



2020 COABE OUTSTANDING TEACHER OF THE YEAR BRIDGETTE KUTSCHMA

Bridgette Kutschma began volunteering with Walworth County Literacy Council in 2004 where she helps adult learners gain English language skills and prepare for the U.S. Citizenship Exam. Five years ago, she became an instructor at Badger Community Education, also in English language learning. In addition, she works as a paralegal at Soberalski Immigration Law, headquartered in Milwaukee, WI.

“Bridgette has built programs through hard work, compassion, and commitment to adult education in her community. She is present in our community and school as an advocate for her students,” said Lilly Barrett, Executive Director of Walworth County Literacy Council.

Bridgette involves local government and businesses into her program including taking students to the grocery stores and restaurants to complete homework assignments, inviting career speakers, immigration speakers, and our mayor into the class and to activities.

For over 15 years, Bridgette has been an integral part of the Walworth County Literacy Council. She was employed as Program Coordinator and continues to serve as a board member and a volunteer tutor. She successfully assists in fundraising for the council, writing grants and seeking community financial assistance, and in recruiting volunteers. In 2008 she initiated and established the Walworth County Jail Literacy program, which to this date has educated over 400 inmates.

“Beyond their sometimes hardened exterior and beyond the title of their offense, lies an individual who so often wants to change their life but does not know how or where to begin,” Bridgette explains. “Education is the key to change for so many of those incarcerated. Education instills esteem and power—power to leave the criminal ways behind them, to stop making excuses, and to create a brighter tomorrow.”

Immigration has greatly impacted Bridgette’s life as her immediate family members are naturalized immigrants. She understands the sacrifices and determination that immigrants embody through her experience teaching hundreds of students. Bridgette not only accepts the learner’s cultural and ethnic uniqueness, she embraces it and celebrates them by offering culturally specific events as part of their class time. She has gone out of her way to learn other languages in order to help her students feel comfortable.

Bridgette is passionate about adult education and creates a student-focused classroom. She sets high expectations for participant success and is constantly reviewing and updating the curriculum to find the best resources available to support her students. She works with a very small budget to create a program and keeps evolving to meet each participant where he or she is at.

In the words of Rafael C., one of her English language learners, “For me Bridgette is one of the best English teachers I have had because she always looks for a way to make her class fun. She makes learning much better. She personally helped me sign up for Gateway for my GED. Bridgette always cares about the Latino community especially and looks for ways to support and help.”

In addition to her work with adult literacy, Bridgette was elected to the Geneva Lakes YMCA Board of Directors and is an active volunteer in the schools and community.