

DATES TO REMEMBER

- March 14 — March 17, March Break — Programs Cancelled
- Monday March 28 — Statutory Holiday, Pathways Closed
- Monday March 21 — New Round of Workshops Begins

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Volunteer Profile	1
From the Editors	2
Youth Engagement	2
Professional Development	3
Beat on the Street	4
Dear Pathways	5

Volunteer Profile: Lesia Saplywyj

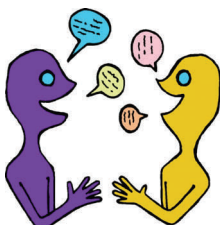
This month in our Volunteer Profile section we are happy to highlight one of our volunteers from the North Hamilton Community Health Centre Site, Lesia Saplywyj

Q – Why did you decide to volunteer at Pathways to education?

While walking along my own life's pathway, I was inspired to see if and how I could be of service to young people in some way. With that seed of intention planted in my mind I turned the page of a newspaper one day and there was the serendipitous call for volunteers for a new youth program. ;)

Q— What is your most memorable Pathways experience?

There are as many memorable experiences as there are memorable students. What in my view makes them memorable is that each student that I have the pleasure to partner with,

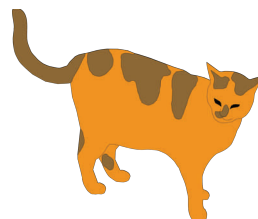


brings their unique personality, a new conversation, a new challenge and a new perspective which makes for a unique experience each week.

Q— What are your hobbies and interests outside the Pathways to Education program?

My interests are quite broad but one that has been a constant passion, one I am proud of, is co-creating positive change with people over the years.

Some of my philanthropic interests include helping children in need, adults in need, capture/fix, recover and find homes for feral cats. ;)



Being adventuresome, I have made it my goal throughout life to learn about and do many activities that spark my interest. In the realm of creative arts some things include: making stained glass art, performing arts, interior decorating, fashion... I like to read and research topics of interest. Some of the more physical activities that I enjoy in-



clude, fitness training, snorkeling, volleyball, bowling, power walking, yoga, walking trails, kayaking....

Q— Under what conditions do you feel most productive?

Generally, I feel most productive when I am exposed to a variety of people, physical environments, doing a variety of tasks with a degree of flexibility and freedom.

Q— How can Pathways to Education Volunteers best affect the conditions at the program to positively impact students?

In my humble opinion, Volunteers can show up consistently each week with a smile on their face, a clean slate, be present, be real, listen and give it all they have! ;)



From the Editors: Considering Conditions

Everything we do, whether here at Pathways to Education or elsewhere, is done under “conditions.” Everything about where we are, what we see, even the “feeling” of the space, is part of the “conditions;” and these conditions matter.

In this edition of the Volunteer Times we are talking all about conditions. The spaces we set, the way they look and feel, and what we can do to make sure the conditions are right for our students to achieve success.

On our cover we feature our longest serving volunteer Lesia

Saplywyj, who has been a Pathways to Education volunteer since the creation of Pathways to Education NHCHC in 2009.

In our Youth Engagement section we talk about getting involved in changing the conditions of the space to make sure they are serving our youth the best they can, and to get students involved in setting their own conditions for success.

In our professional development piece we get more in

depth about how and why conditions matter. In our Beat on the Street column, entitled “Pathways Cribs”, we ask our students about the spaces they have that are theirs and what makes them unique.

Lastly, we have our Dear Pathways question which addresses a real life scenario and how conditions affect outcomes.

We hope you enjoy this Conditions focused edition of the Volunteer Times.

Quotes to Remember

“You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.”

- Proverb

Youth Engagement: Take Ownership Over the Space

While helping students with their assigned homework and taking part in workshops are the main things making up Pathways to Education programs, there is much more that our volunteers can do with our participants during program hours.

As you know (and can read throughout this edition of the Volunteer Times) conditions and spaces are very important when working with youth. The spaces in which we find ourselves impact us in many ways: some obvious, some unconscious. Recognizing this, we here at Pathways to Education take the development of our program spaces seriously, and we want you to know that you, the volunteers, along with our students, can join us in this mission.

The next time you sit with a student who doesn’t

have something to do, keep in mind that you and the student can take ownership of the program space and make improvements and changes that can have a lasting impact on our participants.

Why not try one of these interesting and engaging activities next time you are at the program:

1. At our program sites we have staff and student made posters that display positive motivational messages. These contribute to the beautification of the space, display our participants’ creative works prominently, and contribute to building ownership of the space among our participants.

2. At each of our program sites we have chalk boards, white boards and bulletin boards. Have

an idea for a creative display? Want to add some interesting activities to the board? Want to improve on one of our bulletin boards?

- Ask the staff, get a student involved, and go ahead!
3. Are you an organizer? Work with a student to tidy up the space. Sharpen and organize pencils, stack the papers neatly, alphabetize or categorize the bookshelves. These activities get students engaged, teach valuable skills, and better equip the space for our participants and volunteers.

So, next time you are looking for something to suggest to get students involved, why not make an impact on the space, and on the day to day experiences of our Pathways to Education participants. Give it a try!



Want to Know

More

Broken Windows
Theory

“educators and researchers should be vigilant about factors that influence student perceptions of climate and safety. Fixing broken windows and attending to the physical appearance of a school cannot alone guarantee productive teaching and learning, but ignoring them likely greatly increases the chances of a troubling downward spiral.”

- Plank, Bradshaw, Young, 2009, American Journal of Education - quoted from Wikipedia

The Conditions for Success

A few years ago I was teaching a lesson on evolution to my senior level biology class. The lesson required students to take up different sides of a debate, and its success depended almost entirely on their participation. Unfortunately, I was teaching this particular lesson on one of the hottest days of the year, and the classroom was, to put it mildly, sweltering. Despite my incessant prodding, students couldn't be distracted from the heat, and opted to avoid participating in order to fan themselves with folded paper.

One student, seeing the frustration in my face, pointed out the obvious: “Sir, it's too hot to think.” It was true, of course, but it didn't change the fact that I still had a lesson to get through. Thankfully, the same student was a problem solver too: “maybe we could go outside in the breeze?”



Since I was willing to try anything, the class proceeded outside and found a shady tree to gather under. The free flowing air made the heat tolerable, and suddenly students found the energy to engage with the lesson. The debate picked up momentum and ended up being one of my better lessons.

Reflecting back on that situation, I now recognize just how important the environ-

ments in which we find ourselves are to our success. It's obvious to say that people will work better in certain conditions than in others. And yet, in my continued work with students I'm always amazed by how many people fail to pay attention to the conditions.

Recently I was working with a group of teachers who were interested in helping their students develop more creative ideas and become better problem solvers. At some point in our discussion an excellent point was raised: “We can't force students to have good ideas. We can't force students to do anything.”

Truer words may never be spoken. Though many of us wish we could get students to bend to our will (and we try to steer them with punishments and rewards) the truth is that they act of their own volition. In this way, students are kind of like seeds.

Anyone with any experience with plants knows that seeds can't be forced to sprout. The gardener instead focuses her efforts on making sure that the conditions for growth are just right: the seed is planted in nutrient-rich soil, provided water regularly, and is situated to get the right amount of sunlight. Once the conditions are set, the gardener trusts that the seed will grow.

We might reflect on our work with students in a similar manner. We can't force them to do homework. Instead, we

can concentrate our energy into ensuring the conditions are just right for doing homework – making sure the space is tidy, and quiet, and rich with resources. We can't force students to be creative, but we can create conditions that invite creativity – lots of colours, high ceilings, and making sure students feel safe to explore their ideas. While intuitively we know that spaces matter, it's worth investing a bit of effort to examine more closely how the spaces we create contribute to the work we're hoping to see.



The astute volunteer will recognize that spaces are more than physical as well. It's arguably more important to engineer emotionally safe spaces when working with students: Places that are free from the judgements of others, places that feel fun and engaging, places where originality is encouraged and embraced.

While it's been a few decades since the Broken Windows theory was released – the idea that the appearance of a place influences the type of behaviour that happens there – it is just as relevant now as ever. It calls us to question the spaces we create on a regular basis for our students, and further consider the spaces we create in our own lives. Physical, emotional, and mental – spaces matter.

Beat on the Street: Pathways Cribs!

The Beat on the Street is the place to go for information on youth culture. Each issue we will interview our students to give you insight into the world of youth. As this issue of the Volunteer Times is about "Conditions," Pathways Coach Amaris Rimay spoke with some of our students, asking them about the spaces in their homes that they call their own.

What makes your bedroom yours? Is it the colour of paint you chose? Is it the art work on the walls? Maybe it's the furniture in your room or the carpet on the floor? For me, it's the cat dish on my dresser...which really clearly indicates that the bedroom actually belongs to my cat. But anyway, we wanted to find out about what our students' spaces are like to get to know their personalities a little more. So we asked the Pathways students to describe their bedrooms for us. Is it a clean space? Is it messy? What colour are your walls? What's your favourite thing in your room? What makes your room yours?

The common theme for our student's rooms seems to be this one quote: "By this point I have an ordered chaos, I know where everything is, even if it looks messy."



Some of our students admitted to their rooms being a COMPLETE disaster with clothes everywhere! For some students, it was the mess in their room that made the students' bedrooms theirs.

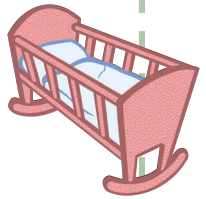
A few of our students have neat pieces of entertainment systems in their spaces. One student said that they have an old 80's TV with an antenna...practically an antique! Another student has a boom box in his room. For these students, these unique pieces in their bedrooms make it theirs.

Other students have books upon books in their room: a clear indication of their love for reading and literature. Other favourite things in students' bedrooms include floors, guinea pigs, laptops, and, well, their beds! (Which may be a favourite among people of all ages.) Sleep is precious to our students and they have no problem admitting it!

A student bravely shared that her bedroom is actually in her family's dining room where she has her bed and a bassinet for her son to sleep. Her room is decorated with family pictures! Some students

shared that their bedroom is only really a place to sleep but that their living room is more of "their" space because that is where they spend the most time.

This may not be surprising, but many of our students enjoy decorating their room with posters and pictures and awards that they have won.



One of our students had their bedroom themed with zebra print; from her comforter, her shoe holder, her lamp, her sheets and even her area rug. The themed room is what made this student's bedroom her own!

So, how about you? What makes your bedroom yours? What makes you, YOU? I think this is a great way to get to know our students at programming. Ask them what makes them who they are, or how do they express themselves. Is it the way they dress? Is it the colour or style of their hair? Is it what they do, whether that is skateboarding, reading, playing a sport or playing an instrument? And more importantly...ask them how will they use who they are to direct their futures.



Dear Pathways... Change the Conditions

Dear Pathways,

I've been with the program for a few years, and while most experiences at the program are fun and fulfilling, sometimes I find that despite my best efforts I am unable to motivate students to get involved. This is especially interesting and confusing when it happens with a student that I normally work well with and who usually has no trouble engaging. Any advice?

Sincerely,

Anne Gage-Menzstradegy

Dear Anne,

Thanks for writing in. I can understand how you might be confused and looking for suggestions given this scenario. When what normally works stops working, it can be frustrating. You tried and

true engagement strategies start failing, and you can't seem to make anything work. That can be a real challenge.

When this happens I always call to mind the YOUCAN principle *Place, Position, Presence*. YOUCAN is a Peace-building and conflict resolution program for youth, and this principle can be useful to remember when working with youth.

The next time this situation arises, think about the *Place*. Where are you and the student? What does the room look like? Who else is there? What is the noise level like? What is the temperature? What's on the walls. All of these factors can influence how a person is feeling and how they will interact with others. A calm, clean and quiet environment may make it easier to focus and pay attention. A change of setting may be all that is required to change the trajectory of your interactions.

You can also think about *Position*? Similar to space, this is

about what is in front of, behind and in between the participants. Windows or TVs should be behind participants. You should be sitting at the same level as the participant. Think about what is on the table between you. All of this can be impactful in interpersonal interactions.

Lastly, think about *Presence*. How are you presenting yourself? Your clothes, your attitude, demeanor and approach. What about these factors on the other students and volunteers around. These subtle factors can change the way others react and engage.

It is important to consider the conditions under which we and our participants are working. The conditions we find ourselves in impact our ability to interact and be productive. So, the next time things aren't going well, look around and ask yourself, how are the conditions impacting my interactions.



Call for Submissions

Want to contribute to the Volunteer Times? We are looking for questions for Dear Pathways..., ideas for topics you want to know about in the Beat on the Street, or an original article about a topic relevant to volunteering at Pathways to Education.

Email your suggestions to Pathways Program Coordinator Jack Bernacki at bernacki@nhchc.ca