In mid-June, the VIPs volunteers lent a hand to the London Children’s Museum at the 13th annual Kid’s Expo Festival in Victoria Park. Our volunteers, alongside Children’s Museum staff, enjoyed beautiful weather out in the park making arts and crafts with kids. Visitors to our booth were shown how to make dinosaur fossils using eco-friendly play-dough made from coffee grounds. After shaping their dinosaurs with the cut out stencils, they used pasta to model the bones of the dinosaurs. At the end of the day there was a great turnout and all the kids leaving our booth looked quite happy with their free take-home dinosaur creations.

Here are some comments from volunteers who attended:

“It was a lot of fun and very interactive. I had a great time!”
Joanne Lac, ECP leader

“I believe our community involvement event was such a great way for the VIPs and the volunteers from the Children’s museum to get together and help out the community.”
Carmen Lac, ECP Leader

“This event was very organized and creative. It was also a great way to meet and spend time with a few of the people involved with the VIP program.”
Shannon Fox, IESC Student Activity Coordinator
ECP Coordinator, Ashley Kewayosh shares her view of how ECP connects the international community at Western with VIPs.

The English Conversation Program (ECP) allows VIPs to further develop their leadership and cross-cultural communication skills in addition to learning from their participants about their various cultural backgrounds and personal qualities. The main objective of the program is to give participants the opportunity to practice their spoken English skills. It is the ECP Leader’s responsibility to provide meaningful and enjoyable opportunities for discussion.

A number of ECP Leaders are interested in pursuing careers and opportunities in Medicine and Teaching. For the future teachers, ECP can help them to discover their teaching style and how to assess the needs and interests of their group members. For the aspiring health care workers, ECP encourages them to expand on their interpersonal skills. This past year our Leaders have explored the opportunities of teaching English in Korea, Taiwan and ESL Programs across Canada.

Every ECP Leader has their own personality and way of relating to their circle or group. Each year we welcome a mixture of very talented ECP Leaders to the program. Together they share a strong enthusiasm for contributing to their community. Many ECP leaders return every term as they continue to incorporate the program into their school year routine. It is a great feeling for them to know they have helped someone to adjust to life in Canada and at Western.

I hope you enjoy the program too!

By: Ashley Kewayosh
By: Jamil Manji

This summer we were happy to welcome Carmen and Joanne Lac to the English Conversation Program. The ECP often draws volunteers who are professionally motivated with sights set on entering a career in education. Carmen, a 4th year music student, is planning to enter teachers college next year and Joanne, a 2nd year physiology student, is hoping to start a career in health care. However, being first-generation Canadians who learned English as a second language, they were duly motivated. They jumped at the chance to provide new international students at UWO with the chance to practice spoken English in a fun, encouraging environment.

We had the chance to sit down with Carmen and Joanne and talk to them about their experiences in the program and this is what they had to say:

In your opinion, what do you feel is unique and desirable about the ECP volunteer experience?
“Besides being a great stepping-stone into almost any career, the program allows you the opportunity to work with people of various ages and ethnic backgrounds. You are challenged in new ways and you truly learn the value of your own skills when put in this kind of situation.”

What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome?
“The great thing about most ECP sessions is that the students are very eager to participate and so robust conversations tend to carry on without much input on the leaders behalf. The most crucial obstacle to overcome is to get everyone well acquainted and comfortable with each other from the beginning. This can be challenging at first, but once a good rapport has been established the students will benefit enormously from the sessions.”

What was your most rewarding moment?
“Seeing the smiles and the joy on the faces of participants who have overcome their frustrations with spoken English through ECP sessions is one of the most rewarding experiences. As an ECP leader you get to see the progress your participants are making firsthand from session to session and it is fulfilling to know that you are really helping them adjust to life in Canada.”

Do you have any advice to future ECP leaders?
“Breaking the ice between participants is crucial during the first few sessions as it will encourage friendships to be built outside of the classroom. This creates an environment where everyone feels comfortable and confident enough to contribute to discussions and ask questions. This has been the best volunteer experience we’ve had the pleasure to take part in and we look forward to carrying on with the program!”
Congratulations on becoming a part of the VIP Program for the upcoming academic year! My name is Joyce Lai and I am honoured to be one of your Student Coordinators. I will be returning to Western for my 2nd year of studies in Medical Sciences this coming September. It is my goal to make this year a truly unforgettable volunteer experience and one in which you will grow and excel in ways you have never imagined! Along with all of this, you will get a chance to meet and work with a diverse team of supervisors and fellow volunteers who are just as excited to kick start a great year. If you can’t wait to know more about this year’s activities, rest assured . . . the annual orientation is fast approaching and during this meet and greet session, all your questions, and perhaps much more, will be answered. Have a blast in these final weeks of summer and I look forward to getting to know all of you soon!

Joyce Lai, VIP Student Coordinator

“Leaders are made not born. You learn to become a leader by working on your skills, getting involved and having a passion to succeed” Brian Tracy, Author.

Hello everyone! First of all, I would like to express my excitement in joining the wonderful staff at Volunteer in Progress (VIP). Known as a program that complements student’s academic life by providing an opportunity to work on their skills and become more involved in their university life poses great advantages for students. To tell you a bit about myself, my name is Nasir Mirza. I am currently a fourth year student in BMOS & Sociology. As an individual who has had experience being an international student, I understand how tough the transition to a new culture and academic environment may be. However with programs such as VIP, students are given an opportunity to make this transition smoother while building on their skills and knowledge.

I look forward to working and communicating with you guys as we progress through this semester!

Nasir Mirza, VIP Student Coordinator
Hi Everyone!

My name is Marya Shabbir and I am one of your VIP Student Coordinators for the 2010 – 2011 academic year. I am currently in second year in the BMOS program with a specialization in finance and administration. I am so excited for this year and look forward to meeting everyone! Some background information about me… I am from right here, the lovely Forest City, London, Ontario. I come from a very large family. I am the eldest of seven girls… yes; my parents have seven daughters. One of my future goals is to become a chartered accountant. I love to read, play with my little sisters, and help others. Well, I hope everyone enjoys the VIP Program this year and has great experiences that will always be cherished.

Be as smart as you can, but remember that it is always better to be wise than to be smart.

- Alan Alda

Marya Shabbir, VIP Student Coordinator

Hello volunteers and welcome to VIP! I am currently a BMOS student with plans to encourage our volunteers to be enthusiastic and passionate about what they do! Whether your interests lie in human rights, children’s aid, environmental protection, education, animal care, health and medicine, sports, arts and music, there is something for each and every one of you to dedicate your time and effort to. I hope to get to know each of you and help you to find a position where you can make a difference. There are also a lot of events to look forward to throughout the year so you can meet other great volunteers like yourself! Hope you all had a great summer, I look forward to meeting you soon!

I look forward to seeing you in September!

Lisa Hu, VIP Social/Community Events Coordinator
Dear VIPs,

It has been a great joy planning your social events for this term and we hope that you will benefit from each experience. These exciting events have been chosen with you in mind. Social events are a small part of the experience of being a volunteer; they will increase your outlook on the different areas and issues as well as give the opportunity to make friends that will last a life time. It’s the foundation of your volunteering experience and everyone should take part, as our motto is “Helping Hands”.

The following events are mandatory for all VIPs and we hope to see each of you take part in them.

VIP 27th Annual Orientation & The Wave Reception
When: September 21, 2010 5:30 – 6:30 / The Wave: 7:00pm
Where: David S. H. Chu International Student Centre, WSS 2130
Who: For all VIPs of the Academic Year 2010-2011

Please take note of this date, as this event is mandatory!!

October

Social Events
VIP Orientation Make-Up
When: October 6, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
   Where: TBA
   Who: VIPs who did not attend September Orientation

Community Involvement Days (CIDs)
Thanksgiving Food Drive
   When: October 4 - 8, 2010
   Where: Canned goods can be dropped off at the IESC, WSS 2120
   Halloween Party at London Children’s Museums
   When: October 28, 5:00- 8:00p.m.
   Where: London Children’s Regional Museum

Professional Development
Workshop # 1 Networking
   When: TBA
   Where: TBA

November

Desert Potluck Social
   When: TBA
   Where: TBA

Workshop # 2 Leadership
   When: TBA
   Where: TBA