

8 Community News

Profile: Young volunteer Amy Callaway

Friends, fun and skills for life

Amy Callaway is passionate about her time volunteering with local disability support service, Interchange Outer East (IOE).

Amy first heard about IOE when she was a student at Mater Christi and IOE's Volunteer Coordinator came to the school to talk about volunteering with Interchange's recreation programs. The message resonated with Amy and, at age 15, she signed up and became a regular volunteer on camps and activities. Her volunteering experience led her to paid support work and employment as a recreation activity leader. Both these positions helped her to fund her interests and further studies.

Now, at 23 years of age and a special education teacher, Amy reflects on how volunteering with IOE has influenced her career, her perceptions and general outlook on life.

'Being an IOE volunteer really set me up for my career. I had always wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember but working with kids with disabilities determined the teaching direction I would take.

'Through the training I received as an IOE volunteer, I learnt so many skills that have been invaluable in my current teaching position. I learnt a huge amount about inter-personal skills, positive behaviour support, personal care and working with

young people with diverse medical and behavioural challenges. I've learnt how to communicate with children by various means and on lots of different levels – verbally, by sign, or by using augmented communication aids.

'I've always believed 'all kids are kids' – my favourite saying – no matter what their background, skill sets, presentation or challenges. That's what I'd always say to new volunteers I was mentoring when they were unsure of how they would relate to children with disabilities. Every child has a story. It's up to us to work out what that story is and how we can help them tell it. We need to discover how to bring out the best in each child.

'Probably the most important thing I have taken from my time volunteering is to give myself license to retain my inner child and to play. As a teacher, it's wonderful to be able to relate to the children on their level through play.

'Volunteering through my teenage years really helped me develop as a person. It gave me responsibility, confidence, trust in myself and my decisions and did wonders to boost my self-esteem. I even gained confidence in public speaking, a sure positive for a teacher!

'All these skills and the practical experience I have been able to take from volunteering are only a part of the story. I can't begin to describe the amazing fun I have had over the years, the memorable experiences



Amy on camp with IOE participant, Noah.

I've shared and the lifelong friendships I've made. Nor the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that I have from knowing that I helped put smiles on the faces of the kids I have been lucky enough to support.

'I still volunteer whenever I get a chance and can't see that changing any time soon!'

For more information about becoming a volunteer with Interchange Outer East recreation programs, please contact Volunteer Coordinators Marcelo or Beck on 9758 5522 volunteers@ioe.org.au or check out the website www.ioe.org.au

Sandra Leahy, IOE

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A day to remember