The VIP Summer Social was held on July 13th at the Forest Glen Golf Centre. Following the mini-golfing, we gathered at the nearby “Bubble King” restaurant for bubble tea to end off the day. I knew that this event would make the perfect opportunity to meet other VIPs. One of my English Conversation program participants joined us for the event. There was something about the mini-golf that sparked conversation and I believe it had something to do with the fact that we were not very good at golf. Afterwards we made our way to the bubble tea restaurant to try some of their best bubble tea flavors. Although we were inexperienced golfers and the weather was so hot, we all had a good time.

-Desmond Ho, English Conversation Leader, Summer 2006

Much like bowling, mini-golf is a game that lends itself to team building. Once introductions were made and teams created, the friendly banter between turns helped the summer VIPs bond. Starting with what we all had in common, volunteering, conversation branched out to topics such as cell phones and funny university memories. It’s debatable whether this experience made us into better golfers. What I know for certain is that we shared our experiences and perhaps laid the foundation for a few new friendships in the process.

-Nick Gnanasabesan, ISS Administrative Assistant
Looking Forward To Another Great Year Of Volunteering

Edited By: Nick Gnanasabesan
ISS Administrative Assistant

Welcome From VIP Student Coordinators

Summer is almost over and life at Western is about to begin. I’m looking forward to coming back to London in September (maybe not the classes), but to everything else, especially the VIP Program. One thing I’ve learnt is that volunteers offer an amazing gift to the community, time. All of this time combined with compassion and creativity allow programs like VIP to flourish. With that, I’d like to welcome everyone to the program and I hope that together we can make the most of the upcoming year. But, until then, take care and enjoy the rest of the summer.

-Madhur Gupta

Volunteering is a great experience for everyone involved, and what better way to volunteer than as a VIP? This program provides us with many opportunities, not only to make friends and meet new people, but also to help others around us. I’m really excited to meet everyone and get started, as I’m sure you are too. Until then, have a great summer, catch that sun while it lasts, and I will see you in September!

-Omar Moharram

I’d like to extend a big welcome to all VIPs. Last year, I was a Student Partnership Member, and I’m really excited to be back with SDS once again. Volunteering as a VIP not only gives you the opportunity to put your strengths to use, it also provides a great learning experience and a chance to meet some amazing people. With everyone’s participation and help, there is no doubt we’ll have an incredible time working together, all while helping the Western community. Enjoy the rest of your summer and I’ll see you in September!

-Saeeda

Hey VIPs! Whether you’ve been working to make some cash for September or have been lucky enough to spend your time otherwise, summer has flown by. I spent last year working as a Student Partnership Member and am excited to work with VIPs again this year. I’m sure returning VIPs will agree with me when I say that volunteering for the SDS not only provides a great experience, but it also allows you to meet and get to know other Western students that you may not have got to know otherwise. Enjoy the rest of summer and I look forward to seeing you all in September!

-Natalie Hetmanczuk

Did You Know?

The VIP program has recruited 99 volunteers for the academic year 06-07 who will be dedicating their time by volunteering in different areas of SDS and contributing their helping spirit to the Western Community. This summer, 20 students participated in the VIP Program.
Service Learning and Culture Sharing Experience In Honduras

Edited By: Nick Gnanasabesan
ISS Administrative Assistant

Varana Mullen, BSc Nursing ‘07 and SDS’ Peer Guide, spent her summer participating in an overseas Service Learning opportunity in Honduras. She discovered this unique opportunity to offer her helping spirit during an on-campus volunteer fair.

Staying with a host family, instead of at a hotel, enriched her culture-sharing experience. Thanks to her strong grasp of the Spanish language, she was able gain an insight into their lives, values, and dreams. She also cherished the opportunity to answer their questions about Canadian culture.

During the day, Varana worked in a health clinic located in the rural town of El Guante. Her main project involved a census of local villages to find out their population, health and living conditions. Varana also helped translate for different service organizations conducting development projects in the area.

It was one of these experiences which she will never forget. During one of her surveys, she’d visited a family which lived in a very run-down house. An American service organization wanted to help so they took money out of their own pocket and paid for the replacement of the house’s walls and roof. “I’ve visited the family many times with the health promotor I work with, and have never seen them smile as they do now.”

When reflecting on her experience, the theme of awareness stood out. She had immersed herself in a culture and way of life which contrasted with her own. It had surprised her how they could be so similar in some ways, and yet so different in others. Nevertheless, her co-workers and host family made sure she felt welcomed and came away with warm memories of her time spent with them.

What are You Doing this Summer VIPs?

Kaitlynn Hodgins, English Conversation Leader (circles):
At the end of July I’m going out to New Brunswick and going to tour the provinces out there and come back through Quebec so hopefully we’ll have a chance to practice our French.

Francesca Victoria Mancuso, English Conversation Leader (circle):
I’m working on two big summer projects. The first is a summer sports program for local teens who may not have the means to join traditional leagues which are often very expensive. My second project is a teddy-bear drive for children living in war-torn countries.

Lindsay Anderson, International Student Activity Coordinator:
I’ve been backpacking all over Australia since the beginning of May. So far some of the highlights include going to a crocodile farm, skydiving over Byron Bay, clubbing in Sydney, and going to more ‘footy’ [soccer] matches than I can count.
This past summer, June and Yongliang participated in Jen Reile’s English Conversation Circle. They were kind enough to offer their views on the ECP program and what they got out of the experience.

1. What is the benefit of the English Conversation Program for you?

June: There are several benefits for me, and the top one is that I could keep talking in English about various topics.

Yongliang: As a visiting professor, I didn’t think my English was good enough to express different kinds of topics fluently. My accent is so strong that sometimes my English is not understandable. My pronunciation has improved and my fluency is better than it was when I first arrived in Canada.

Jen: I value the opportunity to meet people from diverse cultures. Since there is no strict structure for the sessions. I’m free to creatively tailor my lessons to the needs of the group.

2. What is your best experience so far with your sessions?

June: Answering from the multiple choice questions. Jen gave us a piece of paper which contained one real world scenario with three possible outcomes. We shared our answers with the group, allowing us to learn a bit about each other’s character. That activity was the best one I have ever experienced in a session.

Yongliang: I enjoy discussing interesting topics with my group leader (Jen) and the other participants, making the sessions go by fast.

Jen: The case study activity helped the participants shed their inhibitions and speak freely about topics and issues.

THANK YOU AND CONGRATULATIONS!

The VIP program would like to recognize volunteers who contributed their time and effort during the summer term. Thank you from SDS!

Caitlin Russell  Vanessa Omana  Nora Gillespie
Hua Tang  Jen Reile  Kelly Anna Heffernan
Madeeha Qasmi  Desmond Ho  Seema Rathod
Rahul Sharma  Jessica Saso  Rubin Ma
Betty Zou  Michelle Weir  Herman Xu
Terri Vowles  Lindsay Lee  Yuan Xue
Alia Virjee  Sherry Ann Dreger  

Helping Hands Summer 2006