The VIP orientation took place on September 20th, 2007; this marked the official start to a year of change. VIPs received a warm welcome to their kind generosity which they bring to Western, it does not go un-noticed!

Taking place in USC Council Chambers, volunteers were officially welcomed by Dr. Gail Hutchinson, Director of SDS. Then the group was introduced to the array of services and programs offered by SDS, each representative offering knowledge about their specific area. These included:

Ms. Heather Johanson (Learning Skills Services)
Ms. Erika Service-Low (Writing Support Centre)
Ms. Denise Dunleavy (Services for Students with Disabilities)
Ms. Gillian Webster (General Student Development Services)
Ms. Rachel Crowe (International Student Services)

Throughout the orientation, VIPs learned what they were a part of and the bigger scheme of the services SDS has to offer. As well, they were acknowledged for the difference they make in the Western and London community.

Following the orientation, many VIPs attended the first social of the year at The Wave. The “newly renovated” Wave helped us kick off a great start to the year. We had delicious food, followed by some social time and later an ice breaker. The door prizes included: movie passes from Western Film, a gift certificate from “Garlic’s of London” restaurant, as well as certificates for the Western Book Store.

With almost all of the volunteers attending this event, volunteers got an opportunity to mingle and share laughs with fellow VIPs. Everyone enjoyed the relaxing atmosphere, and had a great time making new friends!

The VIP orientation definitely started off the year in a great way!
- Megan Cook
On Thursday 22, 2007 the VIPs travelled to London’s Grand Theatre to see “Anne of Green Gables: the musical.” Full of humor, love, friendship, and tragedy, Anne of Green Gables touches the heart and mind. This musical is based on a best-selling novel and international phenomenon. The protagonist, Anne Shirley, is a spunky, red-headed orphan who comes to P.E.I. hoping to find a happy home. Everyone in the audience enjoyed Anne Shirley’s passion for melodrama and romance that brought both laughter and tears. The play was able to demonstrate the value of imagination, the importance of respect, and the possibilities of love. Most importantly, the show had a fantastic cast and orchestra that engaged everyone with their songs and joyful nature. Overall, the Grand Theatre was a great and out-of-the-ordinary night. Thank-you to everyone who was able to make it to the show and the Grand Theatre for welcoming the VIP Program!!!

By Madhu Gupta

The play itself was amazing. It was my first time seeing Anne of Green Gables on stage, but for me, what was more enriching about the experience was that it made me feel like I was part of the London Community.

-Ka Yee Wu

The different sets were so elaborate and well done. I was very impressed and thought it was better than Stratford!

-Kaitlynn Hodgins
VIP Holiday Party
By Sameera Chaudhary

Our Holiday Party on Wednesday, November 28th was very festive and well-attended. We transformed UCC 200 with bright decorations and music. We had tons of snacks, including hot chocolate, popcorn, pretzels, soda and candy canes. We also had an opportunity to relax and unwind as we watched a holiday movie. Not to mention we had games going on too. Our first game of the evening was holiday Bingo. We also got creative and had a gingerbread bread decorating contest. VIPs did a fantastic job! Prizes were handed out to everyone and they enjoyed it immensely. Thank you to everyone who came, it was a fun-filled evening!

By Gillian Webster
VIP Supervisor & Information Services Manager

An appreciation dinner was held for all VIP Information Services Assistants on Wednesday November 21st. This was a chance for students to get together and talk about their volunteer experience so far, including what they have learned and enjoyed while working at SDS’ front desk.

Students were also thanked for their dedicated weekly time commitment and outstanding work. Some of the special events and projects which volunteers participated in so far this term have been working during career fairs, dressing up and handing out candy during the pirate themed career open house, helping create informational pamphlets and booklets used by counsellors and front desk staff, creating a power point slideshow which will be played in the lobby, taking pictures for the VIP orientation event, and providing excellent customer service to all clients and staff using our services.

Great work everyone; I look forward to continuing to work with all of you!

Beatriz Baumgartner
Heather McMahon
Jas Khosa
Sandy Van
Nina Khant
Gillian Webster

Helping Hands Winter 2007
Through the Eyes of a Seasoned VIP:

Elizabeth Vang

Elizabeth Vang has participated with the VIP Program for five terms. She is currently in her last year of her undergrad in Health Sciences and at the present time she is a Group Leader. One can imagine that as a veteran ECP leader, Elizabeth has demonstrated patience, creativity and understanding of international students needs. I had a chance to sit down and talk to her about her VIP experience and her sense of accomplishment.

What do you remember from your first session with your participants?
In my first circle experience, my students were all from Asia and they were all my parents’ age. Some were grad students, and others were spouses of grad students. It was great because everyone knew everyone. I found it easy to relate to them.

What are some of the activities you engage in as an English Conversation Leader?
I like to give participants a few random words, and have them come up with a story using the words. I also like basic spontaneous conversation.

What do you think are some of the benefits of being an English Conversation Leader?
In this position you develop better organization and planning skills. Teaching the exercise to participants requires hard work and preparation. You have to teach yourself and practice the skill before you can teach others. I have learned to listen more carefully, especially when people speak with an accent. This experience is a great starting point for future teachers, and for anyone that wants to teach English overseas.

As graduation day approaches, how will the experiences with the VIP Program help you in your future career?
I am looking to work in an office-administration related environment, where my planning skills, organizational skills, as well as exposure to people of other cultures will be put to use. I hope to teach English overseas one day, and if it does not happen I hope to continue volunteering as an English Conversation Leader for another organization.

VIP Supervisor Spotlight: Rebecca Denby

My experience with the VIP Program has been wonderful. It is a pleasure to have our volunteer in the office. She has helped us tremendously. I think that the VIP program contributes significantly to our program because we always welcome help in our busy office. Our program benefits volunteers because it is a positive environment where they can gain important skills for the employment market.

Our volunteer Administrative Assistant’s responsibilities are different each week. Typically a small project gets completed each week.
We've had a great first semester and enjoyed meeting all of you. You are the reason that VIP has hosted numerous fun-filled events such as:

- Orientation
- Our end-of-semester Holiday Party
- A trip to the Grand Theatre
- Movie night

We would like to take this time to thank you for all your effort and your contributions to the Western community; it does not go unnoticed. Thank you to all the Supervisors whose hard work and dedication has strengthened the VIP Program. As well, thank you to you, all the volunteers, because without you the program would not be what it is today. We look forward to seeing you in the New Year. Happy Holidays!!!

-Megan Cook, Sameera Chaudhary, Madhu Gupta

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### My VIP Experience

**“My VIP experience with Services for Students with Disabilities has been a very rewarding experience. The office work conducted gave me a different perspective and my one-on-one interaction with students has really opened my mind. I enjoyed working with each one of them, be it helping with online quizzes, reading, or doing simple book corrections. All of it has helped me become a better person and gain new experiences. I am very thankful for receiving this position”**

--Zahira Surani, SSD Office Assistant

**“I have been very pleased with my experience as an Activity Coordinator so far. It has meant a lot to me to be able to assist in some small way with helping people from different countries feel at home. I have felt very much appreciated as various students have thanked me for things I did. I have also learned about Canadian culture by participating in the planning of these events. My needs and expectations have been met as my supervisors have been very supportive, helpful and understanding.”**

--Vernice Philip, ISS Activity Coordinator

**“It has been a pleasure to attend the meetings and discussions of the International Connections Newsletter. All the members are very cooperative and friendly. To date I have done about 10 illustrations, drawings as well as photoshop pictures. I feel that the illustrations contribute to making the newsletter a better way for international students to seek useful and relevant information. I value this experience and I wish I could have had more time to contribute to this position”**

--Boling Li, ISS Newsletter Illustrator

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### Sweet Treats: Candy Cane Wands

1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips
2 teaspoons shortening
16 candy canes or peppermint sticks
Crushed hard peppermint candies, mini chocolate chips, , colored glitter sugars or coarse sugar crystals.

1. Line jelly roll pan, with waxed paper. In a saucepan, heat 1/2 cup chocolate chips and the shortening over low heat, stirring until melted.
2. Tip saucepan so chocolate runs to one side. Dip 1 candy cane at a time into chocolate, coating about half of each cane. Place on waxed paper in pan. Let stand about 2 minutes or until chocolate is partially dry.
3. Roll chocolate-dipped ends in candies. Place on waxed paper in pan. Let stand about 10 minutes or until chocolate is dry.
3 Ways to Celebrate the Holidays in London

1. Go Skating!
   Free Tim Hortons Skating at the Storybook Gardens- 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m.
   December 27 2007 - January 3 2008
   December 28 2007 - January 4 2008
   You can also skate downtown at the outdoor rinks at Victoria Park and the Covent Garden Market.

2. Go See an Old Fashioned Christmas!
   Victorian Christmas at Eldon House
   November 27- January 1st, 2008
   Enjoy the sights and sounds of an old-fashioned Christmas. This is a chance to savour a more traditional holiday season. For information call 519-661-0333 or visit www.museumlondon.ca

3. Celebrate London Rockin’ New Year’s Eve
   Victoria Park
   December 31st, 2007
   Schedule of events: Ice skating (weather permitting): 6p.m.-8p.m., hot chocolate and entertainment: 8p.m.-9p.m., free concert (various artist): 9p.m., midnight Happy New Year! Fireworks.