

July 2020

Name: Lisa Langsdorf



Tell us a little about yourself: I am a mother of two children, Caitlin and Mitchell. Mitchell still lives at home and we have 2 kittens, (Gibbs and Abby) 1 elder cat (Misty is a 15 year old Russian Blue) and a middle aged dog(Emma is a 5 year old Peek a Poo) at my house. I have been a Children’s Librarian for over 27 years. I worked at the Appleton Public Library for over 15 years before moving to Kenosha. I have been in Kenosha for almost 13 years. I spent the early years at Kenosha focusing on serving school age children in the library buildings. I have spent the last 4 years focusing on outreach services. I worked with both preschool and school age children for the first 3 years, but I have changed my focus to K-5th grade school children. I work with students by visiting their schools, classrooms, and city parks in summer and other locations. If there are children, I might be there. I have brought STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) programming to many locations. I like to provide a bit of learning with the fun. I joined the Readers are Leaders program this year and have also focused on helping other students work on their reading skills. I like to share stories about my own kids, because they both struggled with reading. I really understand reading is difficult for many people, and I want them to be comfortable working with me. I try not to judge anyone when it comes to reading. I want everyone to be curious and try to improve their reading skills for themselves. I will be there to cheer you on, joke with you and even scowl at you when you need it, but I will be there!

How long have you been volunteering for United Way of Kenosha County? I have participated in the Dr. Seuss Read Across America Day for 4 years. I usually pick 2 classes to read with, and then if someone is sick, I often pick up another class. I love to bring a day of reading to students who know me from bringing STEAM to their school. The school age children rarely get to hear me read. It's fun to show them a different side of myself.

How did you get involved with United Way of Kenosha County? I heard about the Read Across America Program and was sad that I did not get to go out and read in schools. The next year, I made sure to pay attention and when the call went out, I signed up as soon as I could.

What is your favorite experience/story from your work with United Way of Kenosha County? I think that when I showed up to a Frank Elementary second grade last year, the students were shocked and delighted. They told me how much they missed me and lots of friends tried to get really close to me, I even got some hugs. We had worked together when they were preschoolers, kindergarteners and first graders and then they moved on and we didn’t get to see each other anymore. I was able to bring props and puppets and tell them some of my favorite Dr. Seuss stories and share my love of reading with them. They were so fun to work with and because we already knew each other, we were able to spend more time reading and enjoying stories. Since I always try to be honest and genuine with the children, I started out by reminding them that I am the meanest lady they will ever meet, and at some point during our interactions, someone turned to me and said that I’m not mean, I’m really nice and they like me.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time? What free time? It seems that I am always thinking about how to make my STEAM programs more fun for the kids, while giving them an opportunity to learn something new, or to expand on an idea/lesson they already know. For many of the children, they don’t have the opportunity to just be children and have fun. We work to be better community members and to be empathetic and kind. I want to provide them with quality experiences while staying on a budget, so they can go home and try the experiment with affordable materials. I love to shop and find affordable things at the most unexpected stores. I like to cook and bake, so working with ingredients to make homemade concoctions I can share with kids is a fun pastime for me. Whenever I show up with bowls and measuring cups, several children yell out “Slime”, and I have to say, not this time. I love to read and listen to audiobooks. I am very crafty, I can sew, knit, crochet, cross stitch, draw, paint, and create with almost anything, but I don’t love making things from junk, it’s not my thing. I love to travel and watch nature. I like to play games and do puzzles.

What would you say to someone who is thinking of volunteering for United Way of Kenosha County? Just try it. Keep it simple in the beginning, try reading to one class in March. You can practice reading any Dr. Seuss book. Once you try it, you will be hooked. The children love to have someone come to their classroom and read. They love to share their stories with you, so be prepared to interact. Once you have discovered that you can read to a class, then you can try becoming a Readers are Leaders volunteer. The training is thorough and if you have questions it is easy to get answers. The one on one interaction is fantastic. You become a mentor and friend to a child who looks forward to seeing you every week. You can watch them improve and know that you had something to do with it. It can be life changing. Be honest, genuine and consistent. The children will really appreciate it and be willing to try harder because they know you are invested in them.

What is your favorite quote? “All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten” by Robert Fulghum.

ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School. These are the things I learned:

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life—learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

Wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup—they all die. So do we.

And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned—the biggest word of all—LOOK.

Tell us something that inspires you? I am inspired by young people who don't give up. I am inspired by the faith and trust the children put in me, and what I am bringing to them. I am inspired every time I walk into a school or park program and the children are happy to see me, trusting that I will have something really good that they will like to do, see or share. I have been the difference for some children that turned a bad day into a good day. Knowing that I have made relationships with the children which allow us to shine, if only for a short time each month. I am inspired by teachers who tell me that for the first time all day, a specific child sat down, paid attention and acted just like every other kid, just because I came. That is inspiring!

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