

Championing Justice- A Teacher Profile of Willow Dunlop

By Gerry Brach, Brooks Secondary School Counsellor

Willow Dunlop started to become aware of class and race privilege as a high-school student in the 1990's. Over time, she became more uncomfortable with her own position of privilege. She was curious about the systems in place that centred the status quo and forced so many people to struggle. Willow was raised by parents who taught her to think critically, and to promote fairness and equity in society. These ideals, introduced in her childhood continue to guide her. Before becoming a teacher, Willow was a Community Outreach Worker at YouthCO AIDS Society in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. During this time she facilitated hundreds of workshops on HIV and Hep C to secondary school students. After obtaining her teaching degree she taught in Vancouver for three years where she witnessed the massive socio-economic and cultural differences across the city.



“I really like working with high-school students as it is a dynamic time of their lives when they are exploring their identities and discovering their relationships to the wider world. I consider myself lucky to be witnessing the transformation of their becoming adults.” Teaching during a pandemic has been challenging, with its own set of rewards. “The challenge is that students don’t have the time to process the material and anchor it to their own experience. On the positive side, it is easier to develop personal connections with students. When I am with students for half a day, I get to see the ebb and flow of their mental states so I am better able to adapt my teaching strategy and provide support to them.” Next year Willow would like to integrate her Senior Foods Class with Social Justice 12. “Many of the learning outcomes of Food Studies 12 have to do with food security and sovereignty, so understanding the issues involved necessarily means investigating the intersection of land use and adequately valuing the people involved with food production at every stage.”

Willow has been the teacher-sponsor of the Gender & Sexuality Alliance group at Brooks since 2015. Willow likes helping students who are struggling to feel comfortable being themselves or accessing the support they need. Willow feels the District is doing a much better job in being willing to make accommodations, learn and change than when she was a student. “Again, I get that privilege to witness GSA students in their full expression. It is so rewarding to see them shine in the safety of their peers.” Willow has taken on the District Lead role with the Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Committee (SOGI). “It is important for our staffs and students to access current resources, as it can be isolating for students who are perceived as different in a small town.

Not one to give advice, Willow would rather listen and be a stable companion for students in their learning, and help connect them to resources when asked.

At the community level, Willow is currently working with her Food Studies 10 classes and LIFT Community Services (The Nook Social Enterprise Café) to process diverted food waste from grocery stores and local farmers. The food is then prepared and donated back to the Community Resource Centre, BOP and EXPLORE programs at Brooks. “I find it really rewarding for students to be connected with something good that is happening in the community.” Willow grew up on a co-operative farm, north of town. The values of everyone contributing and sharing in the farm’s bounty was instilled in her at an early age. Willow’s contribution to her school and community continues to be bountiful!

