it's not easy to find somewhere for an entire class to volunteer, but many organizations will give you a tour of their facility and give you a list of their needs. That way, your ELSA 5, 6, 7 students can take the initiative and get involved themselves. Good luck and have fun with it!