

Local teen experienced teaching in Jamaica this summer

By Nelia Raposo
Special to The IFP

Briana Courtemanche did two of her favourite things this summer. She taught and travelled.

The Georgetown native, who is studying to be a teacher at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., spent two-and-a-half weeks in Negril, Jamaica with The Power to Be International, a registered charitable organization that aims to inspire and empower young people around the world through education.

During her trip, Courtemanche spent the first half of July teaching literacy skills to 8- and 9-year-olds. As an instructor, she focused on teaching Grade 4 and 5 students reading, writing and comprehension. She was there from July 1-19.

"I loved the community I was in. The experience showed me that no matter where you are, all kids are the same. They had the exact same excuses for not doing homework," Courtemanche says half-joking.

They also played similar school yard games and were fascinated with technology. But, like in Canada, not all kids have equal access to the same resources, she says. The disparity among the haves and have-nots is exemplified in her description of two of the kids she met:

"There was a student who brought an iPad to class and another who had to sell mangos after school to help with the family income," Courtemanche explains.

Aside from getting used to spending her workday far from home in a really hot, and often, loud portable classroom, she also had some emotions to work through.

"I'm fairly privileged so the most challenging part was being able to understand the complexities of the students' lives and some of their



Briana Courtemanche taught youngsters in Negril, Jamaica in July.

behaviours," she says candidly.

Feeling secure was another obstacle. "I was warned by my parents that Jamaica is not safe. They told me to always travel with someone. I was there with my guard up. But once I relaxed, it was fine. I thought, if I'm nice to people they will be nice to me, just like at home."

And then, she had to adapt to cultural norms. "Different things are culturally acceptable in Jamaica. Catcalling exists in Jamaica but it is not called that. I would walk down the street and people would shout compliments at me. Someone would say, 'Hey beautiful and it was the equivalent of good morning or hello,' she says. "It is not perceived as negatively as it is here. It's just part of the culture."

Although she was far from home, Courtemanche had support from Power To Be International's Director Kisha McPherson who interacted with all the volunteers daily. McPherson, who is an instructor at Centennial College, says Courtemanche was one of the youngest volunteers on this trip to Negril, yet she proved to be a leader.

"She's picked the right profession. I can see what a fantastic teacher

she will be," McPherson says. "She really took the bull by the horn."

Usually volunteers give one or two lessons but Courtemanche took initiative and planned many lessons on her own, McPherson says. Overall, Courtemanche rates the experience positively.

Travelling to volunteer is not new for the 19-year-old. She travelled with the organization Me To We to build schools in Kenya three summers ago.

"Since I was young I have always wanted to go away on trips. I've always been like that," she says before listing school trips to Quebec, Boston, Washington, and Italy and Greece while attending Georgetown District High School. Before settling on a teaching career close to home she says, "I would like to work up north in aboriginal communities or at risk communities in Canada."

Young readers may recognize Courtemanche from her work as a camp counsellor with Halton Hills Parks and Recreation where she keeps kids ages 6-8 busy during summer.

"I told them well in advance and they said it sounds like a great opportunity. They were extremely good to me," she says of her employers who held her job for her while she visited Jamaica.

This is her third year working at Halton Hills summer camps. Before being hired she volunteered at the camps, and before that she was a camper with the Town. She has lived in Halton Hills since age 3.

"She is a great member of our team," Jennifer Ancona, Recreation Coordinator for Children and Youth with the Town of Halton Hills, says. "She obviously has a passion for working with children."

Courtemanche is already thinking of possibilities for her next international adventure. She encourages everyone to travel.

"Just do it. I got homesick on the first day. After the first couple of days you get into it and it's some of the best times you are going to have."

WagJag.com



Buy Online:

42% off \$29

\$29 for 1 Admission to a 2015 Ontario Entrepreneur Week Event (a \$50 Value) from John Stanton at Ontario Entrepreneur Week

Want to feature your business on WagJag? email us at wjinfo@metroland.com

In partnership with **metrolandmedia**

Visit us at www.wagjag.com



Buy and sell in your neighbourhood.

tradyo



Download the Tradyo app for FREE.