

EDUCATION ASSISTANTS: A career that makes a difference

Changing lives, moment by moment

By Pamela Charach



Marilyn never dreamed she would go back to school at the age of 40, but it was the best decision she ever made!

An unforgettable moment

Kerry Ogilvy is an Education Assistant and a Stenberg grad who feels lucky to work with children with exceptionalities. As she puts it, “It’s a privilege to work with these children. You can and do make a difference in the life of a child. I love it.”

There is a moment that stands out in her memory. On her first long-term placement, Kerry supported a young girl with

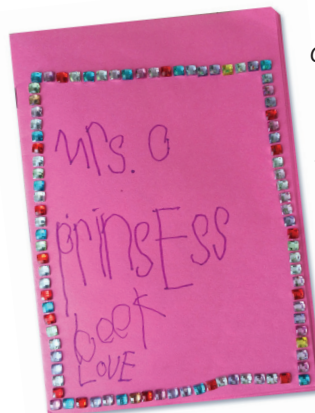
selective mutism. “She doesn’t speak at school, not a word.”

Kerry started spending her lunch break with this student where they would have conversations without words. “Kids can communicate without speaking – I knew when she was happy, sad, if she enjoyed what we were talking about or if she didn’t.”

Kerry fondly recalls, “She came one Wednesday and she was beaming! She had brand new Disney Princess lunch containers and wanted me to name the princesses. She pointed at the first one and I excitedly said, ‘Yes, that’s Ariel! Don’t you love Ariel?’” Kerry’s little friend nodded and smiled and pointed at the next princess. Kerry happily affirmed, “Yes, that’s Belle. Isn’t Beauty and the Beast a great movie?” It went on like this. But when Kerry’s student pointed to the last princess, Kerry drew a blank. She promised to go home and ask her daughter the name of that princess but the young girl continued to point at the lunch container, awaiting an answer.

Kerry apologized profusely, unable to recall the name of the princess. When Kerry shares this story, it’s clear how much it means to her. She pauses, recalling the next life changing moment, “In this tiny voice, my student whispered, ‘Rapunzel’. That was the first word she ever spoke at school. She trusted me enough to say that word, her first word at school, and it was Rapunzel.”

Today, one of Kerry’s most prized possessions is Mrs. O’s Princess Book. It’s a paper booklet handmade for her by



One of Kerry’s most prized possessions, the book her student made for her.

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– Natalie Taylor-Lane

this student, who never wanted Mrs. O to forget princess names again. The little girl stayed inside every day at lunch for a week to make the booklet. Kerry remembers, “She cut out all the Disney princesses, glued them in, and printed their names. This was her handiwork. Ariel. Belle. Tiana. And most important of all, Rapunzel. I’ll never forget her name again.”

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– Kerry Ogilvy

A career of life changing moments

Education Assistants (EAs) make a difference. They work with students who require additional support with special needs and behaviours, ELL (English Language Learning) and academics. Typically, EAs work in a classroom setting and are one-on-one with a child. However, EAs are not limited to the classroom. Graduates of Stenberg's Education Assistant program are prepared for employment in public schools, private schools, after-school programs, post secondary institutions, child care centres, home schooling environments, community or youth drop-in centres, home-based therapy programs, residential settings, parks and recreation programs and other services where educational programming is offered. Additionally, many of our grads support adults with disabilities.

Natalie Taylor-Lane, an EA for over 20 years and a Stenberg EA instructor, explains, "It's wonderful to see a student understand concepts for the first time, initiate conversations, overcome challenges, or make friends, and know you had some small (or large) part in it. Yet, the most rewarding part is what the students give me."

She continues, "Working with students with exceptionalities has been exciting, challenging, joyous, frustrating, and full of laughter. The students I've had the pleasure to support have taught me about life and myself. They've shown me what hard work looks like, what it is to care, and what overcoming challenges really means. They accept people for who they are, enjoy the small things and embrace the moment. They show me how to do more than I thought, how to advocate for others, and how to see beyond the behaviour and appreciate the person. My job is rewarding not only because I get to help people achieve their potential, but because they help me achieve mine!"

Maricar's moment

Maricar immigrated to Canada from the Philippines with big dreams and in search of a better life. However, it can be hard to realize your dreams in a new country when the language and lifestyle is different from everything you know. In search of a job and an opportunity to improve her English, Maricar worked at a fast food restaurant where she made good friends, adjusted to life in Canada and met her future husband with whom she has three beautiful children.

For 16 years, Maricar worked tirelessly to provide for her family but dreamed of doing more. "I was scared to try some-



Maricar came to Canada to follow her dreams... and she did.

thing different. It felt like there were too many barriers, too many things holding me back. I felt stuck and thought I wasn't good enough to do anything better." Of course, this was not the case.

While volunteering at her children's preschool, Maricar's path became clear the moment she met children with special needs. It was then that she knew a quality education would help her realize her dreams.

"It's the smile you get when you do something the child likes," she says. "Or when they hold your hand because it's hard for them to communicate. These little things give me a wonderful feeling."

She enrolled in Stenberg's Education Assistant program and the rest is history. "I went back to school and had a wonderful experience. It was amazing. Especially for a mom like me because the schedule worked. I graduated and found a job right away. As an Education Assistant I'm making a difference with my family and the community." Giving credit where credit is due, Maricar exclaims, "Who changed my life? I changed my life."

Calling in the moment

Parminder Bering is another Stenberg grad who found happiness as an Education Assistant. With 21 years of teaching experience in India, Parminder knew the EA program would be her fastest route into the Canadian education system.

"I saw an advertisement on the sky train and made a call that moment. I was looking at the ad while I booked an appointment and now I love my job. It comes from inside – you jump in and do the work. You get to know the children and every day you learn something new. I'm very happy."

Moments that make us different

Like Parminder, Kamaljit Kambo is a highly educated woman from India. With a Bachelor of Education and a PhD in Punjabi Language and Literature, Kamaljit is a lifelong learner who came to Canada destined for happiness.

"I was searching for an appropriate course so that I could choose the profession of my dreams," she explains. When she found Stenberg College, she knew her dreams could become a reality.

"Every moment, every life experience makes us different. This career has changed my life."

– Kamaljit Kambo



Kamaljit found a career she loves in Canada.

Although she had never worked with special needs students before, Kamaljit's experiences set her up for success. "I've taught diverse groups of students and classes of 30-35 students. I tried my best to attend to every student personally, but it wasn't always possible. It's my hobby and interest to get to know people and learn about their behaviours and problems. It gives me satisfaction to help. I can now work one-on-one and might be able to change a student's life."

As Kamaljit reflects, she explains, "Every moment, every life experience makes us different. This career has changed my life."

A moment of pride

Marilyn Patterson is a Stenberg EA grad who found her purpose in this profession. "At 40 years old, I decided to go after my dreams. This isn't just a job, it's something I want to do. I want to go to work every day, see these kids, work with them, and make a difference. I'm making a difference."

When Marilyn stood on the stage as the Fall 2017 Valedictorian, she shared a story about a kindergarten boy on the autism spectrum. She explained the challenges she faced when she started working with him, as he had a hard time at school without his mother. As time went on and Marilyn continued working with her student, the boy cried less and less, and took strides in his ability to enjoy school.

"I've found ways to communicate with him. I work with pictures to show him that he has power through communication. I've even gotten Mom to use pictures at home. Every morning, she shows him a photo of me to encourage him to come to school. She's amazed at the progress we've made in just one month."

As Marilyn spoke the final words of her Valedictorian speech she took a deep breath and smiled, relishing the moment. She did it. She went back to school. She has a career she loves. She changed her life.

Taking advantage of the moment, no matter where you are in life

The career of an Education Assistant is an ideal first and last career that can be enjoyed by a spectrum of age groups. Before enrolling in Stenberg's EA program, Kody Lacroix worked at a pet store earning little more than minimum wage. When she came across the EA program, she was excited, "I knew it would be something different every day. I'd be able to challenge myself and even if I'm with a challenging student, that's what makes

it worth it.” Kody was hired out of her practicum and remarks, “I have a career, I have a life and the opportunity to go somewhere with this. I can’t think of a more fulfilling career.”

Lyne Boehm also found success as an EA but under different circumstances than Kody. When she was young, she planned to pursue a career as an EA but as it often does, life got in the way. She was inspired by her sister who had a disability... Lyne wanted to provide children with the support her sister never had. She reflects, “When I retired, I decided to finish what I started. My friends thought I was crazy. They said, ‘You’re retiring and you’re busier than before.’ But this is my dream and I’m excited.”

Moments of change

Being an EA is more than supporting children with special needs. EAs pave the way toward inclusion and help create an environment where people who are “different” aren’t just tolerated but are treated as equals.

Stenberg EA instructor, Lovey Sidhu, passionately explains, “We create

a ripple effect that changes our world. We model compassion, empathy and embrace differences as diversity. We create a classroom that values differences and teaches inclusion, not tolerance. We build a community where students with and without special needs work together, support each other, and demonstrate how to be kind to one another.”

As Lovey fondly explains, “The difference we make extends far beyond one child. Our work makes a difference in the world we live in.”

Moments of success

Dr. Kenneth Cole is a Registered Psychologist at the Provincial Outreach Pro-

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– Lovey Sidhu



Stenberg College Education Assistant instructor, Lovey Sidhu, is passionate about the work she does.

gram for Autism and Related Disorders (POPARD) and a District Psychologist in the Surrey school district. He teaches a two-week POPARD course to Stenberg EA students where he instructs them to focus on the good.

He explains, “We must stop looking for

things that are wrong, for things that we need to fix. We must look for what’s right. We must water the flowers.” This message embodies an EA’s purpose, as they are in the classroom to support students who need a little extra help. They are there to see them succeed.

Moments

Regardless of the career path you choose, your life will be filled with moments. Time will pass and, in its wake, will be memories. Memories of a first word at school. Memories of coming to Canada and making your dreams a reality. Memories of progress. These are moments worth living for. These are moments that forever stay ingrained in the mind because they are full of substance, full of meaning. What type of moments will you fill your life with and what kind of memories will you create for yourself?

To learn more about Stenberg College’s Education Assistant program, visit stenbergcollege.com/program/education-assistant.

Make a difference as an EDUCATION ASSISTANT

- Become an Education Assistant in just 40 weeks including an 8 week practicum
- Earn up to \$27.44/hour
- In-class & combined delivery (online) options available
- Training & Certification from the Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders (POPARD)

“Before Stenberg I was working in a pet store earning minimum wage ... I got a job right out of practicum and I can’t think of a more fulfilling career.”

– **Kody Lacroix**, Stenberg grad

All attendees will receive **\$250 Bursary** (Discount) for next SEA/SEAD start on Aug. 27, 2018



EDUCATION ASSISTANT INFORMATION SESSIONS

**Thursday
MAY 24
7 – 9pm**

7th Floor 13450 102nd Ave,
Surrey (Central City Tower)
SURREY

**Tuesday
MAY 29
7 – 9pm**

Abbotsford Senior
Secondary School – Room 102B,
33355 Bevan Avenue
ABBOTSFORD V2S 0E7

**Wednesday
MAY 30
7 – 9pm**

Coquitlam Public Library –
The Nancy Bennett Room,
575 Poirier St.
COQUITLAM V3J 6A9

**Thursday
MAY 31
7 – 9pm**

Burnaby South Secondary
School –
The Multipurpose Room,
5455 Rumble St.
BURNABY V5J 2B7

**Wednesday
JUNE 6
11 am – 1 pm**

7th Floor 13450 102nd Ave,
Surrey (Central City Tower)
SURREY

Register online at stenbergcollege.com/events or by tel: 604-634-0384