

TESS O'CONNOR

'THE CULTURE-LOVER' IN OUR FAMILY OF VOLUNTEERS

Tess O'Connor is a teacher of English and she has been putting her teaching experience in China to use in New Zealand, working as both a relief and a volunteer teacher. Apart from her volunteer work with many other organizations and taking Tai Chi and Chinese dancing classes, she has been an ESOL volunteer at MCLaSS since September 2017.

Tess first got interested in volunteering when she was raising her grandchild. She says she wanted to go out to the community, to a place where she could talk to adults and meet other people. Her need to meet new people, learn and contribute resulted in her volunteering work that now occupies most of her time.

A day of volunteering at MCLaSS for Tess includes, amongst many other things, presenting students with the day's work, engaging in ice-breaking activities to ease students into learning and assisting them with group and paired classroom tasks.

At MCLaSS, the learning journey is not easy for every student. Tess says each individual learns differently and there are some students who have difficulties understanding the new language. For Tess, seeing them excel in class and seeing them light up and become more confident is a fascinating experience. And Tess believes that individuals from migrant and refugee backgrounds are resilient and have the potential to succeed, so she always encourages MCLaSS students to aim high.

"It is so rewarding when I know I have made something better for students for the day and that they're happier because of me. Assisting them learn and connect with others through language helps me get there"

Volunteering at MCLaSS has also been an interesting cultural experience for Tess. Before joining MCLaSS, Tess has had experienced the Chinese culture, but at MCLaSS, Tess gets to enjoy a fine blend of multiple cultures. Specially, she enjoys hearing about various celebrations and rituals the students observe and understanding how they fit in New Zealand culture as well as how she herself fits in their individual cultures. Tess also adds that interacting with Muslim students at MCLaSS helped change her perception of Islamic culture and realize that there's more to their stories that goes beyond stereotypes.



Currently, Tess is following a course on teaching literacy and numeracy for adults and her experience at MCLaSS allows her to learn more and become a competent teacher. In Tess' own words, 'at MCLaSS, not only am I giving something, I also get a little something back, an opportunity to hone my teaching skills in classroom'. She is making the most of her time at MCLaSS, as she is a passionate teacher and wants to teach English anywhere and whenever she can.