

TEACHABLE MOMENTS ... AN INTERVIEW WITH KRISTIN BREWER, COORDINATOR, KERRY'S PLACE AUTISM SERVICES PRE-VOCATIONAL YOUTH CAMP *by Crystal Tancredi*

With the passing of each summer, Kristin Brewer moves a little closer to her long-cherished goal of becoming a teacher. This summer, that goal is finally within reach: In September, she will be attending Teacher's College at Nipissing University.

"Since I was very young, I have been inspired by my teachers, as I always wanted to become one. Specifically, one teacher I had in Grade 6, Ms. Ypma, who always brought lots of energy to her classes and had creative lesson plans that made the learning process fun."

As an undergraduate, she was looking to gain experience that would relate to becoming a teacher; an opportunity arose within Kerry's Place, an organization she had heard of through a friend.

Now in her fourth summer with Kerry's Place Pre-Vocational Summer Youth Camp, Kristin has been Camp Coordinator for the last two of those years.

She has readily applied her teaching philosophy to assignments there.

"I have always tried to emulate [Ms.

Ypma's] creativity when I work with young people, which I have done most of my life through babysitting, co-op, and employment opportunities."

The Camp Coordinator's responsibilities include camper registration, maintaining contact with parents or guardians, and the creation of the camp schedule, including organizing the outings and work placements.

"My expertise is in terms of organization and leadership. I also motivate the campers (not everyone likes to volunteer everyday) and support my counsellors. Our team works together to support our individuals on a daily basis ..."

"The main purpose of Youth Camp is to create social opportunities and improve social skills, as well as providing a variety of job experiences to help the campers create goals for the types of jobs they would like to have.

"The Kerry's Place philosophy is to enhance the quality of life of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder through innovative personalized supports, expertise,

collaboration and advocacy. We work together to show the campers vocational goals that would be available in the future, and to teach them the necessary skills. We also have a car wash fundraiser to promote awareness for Autism Spectrum Disorder and our camp."

Each week, the camp welcomes 10 campers, who work with five or six support staff. Three mornings a week, each staff member accompanies two campers to various work placements, where they volunteer for two hours.

This summer, campers are gaining work experience at: Bulk Barn, Zellers, SportMart, Rogers Video, Michael's Arts and Crafts, Town of Richmond Hill KinderCamp, Covernotes, Dollarama, Winners, Canadian Tire, Salvation Army, and Shoppers Drug Mart.

"We are always interested in creating new partnerships with businesses within the community who are willing to help support our programme!" Kristin enthuses.

One morning a week, campers attend a Job Skills workshop, which covers

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About Autism Ontario

Originally incorporated in 1973 as *The Ontario Society for Autistic Children*, we later became *Autism Society Ontario*, and, in 2006, *Autism Ontario*.

*Our Vision:
Acceptance and opportunities for all individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.*

*Our Mission:
To ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society.*

AUTISM ONTARIO –
YORK REGION CHAPTER
11181 YONGE STREET
SUITE 305
RICHMOND HILL, ONTARIO.

www.autismontario.com

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topics such as communication, interview and transferable skills, resumé writing and cover letters.

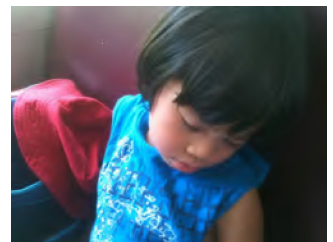
"Sometimes individuals that register for the camp are not motivated to go to a work placement, or to develop job skills. This can be challenging for the staff, as we need to find ways to motivate the campers and help them understand the long-term opportunities that this experience creates. I am happy and proud to say that many of our past and current campers are employed."

Afternoon outings are more recreationally-based. Activities include bowling, Lazer Quest, swimming, mini-golf, rock climbing and movies. "We also have a music workshop every Tuesday. Glenn Marais leads the group through song writing and singing. We currently have 6 original songs created by our campers!" Friday consists of all-day outings to destinations such as the beach, Wonderland, the Science Centre, the ROM, African Lion Safari, the Zoo, and the CN Tower.

Over the past four years, Kristin has many favourite experiences – it's

difficult to choose just one; however, some extra special lessons do come to mind.

"I love that I have met so many amazing individuals that have inspired me in my personal career path. I love seeing the campers enjoy themselves, laugh together and create friendships that last outside of camp. I love seeing the campers try new things and overcome fears and problems that they originally felt defeated by." ♥



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aokyorknews@gmail.com

Editor, Photo Editor, Design: Crystal Tancredi.

Contributors: Liz Cohen. Mike Freeman. Paul Kalmykow. Crystal Tancredi.

Photo Contributors: Kristin Brewer. Jennifer C. Nicole F. Jamie H.

Emma Jackson. Robyn K. Myles K. Chelsea-Anne S.

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