

Resolved to be Involved (2014)



VOLUNTEER BURNABY

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT STARTS HERE

www.volunteerburnaby.ca

by Kelina Kwan

The New Year is a time for resolutions and renewal, and also a great time to seek new opportunities and get involved with your community. Having featured a number of non-profits and charities last year, I am starting this year's series with a very unique organization – a non-profits organization that teaches youth about businesses.

A non-profit about for-profit businesses? This is exactly what Junior Achievement is all about. Junior Achievement (JA) is the world's largest not-profit organization dedicated to educating young people about business. With over 120 charters world wide, JA brings a global view of business to local communities. Since 1955 Junior Achievement of British Columbia (JABC) has partnered with educators, donors and volunteers to bring a real world experience into the classroom. Their programs give students in grades 5 to 12 the confidence and skills they need to become the next generation of business and community leaders.

Cheryl Borgmann, JABC's Regional Manager, is a firm believer of JA. "I have seen time and again students graduating but they were not prepared, especially when it comes to basic life skills. It always struck me as odd that students would graduate with algebra... but they couldn't balance a cheque book, didn't know how to use a credit card properly, or didn't know anything about savings" Borgmann told me when we spoke recently. This is what draws Borgmann to JA, "we are covering an area that the schools are not" When Borgmann talks to people about JABC, she constantly runs into people who exclaim that they wish they had something like this when they were at school. They feel that the JA programs would have better prepared them for the real world.

JABC's programs cover "Business Basics" for grades 5 to 8, and programs such as "Dollars and Sense" for grades 7 to 8; "Economics for Success" and "Investment Strategies" for grades 9 and 10; and their flagship program "Company Program" for grades 11 and 12. Programs are all conducted by volunteers who go into schools and spend time with the kids. JA's volunteers come from all walks of life – most work in the financial and business sector or are entrepreneurs, but there are also a large number of university students who volunteer their time to share what they are learning. The program is so valued that many JA alumni also come back to volunteer. "We've got fantastic people who work with us. We are really, really lucky" said Borgmann.

For elementary level programs, volunteers are encouraged to visit the JABC website (www.jabc.org)

and see which program and age group they'd like to work with. Volunteers then fill out an application online, and JA will follow up with a phone interview and a reference check. A 90-minute training session will follow. JA is very flexible in where and when training takes place. "We are so grateful for their time that we really try to cater to the volunteers when planning training" Borgmann said. Volunteers are then paired up to go into schools for a one-time 3 to 4-hour session of learning, games and conversations.

Their flagship "Company Program" for grades 11 and 12 is more involved. Students are guided by a volunteer mentor with business experience to form a company, develop a product or service, and go out to sell it. It is a 4 to 5-month process that is as close to real life as you can imagine. Students who are interested to sit on the executive board have to submit a cover letter and their resumes, and be interviewed by a panel, after which the executive board will be chosen. Other students are assigned positions such as VP of Human Resources and VP of Marketing. The program not only teaches business and entrepreneurial skills, but also life skills from how to prepare for an interview, to how to work with others and how to cope with rejection.

Last year, JA delivered 1,100 programs in BC, and they always have schools and teachers asking for programs. So Borgmann is always looking for volunteers. Resolve to get involved in 2014 - teach kids how to manage their own finances by helping JA deliver a program. If you are interested in volunteering, visit the JA website at www.jabc.org and go to the "Volunteer" page. You will find a list of programs and accompanying videos for each program. You can also call 604.688.3887 for more information.

For more information on how to get involved in your community, please contact Volunteer Burnaby through their website at www.volunteerburnaby.ca

Junior Achievement Volunteer of the Month – Sonia Clair

Sonia chose to volunteer with JABC because she believes in the value of a post-secondary education. The experience with JABC has given her a taste on what it would be like to facilitate a class full of students. Sonia believes that it is essential that today's generation have financial literacy programs as part of their basic K-12 education. "Today's students need to have the skills and habits to make the best financial choices throughout their lives, from managing a realistic financial budget to making wise career decisions." With her accounting and finance background, Sonia felt volunteering with JABC was a perfect fit and a great way to give back to her community. Sonia enjoys listening to the JA students throughout the activities. She felt that the discussions reflect on how well some students are prepared for the "real world," and how many of them are unaware of the challenges that they may face right after high school.

Sonia is a graduate of SFU's Beedie School of Business and loves travelling, fitness, yoga, rollerblading the seawall, ice skating and stand-up comedy. She currently works as a Tax Analyst with TD Waterhouse in Vancouver and continues to volunteer with JABC.