Our New Home

The Student Development Centre has moved to the new Western Student Services building, attached to the University Community Centre along Western Road. On the second floor of this building, you will find Indigenous Services, International and Exchange Student Centre and the Volunteers In Progress offices. A new addition to our Student Services is the David S. Chu International Centre which can hold events of up to 100 people. Presentations and workshops offered through the Writing Support Centre and Learning Skills will be on the third floor. On the fourth floor, you can find the rest of the SDC team including: Adaptive Computing Technology Centre, Learning Skills Services, Psychological Services, Services for Student with Disabilities, and the Writing Support Centre.

By: Julie Burke
VIP Administrative Assistant
Julie: What kind of services do you offer students?
Georgia: We offer a wide variety of services for students with disabilities. The main service we offer is academic accommodation, such as arranging to write exams in a different room. In addition to this, we offer assistive technology such as the programs to transfer written text into braille or audio format. To aid with day-to-day classes, we assist with campus transportation and provide bursaries for tutors and/or note takers. We also offer assessments to determine whether or not students have learning disabilities or attention deficit disorders.

Julie: What kind of challenges do your students face?
Georgia: One of the greatest challenges for students with disabilities, as is the case for most students, is the transition from high school to university. Many students need to develop new learning strategies and support networks as they adjust to the new academic demands.

For those students with vision impairment, they need to account for the extra time and organization involved with using assistive technologies to convert the text into audio or braille format. Many students do not take a second thought of how easily they can open up a textbook and begin learning the information.

Julie: In what ways do you feel Services for Student with Disabilities makes a difference?
Georgia: SSD is a service that is open to receiving students, with staff who are ready and willing to help. When students first arrive to a large university campus like Western, it can be overwhelming. We offer support that is tailored to each student’s needs and help to link them to the wider support system within Student Development Centre such as Learning Skills Services and the Writing Support Centre. In this way, we help students achieve their academic potential.

Julie: What kind of volunteer opportunities do you have for students?
Georgia: Our main VIP position is SSD Office Assistant. This exposes students to working in an office environment and the utmost importance of confidentiality. Students may also help out as readers, scanning written material, and walking students to the library.

What VIP, Zaahir Surani, had to say about volunteering for SSD:
Zaahir: I have volunteered with SSD now for 2 years and I have learned that patience is a virtue. Helping students with disabilities is a challenging task at times but it is the most rewarding task one could ever imagine. In my 2nd year of university, I assisted a blind student with school assignments, readings, etc: and even though it just took 2 or 3 hours a week to provide help, the only thanks I needed was a smile. So, I have learnt that even a few hours of service can provide a heart warming feeling which gives you the motivation to do so much more.
So you want to Volunteer Abroad...

Julie: When I asked VIP Tyler Kaster what advice he had for students looking to volunteer abroad, he provided a comprehensive review on how to get started and make your experience one you will remember. As someone who has volunteered internationally with Free the Children, I can attest to the fact that this will give you a great head start for planning a volunteering adventure for next summer.

Tyler: First of all, I would congratulate students on making the decision to volunteer overseas for it is an extremely rewarding experience. However, now the planning process becomes more challenging.

The first step is to evaluate your own interests. Ask yourself where your interests and strengths are. If you have experience tutoring or teaching, then you may want to look into overseas education programs. If you enjoy working with children, then you may want to consider volunteering at an orphanage. Whatever you do, make sure you are volunteering because YOU want to. Do not do it to simply enhance your resume or because of parental pressure as it will just make you unhappy.

The next step is research. Find out what organizations there are in your area of interest. Come up with a list of all the potential groups that accept volunteers, then start doing some background checks on them. A quick Google search will turn up a lot of information. Talk to people who have been previously involved with the organization.

After doing background checks, contact the organizations that you are still interested in. See what programs each group offers and if they fit with your situation. Different organizations have different requirements and expected level of commitment. Make sure you know what you are getting into before you commit.

The last step after finding your program is to get ready! International volunteering is a big commitment that requires a lot of work, so start early. Vaccinations, visas and passports all take time to acquire. However, in the end, it will be an unforgettable experience.

Tyler Kaster, 4th year Biomedical Physics Learning Skills Assistant

Profiling Volunteer Experience with Two Organizations

Unite for Sight with Tyler Kaster
For more information visit http://www.uniteforsight.org/

Western’s Alternative Spring Break with Heather Bailey
For more information visit http://www.asb.uwo.ca/

Provided by www.asb.uwo.ca/
Julie: Imagine for a moment what your day would be like if you no longer had the ability to see. Simple tasks, such as preparing a meal or getting to the bus stop, would become extremely difficult.

For remote, underserviced areas throughout the world, blindness is a real threat for many people. Without regular eye care, sun protection, and frequent eye damage caused by sticks when gathering firewood, what could be a simple fix at the time becomes a complex problem that may result in blindness.

Unite for Sight, an American based charity, has provided eye care services to more than 800,000 people and sponsored over 20,000 sight-restoring surgeries worldwide. This September Tyler Kaster will be travelling to rural villages in Ghana to assist doctors in eye surgery and nurses in health education programs. Here is a brief excerpt of an interview I had with Tyler:

Julie: How did you decide upon Unite for Sight as the organization you would partner with?

Tyler: I have an uncle who is an optometrist, who has shared with me how debilitating poor eyesight can be. When I came across Unite for Sight’s program it seemed like a great opportunity to have a concrete impact on people’s lives. 80% of blindness is preventable or curable. One way Unite for Sight approaches this dilemma, is by providing sight restoring cataract surgery with a donation of $50. Also, with Unite for Sight, I will be getting direct patient contact while working with nurses, doctors and optometrists. Moreover, 100% of donations go directly to patient care. This means that every dollar I raise along with the 500 pairs of eyeglasses I am bringing along will go directly towards improving patients’ quality of life. With all these positives, Unite for Sight seemed like a natural fit for me.

Julie: What lessons or new perspectives from your experience in Ghana do you hope to bring back to Western?

Tyler: This experience will make me a much more globally minded citizen. As a university student, I am sheltered from the crushing poverty experienced by people living in the world’s poorest regions. It is important to realize that the decisions we make have a global impact. Through awareness of the world around us, we can make better decisions to help those in need. Furthermore, this experience will be a continuation of what I hope to be a lifelong service commitment to others. My experience with the VIP program and upcoming Ghana trip are both a part of this commitment. This commitment comes from the belief that when people do not have the resources to help themselves, it is time for those who do to step in.
Volunteering with Western’s ASB program: Heather Bailey

Julie: Last February Learning Skills Counsellor, Heather Bailey, volunteered to be a co-leader of a team of students that traveled to Costa Rica as part of the Alternative Spring Break program at Western. The Alternative Spring Break program, offered through Centre for New Students and Residence Life, provides a week-long, hands-on service learning experience for students. Its goals include the development of mutually-beneficial partnerships between Western and community organizations in London and across the globe.

Julie: What kind of activities did you perform while in Costa Rica?
Heather: We worked with International Service Learning (ISL) as our community partners. During our time there we helped to deliver free health care to the community in two different clinics: one urban and one rural. We performed various duties including patient interviews/triage, basic medical examinations, prescription dispensing and vision testing. The experience also included some fun time where we had a chance to explore the culture – we spent a day in a beautiful beach town, and another day zip-lining in the rainforest.

Julie: What lessons or new perspectives from your experience in Costa Rica do you hope to carry with you?
Heather: I think there are two major lessons that were reinforced by this trip. The first would be the importance of communication, especially in the delivery of health care. We were able to communicate with our patients through a translator, but even then some things were confused. A lot of the good that we did was simply being compassionate listeners. Even amongst the team, it was crucial to have open, honest and effective communication in order to work well with each other and to deliver the best service possible.

The other important thing that I will always remember is the sense of community that I felt while we were there. The people seemed to consistently help each other, regardless of what they themselves had. It reminded me that community can be felt anywhere, that it is only as strong as the contributions of its members, and that it allows us a means of reaching out and helping one another. I had a wonderful, enlightening time! I encourage anyone who is interested in serving others to check out this opportunity.
Introducing this year’s VIP Leadership Team

Doria
VIP Student Coordinator

Kitty
VIP Student Coordinator

Joanna
VIP Social and Community Events Coordinator

Hi and welcome 2009/2010 VIP’s! I am Doria Keung and I am starting my second year at Western, working on an Honors Specialization in Economics. This is my first year in the VIP program and I hope that we can all work together to make this year a productive, memorable and valuable learning experience for all of us. I joined the VIP program this year as a way to get involved with Western, my new community. After getting through first year, I decided it’s time to give back. I hope that all of you share my enthusiasm and are as motivated as I am to achieve new heights in VIP as well as outside of the program.

Now, to end off, I would like to leave you with some words of inspiration, “success is only 20% talent and 80% hard work”. I am really looking forward to working hard with all the new VIP’s this year to achieve success!

Valeryia
VIP Student Coordinator

Hello all new and returning volunteers! Summer may be coming to a close, but a new and exciting school year is fast approaching. This is my first year with VIP, but it is definitely not my first year volunteering. The reason I was so eager to get involved with this particular program is that it is about connecting people with opportunities. I know how difficult it can be to find a venue to lend your volunteering skills and passion.

I hope that this year we can hold the annual VIP events and do the previous volunteers proud. I would like for all of us to take initiative and think of new ways our volunteers can get involved. Doing something that forces you to step out of your comfort zone can be the most disconcerting, yet the most rewarding experience of your life (as a one-time contemporary dancer, I give you my word). Remember, you can only fail at something if you do not attempt it.

Joanna
VIP Social and Community Events Coordinator

Hey everyone! My name is Joanna and I am extremely excited to be your 2009-2010 VIP Social and Community Events Coordinator! When I first heard about VIP, all I knew was that it was a program based around the idea of students helping students. With that alone – I was sold. I truly believe that with every Western experience, “you get out of it, what you put into it”. Having said this, I want to make it my personal mission this year to get as many people involved as possible! I have many fun ideas for events, socials, activities, outings.. the list goes on! I cannot wait to get this year started and meet all of you! Ladies and gentleman: let the fun begin!

See you at the VIP Orientation on September 16th, 2009!