



Volunteer Spotlight – August 2017

Christine Jackson

Playcare Academy, a service in Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services' (SFBFS) Youth Education program, is often a very busy place. Playcare is free onsite childcare offered to parents who are enrolled in SFBFS' Adult Education or Parent Education classes. Moms and dads attending classes may drop off their young children in Playcare. Staff, volunteers and fellow parents help supervise the fun, educational and lively classroom environment. Children range in age from toddler to preschool age. Daily activities vary from circle time, outside play, art and science activities, snack time and more.

The volunteers in Playcare are experienced, compassionate, patient and dedicated. One of these wonderful volunteers is Christine Jackson. Christine has served as a volunteer in Playcare since March 2016. Before this, Christine lived abroad with her family for about 20 years, raising her kids in Jakarta and Singapore. In 2007, they returned to the U.S., first living in Florida, where Christine worked at a community center's after-school program alongside a team of devoted volunteers. Later, Christine and her family moved to Sacramento where they had family connections. When Christine attended volunteer orientation at SFBFS, she knew that volunteering with children in Playcare would be the place for her.

Because most of the parents participate in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at SFBFS, the children in Playcare are not English speakers. Sometimes children arrive to Playcare feeling scared or unsure. "It's wonderful that the kids can be in Playcare," comments Christine. "I am glad I can be here to help the kids feel comfortable during the transition." This summer, just like last summer, Christine volunteered for the entire eight-week summer session, allowing her to observe the kids' English language progress first-hand. "It's amazing," she says. "After just a few weeks, you see kids who spoke no English transition to speaking and understanding by the end of the session."

In addition to helping the kids' language skills, Christine loves making connections with the kids and helping them settle in to the new classroom experience. "This summer we had a little girl who was having a really tough time parting with mom in the morning," said Christine. "Finally, one day when she arrived she came straight over to me, gave me a hug then waved goodbye to her mom. It was a really sweet moment."

SFBFS' Playcare Coordinator, Teri Weesner, says that Christine is a dream volunteer. "She is engaged with the children and their play," says Teri. "She follows their lead and teaches along the way. She initiates activities that capture the children's curiosity and provide them opportunities to create and learn." Reflecting upon why she enjoys volunteering, Christine says, "Often times these families have struggled to arrive to the U.S. If I were in the same situation, I would also want to have a trusted person to care for my kids while I was in class." SFBFS is grateful for the dedication of trusted volunteers such as Christine to support the families in Youth Education.