



Kim – Inspiration for a School Board Pilot Project

Transcript

Kim: Hi, my name is Kim. I work at Cardinal Leger School. I've been here for 12 or 13 years. I work with the JK class and I help the kids with their work. I help them get dressed. I help them with anything they need help with. I wash the tables. I photocopy. I make booklets.

Barbara: My name is Barbara and I am the parent of Kimmy, a special needs young lady. A wonderful young lady, I might add. As with all special needs parents, you have many worries and concerns about schooling, employment, and interpersonal relationships, which always are there, no matter what. Kim finished her formal education within the separate school board at Monsignor Fraser College. From there she went to George Brown (Community College) for a year, which was quite a wonderful experience for her.

However, finding meaningful employment was extremely difficult. She had many placements, was very successful, but it wasn't always meaningful. She did get a job, or placement, in Winners and I used to visit, just to see what it was like. Really, all she was doing was sorting coat hangers, and that sort of 'did me in.' No interpersonal relationships, no nothing!

So I came back to my school, Cardinal Leger, and I spoke to Mrs. Saunders, and asked would she like a helper? And she said "Oh yeah, of course!" She (Kim) started working a couple of half days a week because I thought the teachers might have needed a break at recess time because she does tend to talk rather a lot. Anyway, it sort of gradually over the years increased, and she would do five half days, and then the teacher actually asked me, "Could she come all day?" So, of course we were thrilled. I mean, that was 12 or 13 years ago and now she has a full-time job, which now she comes to five days a week. And she interprets this as: this is her job and the little pension she gets from the government, that is her salary. She is wonderful. That's really all I can say. And I'm really happy with the principals at Cardinal Leger. It's really been a godsend for me.

She's happy every morning to come to school, even if she's late sometimes, but that's not



her fault, that's her mother, because I drive her. She walks home from school most days or is able to take the bus, whichever. And, that's the story of my Kimmy.

Liz: Hi, I'm Liz and I'm principal of Cardinal Leger School with the Toronto Catholic District School Board. I'm honoured to be principal of this phenomenal school and I'm honoured that Kimmy is part of my school. I came here seven years ago when Kim was (helping) in grade one. After a few years, this teacher decided that she would retire. And I approached my kindergarten teachers and I said, "Would you be willing to have Kimmy work with you?" And they were a little hesitant at first, but then they can't wait to have her there now! And they miss her terribly (if she's not there). I asked one teacher, "What do you think about having Kim work with you?" and she said, "Oh man, she was away on a cruise and we missed her terribly!"

Kim does a lot of things with the kids. She helps them work. She helps them keep on task. She helps them get ready to go home. She does all the things the teacher doesn't have time for with every child, and Kim's able to help the teacher and spread out her workload. She is just amazing. She's happy. At Christmastime, she gets more presents than some of the teachers do. She is just so loved by the children, the staff, the parents. Everybody thinks Kim is phenomenal. And when she's not here, we really miss her and we really think she is an important part of our school.

A lot of other students should have an opportunity to work in a school like Kim does, because it is most positive for everyone, not just the special needs student but the school community at large. What's really important is that students do not see Kim as a special needs person. They see Kim as Kim, and she is part of our staff. They look up to her as part of the staff and they don't see her any differently than anyone else, which is great because that's a great role model that we want to set for them for the future. Eventually we decided we should give Kim her own mailbox because she was getting so many things coming to the school, little things, so Kim's got her own mailbox--so she really is part of our staff.

Kim: I'm happy to come to work because I like working with the JKs and the SKs and they bring life to me. They bring their joy. They're fun to be worked with, and thanks to the principal for putting me in there. That was the best thing that ever happened. And I just love the staff and the kids and everything. I like working with them and I like my job. And I'm just a happy girl!

(With thanks to Linda Alonzi and her colleagues at the Toronto Catholic District School Board)

