

Never give up on their dreams

For Kim Rego, mentoring with YouthNet was just the start of a much more personal commitment to students at Victor Scott School.



Kim Rego, a YouthNet volunteer since 2006, sees her role as being not just a mentor but also an advocate for the teachers and students she meets at Victor Scott Primary School. In addition to weekly lunch hours she spends with her mentees, she tries her best to open doors, offering opportunities for them and supporting them whenever possible. Over the years that has ranged from taking them to shows, getting them involved in sports programs, or summer camps outside of school, helping them with scholarships and even arranging them to spend time with her own teenage family on weekends.

“I try to offer the kids as much support as possible,” she says. “When I hear them speak of dreams, see them excel at something or even struggle with a subject I try to research programs or opportunities they could participate in.”

“For example, one of my mentees is an excellent math student and joined the Center for Talented Youth and has since been offered scholarships from them to participate in the summer program abroad. Another was getting behind in reading so I encouraged him and helped facilitate teachers and parents to approach the Reading Clinic. Luckily he has been supported by the Clinic for the past two years and his reading has improved greatly.”

“I sometimes have them during the weekend or after school and they enjoy new opportunities. Some live in challenging locations where gangs, crime and drugs are a very real part of their world. Many students and staff have been affected by the rise in gang related violence — they have lost family members or know someone who has. I feel honoured and blessed to be able to provide a different view of the world on occasion.”

She admits: “I realize the extent of my involvement is not appealing to all but it’s a personal choice. A mentor can just enjoy a lunch hour getting to know these students; be an advocate, encouraging and supporting their personal or academic life; or incorporate them into your own life; the level of immersion is varied and personal.”

“I started off five years ago with a lunch hour commitment but so enjoyed the connection I soon found myself engrossed in the life of Victor Scott and its students. I am lucky to have a flexible job so I can spend more time with the students. When I come to Victor Scott I get totally absorbed in assisting teachers and students like nothing else in my life matters. When I am with them I try to remain totally engaged.”

Kim says she joined YouthNet because “I wanted to get involved in the community. I enjoy children and am passionate about education. I like to empower these students reminding them that we all have a lot more choices than we think we do. I was intimidated at first listening

to Clare Mello [YouthNet director] share statistics. I felt overwhelmed and incapable but after the first few sessions, realized we can all make a difference by just being a good listener or offering them assistance with math. At this tender young age it takes so little to make a positive impact in their lives.”

Over the years Kim has become involved with her mentees’ whole class, making gingerbread houses, taking them to the Matilda Smith home for the elderly or to learn about the stock market at Lines Overseas Management. “The teachers at Victor Scott do an amazing job,” she adds. “I am inspired by their commitment to the whole student’s experience at school and very grateful for their support.”

She says it is important for mentors to listen carefully and provide encouragement and guidance. “I learned early on that I didn’t want to be known as a provider of material goods. Instead I wanted to nurture my relationship as a supporter of these students.”

Her first mentee was “an exceptionally bright young man”, who she started with in P3 and encouraged him to apply to a couple of private middle schools. He was successful and received a scholarship to Somersfield Academy from investment company Orbis. He and other Middle Year students at Somersfield earn community service credits by weekly tutoring Victor Scott students in reading and math after school. “It has proved to be a wonderful experience for both parties,” she says.

Kim also mentors two siblings, Kani-Xah and brother Kani, aged 10 and 11. “It is not always easy, as I once was reminded by [fellow mentor] Anthony Peets to never give up on these kids. These two children are a big part of our family, sharing celebrations and meals. My eldest takes them fishing, we make cookies and support them in activities outside the school like baseball, running races and volunteering at the Salvation Army. Our family really enjoys these children and we feel very lucky to be part of their lives.”

On the playground at Victor Scott it is clear to see the impact she has made on the children. They greet her with a big hug and wide smiles and respond readily to quiet but firm reminders, such as looking people in the eye when they are talking to them.

Some prospective mentors may worry that the often disparate socio-economic differences between their backgrounds and those of mentees may make it difficult to establish a rapport but like most mentors Kim says she hasn’t found that to be the case.

“I really think the children welcome different perspectives,” she says. “It is also enlightening for people with my background to really appreciate what some of these children face in their day-to-day lives. I would have never had this amazing opportunity had I not joined YouthNet.”