

# Staff Report



March 11, 2025

**To** Board of Education (Public Meeting)  
**From** Sean Nosek, Superintendent/CEO  
**Re** **2025 Heroes in Education Honoured by Abbotsford Community**

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This report is presented to the Board for information.

## **BACKGROUND:**

We are thrilled to announce that the Abbotsford News has published a special edition honoring Abbotsford's Heroes in Education(attached). These remarkable educators, selected through nominations from our community members, exemplify dedication and passion for nurturing the minds of our students. Their unwavering commitment not only enriches the lives of our students but also strengthens the fabric of our community.

Over the next month, we will be featuring these honourees on our social media channels, highlighting their contributions and the profound impact they've had on our schools and community. Join us in recognizing these heroes who help shape the future of [#Abbyschools!](#)

### **Danielle Petrie, ELL & Library Learning Commons Teacher from École Centennial Park Elementary**

- At Centennial Park (CPARK), Danielle became the glue that holds everyone together. Danielle started her career in 1999 and has been at CPARK since 2017. The community nominated her because "no matter who you are at CPARK, you can always count on Danielle to welcome you with a friendly smile, a hug, words of encouragement, a shoulder to cry on, and an objective and active ear."

### **Satvinder Gill, Custodian From Chief Dan George Middle**

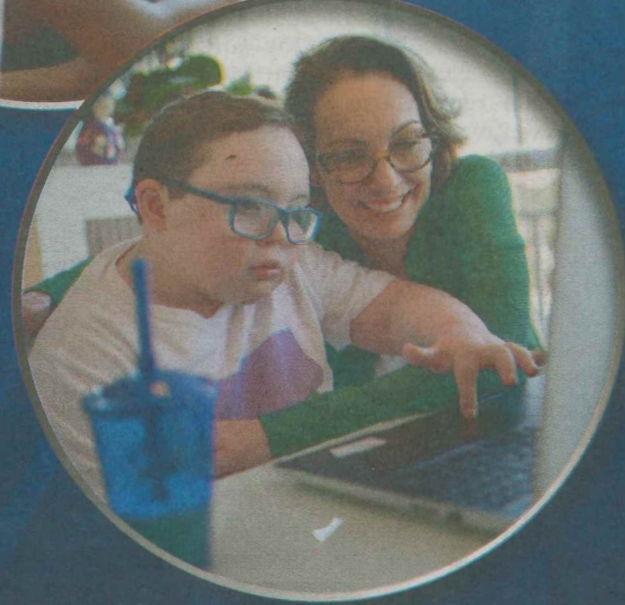
- A student at Chief Dan George Middle School nominated Satvinder because she is always friendly to all the students and goes above and beyond to make sure everyone feels comfortable at school. She has also contributed food to help out with class parties and donated freezies during the summer months to help students get a cool treat in the heat.

### **Terry Ninkovic, EA From Clayburn Middle**

- Terry has been working with young people in education for the past 47 years. She's worked at several schools in the District as an EA for the last 15. For her, "it's trying to adapt things so that all the kids can be a part of what the class is doing. It's so neat to see when the lights come on."

### **Teresa Chan, Social Studies Teacher From Yale Secondary**

- Teresa knew she wanted to become a teacher since the age of three. Her colleague nominated her for being an exceptional and beloved teacher. "Teresa has demonstrated unwavering commitment to the well-being and success of her students, going above and beyond the call of duty in every aspect of her role."



ABOVE AND BEYOND  
**HEROES**  
*in education*

The Abbotsford News is honoured to profile 2025 "Heroes in Education" from a long and amazing list of nominees sent to us by our readers.

Thank you to those working to support education in Abbotsford.



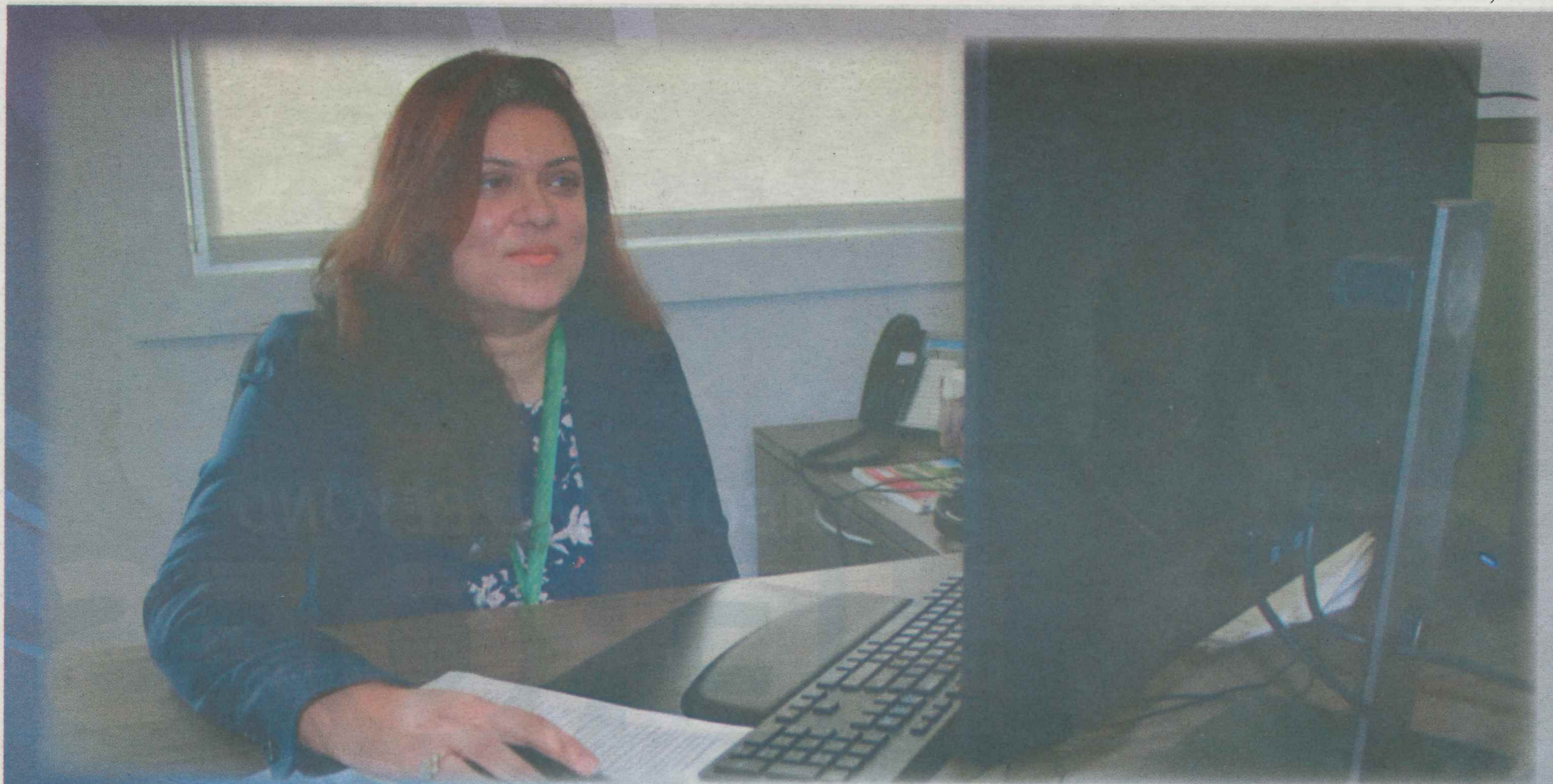
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 **THE NEWS**  
ABBOTSFORD

Black Press Media



# HERO

*in education*

**Afia Raja helped create the first urban planning degree program at UFV**



## Bringing outside world into the classroom

University education has been a major part of Afia Raja's life for more than a quarter of a century now, with the UFV professor using her many years of experience as an undergrad and graduate student to help better prepare her own students for the outside world.

Raja first enrolled in university in 1998 when she pursued an undergraduate degree in urban planning in her home country of Pakistan.

She followed this up with a master's degree in architecture, which she completed while also starting her position as a lecturer, marking the beginning of her teaching career.

"I enjoyed working with my students and the flexibility that you get with teaching," Raja said.

Eventually, her education took her across the sea, with Raja getting into the Fulbright Program, which allowed her to attend Texas A&M University to obtain a PhD in urban and regional science.

After a few years of teaching in both Pakistan and the United States, Raja moved to Canada in 2019 and took a position at the University of the Fraser Valley in the School of Land Use and Environmental Change, which has since been renamed to the department of Planning, Geography, and Environmental Studies.

Moving her way up from assistant professor to department head, Raja

has used her many experiences as a university student to help guide how she helps each of her students at UFV.

"I did concentrate a lot on the personality traits of all my professors," Raja said.

"Because, in my opinion, it has to be value-driven. If somebody is spending time with you in your class, then it shouldn't be the same person leaving your class. There has to be some value added, which is what we are being paid for. If we are not doing that, then there is probably no use for you to be in teaching, because students are there for your mentoring, for gaining knowledge, and for gaining skills from you."

One of the ways she has helped create this value for her students is by consistently introducing real-world elements into her teachings and not just relying on theoretical lessons.

As part of this teaching philosophy, she has led countless students to the bi-annual Hubhub events at Abbotsford City Hall, which have groups of UFV students showcase special projects to city staff and other community members for a chance to win an award.

"When they are interacting with people, they learn a lot," Raja said.

"Preparing them for what is coming out in the field is the final goal."

This tactic has had many positive tangible impacts on her students, such as Elena Van Buschbach, who nomi-

nated Raja as a Hero in Education and explained that it was through Raja's unique teaching methods that she was able to make significant leaps in her young career.

"Her mentorship has equipped students, including myself, with the skills and confidence to network with industry professionals, community leaders, and peers," Van Buschbach said. "In my case, this encouragement and support motivated me to pursue and accept a co-op position with the City of Abbotsford – a step I might not have taken without her guidance and the confidence built through experiential learning."

Through her years at UFV, one of Raja's proudest accomplishments has been the creation of the Bachelor of Community and Regional Planning program, which makes the Abbotsford university one of only a handful of schools across Canada with an accredited urban planning program.

"We started the degree, and we were expecting that in the first term, we would see around 10 to 12 students getting registered into planning," she said. "It was a flying start, with 45 students registering for the degree."

As the head of the Planning, Geography, and Environmental Studies department, Raja plans on continuing to develop students into young professionals armed with plenty of real-world experience when they graduate from UFV.

Story and photos by Brandon Tucker



# HERO *in education*

**CPARK educator Danielle Petrie just wants school to succeed**



## She's 'the glue' that keeps them together

**A**ccording to her nominators, Ecole Centennial Park Elementary (CPARK) educator Danielle Petrie is "the glue that holds us together."

It's high praise indeed, but one look at the nomination letter sent by Madison Algard and Barbara Lafresnaye for the 2025 Heroes in Education, and you quickly understand they're not kidding around.

Petrie, a Library Learning Commons teacher and an English Language Learning teacher, has managed to insert herself completely into the very fabric of life at Centennial.

"No matter who you are at CPARK, you can always count on Danielle to welcome you with a friendly smile, a hug, words of encouragement, a shoulder to cry on, an objective and active ear, an uplifting story, a treat, or anything else that you might need," said Algard. "She welcomes newcomers to the school with her friendly demeanour, open arms and a guided tour if that's what they need."

For Petrie, teaching is simply in the blood. Her mother, cousins and aunts are all educators.

"I've always loved children," she said. "I was always the babysitter when I was young. It has always

felt comfortable and natural."

Petrie started her career back in 1999 at Central Elementary in Chilliwack. Raising four children, one of whom is autistic, meant Petrie decided to work as a teacher on call for many years. She came back full time in 2017 to CPARK where all her children once attended.

"I love this school so much," she said with pride. "I just want it to succeed."

For Lafresnaye, it's Petrie's dedication to CPARK that sets her apart.

"When it comes to student success and team collaboration, Danielle recognizes the hard work and dedication to students fellow teachers and Educational Assistants demonstrate regularly," she said. "She acknowledges that we are all there to support students and provide them with a platform to be the best version of themselves."

And kids, simply being themselves, goes to the very heart of who Petrie is as both a person and as an educator.

"I'm super blessed to be in this position," she said. "The connections to the kids; I like to hear their stories. I like creating a nice place for them because I like to listen."

"They are so entertaining."

But the students are just one

part of why Petrie adores her time at CPARK. Her colleagues make coming to work each day a true joy.

"I love the staff here," she said.

"From the Christmas concerts to everything we do here at CPARK, we love to have fun together. I love that family feeling."

Her nominators call it the "Petrie flair" and she adds it to every school event from Halloween, Book Fairs, Pink Shirt Days, Sports Days to enhance the school environment.

But if you ask Petrie that all comes from a different source – her colleagues.

"It's not me," she said. "I'm a reflection of the people I work with. The staff here are such diverse learners. It makes you want to match their level of achievement."

Petrie is also a big fan of CPARK's dual track program of both French and English classes.

She says both sides do many things together and it adds to school spirit. "I love it when I see kids outside of the school. There are just such good, great humans here. It's like my family here."

While she is a few years away from retirement, Petrie is looking forward to spending her golden years with her firefighting husband, a member of Abbotsford Fire Rescue Service.



# HERO

*in education*

Satvinder Gill is a favourite of students at Chief Dan George Middle School



## Gill always brings positive energy

**T**he custodian could be considered one of the unsung heroes at any public school.

They clean up messes, are an ear for students and staff and help keep the school environment safe for everyone.

For Chief Dan George Middle School custodian Satvinder Gill, the custodian role is her life and she said the bond she has with her students is special.

A CDGMS student nominated her to be featured in our section and Gill said the acknowledgement both surprised her and warmed her heart.

"I was shocked," she said, laughing. "But it was a happy and nice surprise. Now I feel like – oh definitely they appreciate my work."

"That's everything for me. I know already that they do, but this was... oh my god."

Gill has been at the school for seven years now, previously working at another school and working as a care aid in care homes before moving into the public school system. She said everything felt right really quickly at CDGMS.

"Wherever I went I try to make my home," she said. "That's just how I feel because I care so much about students and staff. I joke that sometimes I get in trouble because

I care so much."

She's been employed at the school district since 2007 and said she loves everything about being in the school environment.

"I enjoy caring about the kids," she said. "I want to clean properly for them and I love, love to work with the staff also."

Gill explained that one thing she always tries to do is bring a positive energy to work. Any other stresses or issues she might be facing elsewhere are left at the door.

"Every day, it doesn't matter what happened before, once I enter the school door I am in a different atmosphere here," she said. "I feel like – the kids give you love, they see you, they say hello and that I look nice today – these kinds of things make my day."

The nomination form stated that Gill is always friendly to all the students and goes above and beyond to make sure everyone feels comfortable at school. She has also contributed food to help out with class parties and has donated freezies during the summer months to help students get a cool treat in the heat.

Gill has two children of her own in their 30s and said being around all the young children helps her relive some of her younger days and feel youthful herself.

"Wherever I work, I work for my heart," she said. "I do care very much, sometimes my co-workers say it's too much."

She explained that custodians work morning or evenings shifts and Gill has done both over the years. Morning shift workers have to make sure the classrooms are all ready to go first thing and then custodians respond to calls and making sure things are perfect inside the school. Evening workers deal with the accumulation of a full day of activity and try to set things up for the following morning.

Gill said she believes that the role of a custodian is to maintain a safe and clean environment, but also be there for students.

"Kids need someone positive around them," she said. "If you are positive then the kids will follow. They need someone like that. Cleaning is a part of the job, but I take care of them and the building anyway I can."

She said students have recognized her out in public and that and the fact that a student nominated her has been overwhelming.

"Oh my god, they all make my day," she said of the students. "They make me cry I am so happy. I love to work, I love the school and the kids at the school. They are my heart."



# HERO

*in education*

## Performing arts is her passion

**St. John Brebeuf teacher Lauren Gloanec loves to see her students shine**



**L**auren Gloanec believes that fostering the spiritual and emotional growth of young people is just as important at their intellectual and physical development – and that the arts play a crucial role.

Gloanec, selected as one of Abbotsford’s Heroes in Education, is a drama and musical theatre teacher at St. John Brebeuf Regional Secondary.

She believes the power of the performing arts cannot be underestimated, particularly at a time when so many young people suffer from mental-health challenges such as anxiety and depression.

“(The performing arts are important) not just as a story to distract us, but learning to step into the skin of someone else and to practise compassion and empathy. Or to stand up in drama class and do something scary, to feel vulnerable in front of your peers and be met with people who support you and cheer you on,” she said.

“Teaching a course where we put away the laptops and stand up in front of other humans, holding direct eye contact with each other, is pretty powerful when young people are used to connecting through a cellphone.”

Gloanec teaches drama for students in Grades 8 to 12, musical theatre to Grades 10 to 12, Social Studies 8, and Christian Education 9.

The performing arts is her passion.

She studied theatre and music in university, earning a diploma in musical theatre performance and a bachelor of arts with a major in theatre and minor in music.

Gloanec was first inspired to go into teaching by her mom, who taught French in elementary school, and then later by high school teachers and instructors at voice lessons and theatre camps.

“I think teachers in the arts can’t help but show their passion for the craft, and it’s contagious,” she said.

Gloanec had planned to pursue a career on the stage, but teaching was more conducive to raising children. (She and her husband, who is also a teacher, have three sons.)

She has been at St. John Brebeuf since she started teaching in 2017 and has helped grow the drama program from classes being held in an old portable on site to now being held in a massive open classroom in an addition built to the school.

Gloanec works closely with fellow teachers Veronica Van Vliet and Laura de Fleuriot.

“We feel like we’ve hit our creative collaborative stride together. I take the reins with artistic direction, Veronica is head of production and any tech/crew and backstage elements as well as some of the music direction, and Laura also takes on music direction and runs rehearsals on the days I can’t

be there,” she said.

Gloanec said other colleagues and members of the community are instrumental in ensuring the success of each show.

As well, she said the school administrators are “incredibly supportive and see the arts as an essential part of education rather than an expandable elective course.”

They stage one big production each year, usually alternating between a musical and a play. This year, they are presenting West Side Story on April 24 and 25 at Matsqui Centennial Auditorium.

Several of Gloanec’s students say she is their favourite teacher and a vital part of the arts program.

“As a senior student who has had the pleasure of being taught and directed by Mrs. Gloanec, I cannot express how incredibly positive my experience at SJB has been because of her inspiring attitude and dedication to her profession,” said Theo Surdu.

Another student, Anabelle Dos Santos, said Gloanec “recognizes the gifts and talents that people have.”

“She’ll push them and mentor them to achieve amazing things. I admire her passion and enthusiasm for everything she does. She is patient and understanding, which are very valuable qualities in a leader...Mrs. Gloanec is an inspiration to me and many other students in our community.”

Story by Vikki Hopes • Photos by John Morrow



# HERO *in education*

**Sharon Black created the 3 L's program at Dasmesh Punjabi School in 2009**



## Preserving culture while embracing learning

**D**asmesh Punjabi School looks a lot different now than it did when Sharon Black first started there in 1992.

The elementary teacher said that one of the biggest changes has been the sheer size of the school, going from less than 200 students to more than 900.

But she's also seen many improvements made to the level of education at the school, including the development of the 3 L's program, which Black created more than 15 years ago.

"We always have evaluators come in, and the evaluators choose whether or not we can have our funding from the government," Black said. "They said, 'Where's your help for struggling learners? I don't see it anywhere.' And when they left, I said, I would like to do that. I would like to do that because I was a struggler."

Black developed what became the 3 L's program and received approval from the school board to begin teaching it to elementary students.

"It was very simple at first, but it's got way more complicated," she said.

The initiative combines learning,

language, and literacy to help struggling learners become more adept at language arts courses. Black has tried to inject a bit of fun into the learning by utilizing a wide range of children's books and popular songs to engage students.

It's this dedication to helping all of her students that has inspired Dasmesh Punjabi School business manager Loveraj Grewal to nominate Black as a Hero in Education.

"Mrs. Black has consistently fostered the belief for each student to 'do the best you can whatever you do.' Assisting students on their way to success has graduates as doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, etc. They bring their own kids to meet their Grade 2 teacher who still imparts her knowledge at Dasmesh Punjabi School," Grewal said.

While the elementary students at Dasmesh Punjabi School learn all about how to read, write, and speak English, Black believes it's important to keep them connected to their culture, which is why she also coordinated regular field trips to the Gur Sikh Temple National Historic Site where the students would learn about history and religion from the seniors at the temple.

"It's important that they connect," Black said. "Don't lose your

background, culture, speech and music."

Another major addition that Black brought to the school is the introduction of the Fill the Bin fundraising campaign.

This event takes place every year for Valentine's Day, which she said was a holiday that the students didn't particularly embrace when Black started at Dasmesh Punjabi School.

So Black decided to create something to replace the stereotypical Valentine's Day celebrations, focusing the holiday on friendship, and encouraging students to bring in food donations for the Archway Abbotsford Food Bank.

In addition to teaching students the value of giving back to their community, Black explained that the Fill the Bin also provides the food bank with plenty of contributions during a time of the year when donations typically slow down significantly since everyone tends to donate at the end of the year for the holiday season.

While she has already been at the school for more than 30 years, Black doesn't plan to go anywhere anytime soon, saying that she'll continue to teach for as long as she can.





The City of Abbotsford's Economic Development Department congratulates the 2025 Indigenous Role Models, to be celebrated by the Abbotsford School District in April.

## 2025 INDIGENOUS ROLE MODELS



**SEQUOIA LEVAN**

Shawnee Tribe & Walla Walla Tribe

Robert Bateman Secondary School



**EMILIA BYLOW**

Métis

Yale Secondary School



**MAX TAIT**

Kitsumkalum First Nation

Yale Secondary School



**ACADIA TONEY**

Métis

Abbotsford Senior Secondary School



**DHEJA COGHILL**

Saik'uz First Nation

Abbotsford Senior Secondary School



**KIANNA MCNEIL**

Semá:th First Nation

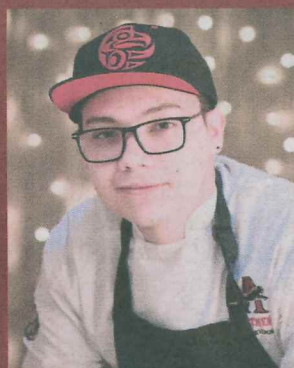
Bakerview Centre for Learning



**ISAAC LINDSAY**

Dogrib Rae First Nation

WJ Mouat Secondary School



**JASON HARLOW**

Nisga'a First Nation

WJ Mouat Secondary School



**CIARA MORAES**

Tsimshian First Nation, LAX KW'ALAAMS band

Robert Bateman Secondary School



**PEARL LEVAN**

Shawnee Tribe & Walla Walla Tribe

Robert Bateman Secondary School



# HERO *in education*

**Clayburn Middle School educational assistant Terry Ninkovic loves working with young people**



## She has a keen awareness and sensitivity

**I**t's been a lifetime of working with young people for Clayburn Middle School educational assistant Terry Ninkovic.

For the past 47 years she has been working with young people in the education in some form for basically her entire life.

She said her experience caring for others really started by taking care of her sister, who was born with spina bifida. Ninkovic helped take of her younger sibling for years and that time helped develop a keen awareness and sensitivity to the needs of others.

"I've always loved kids and wanted to be a mother before I wanted to be married," she said laughing, and noting she has two daughters of her own. "And I've always got along with kids. I've always encouraged children's play and to use their imagination and I love to be creative."

She began her career in early childhood education in Ontario in 1978 and then moved to Abbotsford in 1988. It was at the Mountain Park Preschool at the base of Sumas Mountain where she got her first big career break and she ran that facility for 16 years.

She said she loved that experience, but moving into the public school system has also been

extremely rewarding.

But even before her time in the public school system, she spent several years teaching ECE at Abbotsford's Columbia Bible College.

Although she worked with more mature students there, it was all part of her journey helping students achieve their goals.

"I did my ECE though the college and at one point one of the ladies retired and I was asked to take over their job," she said, noting that she also running the preschool at the time. "It was just so creative and so inspiring. My idea was that if you've gone to the trouble to get this education (ECE) you should have an idea about how you want to do things so I would let them try it."

"Some will fail, some will need some tweaking, but that's how we learn."

She move over to the public school system shortly thereafter and has been working as an EA in Abbotsford for close to 15 years. As is typical for an EA, Ninkovic moved all over the Abbotsford school district when she started and spent time at W.J. Mouat Secondary, Colleen and Gordie Howe Middle School, Aberdeen Elementary and about 11 others before finding a home at Clayburn.

A typical day for her could see her work alongside as many as 60 stu-

dents in all sorts of different classes. She is there to help the teacher guide the class, aid students with any questions they may have and keep the class running smoothly.

Everyday is different, with some more challenging than others, but she said the team at Clayburn has been great to work with.

"It's trying to adapt things so that all the kids can be a part of what the class is doing," she said. "It's so neat to see when the lights come on – and sometimes they don't come on. With them you just tell them you love them and that you've done enough for today."

She works with a large team of EA's at Clayburn and said the school has built a special community.

"We have a new principal who has really been connecting with the kids and I feel like I've actually made some great friends here," she said. "Before there were so many EA's moving around in different classrooms and it was hard to get to know people. That was a detriment to morale and the community."

"They're now being more steady with us and it's building more of a community."

Ninkovic hopes to continue doing this work for as long as she can and said she is looking forward to helping to build something special for students and staff at Clayburn.



# HERO *in education*

## Making connections, making an impact

**T**heresa Chan was just three years old when she knew what she wanted to do with her life.

She was so inspired by her pre-school teacher that even at such a young age, she knew that was the path she wanted to take.

"I saw how teachers could make a profound impact during a child's formative years, and I was excited to be that influence," Chan said.

She now teaches Social Studies 9, English 9 and 10, and Academic Language Acquisition (levels 3 and 4) at Yale Secondary.

But her work goes far beyond just academics.

Chan's students come from diverse backgrounds, and she says that understanding their individual purposes for learning directs her in what topics to include and what skills to target in each lesson.

"Getting to know my students first and foremost is of the utmost importance when I begin teaching a class and to ensure a safe environment in which they feel comfortable exploring and thriving in their interests," Chan said.

Chan was nominated as a Hero in Education by school counsellor Jennifer Wickman, who said she is an "exceptional and beloved teacher."

"Theresa has demonstrated

unwavering commitment to the well-being and success of her students, going above and beyond the call of duty in every aspect of her role."

Wickman said one of Chan's most remarkable qualities is her dedication to new immigrants.

"Upon their arrival, she immediately opens her classroom as a safe space and a home base, where these students can find a sense of stability and comfort," Wickman said.

"She is a lifeline to many of them and has continually brought them supplies to their homes."

Chan calls the welcoming of newcomers to the school "a collective effort," saying she works closely with teachers and students to ensure these students feel supported.

Chan said building meaningful connections with students goes beyond the classroom, as she devotes much of her time to extra-curricular activities.

In the past, she has sponsored the Global Club and the senior and junior girls' basketball teams.

In recent years, she has co-coached track and field and volunteered to organize convocation and graduation activities.

Chan also attends various school events, from fundraisers and festivals led by the school's leadership

students to musical theatre and concerts.

She said the thing she enjoys most about teaching is when students have what she calls a "light-bulb moment."

"I love making those personal connections with students. It's incredibly fulfilling to see them embrace who they are and recognize their own potential," Chan said.

She said she is also grateful to work alongside "dedicated colleagues who go above and beyond to support our students."

Chan said she is "truly surprised and deeply honoured" to have been nominated as a Hero in Education.

"To me, I feel like I am just doing my job, which makes this recognition even more humbling," she said.

Chan's educational background includes a bachelor of education from UBC in 2002 and a master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language from UBC in 2021.

She began her teaching career at an independent school in Burnaby before moving to the Abbotsford school district in 2007, starting with Howe Middle School and then Eugene Reimer Middle School.

She has been at Yale Secondary since 2010.

**Theresa Chan helps Yale Secondary students recognize their potential**



Story by Vikki Hopes - Photos by John Morrow



# Thank You!

To every teacher, educator, and staff member who supports our students' successes;

To every parent, guardian, and family member who nurtures and encourages them;

To every student who inspires us as we watch you learn, grow, and thrive; Thank you.

We extend our gratitude to all who support our students on their journey and help them prepare for a lifetime of success.



The Abbotsford School District proudly serves over 20,000 students across 46 schools, offering a range of high-quality programs designed to engage and challenge every student. Our 3,000 staff members are committed to creating meaningful, innovative, and relevant educational experiences.



[www.abbschools.ca](http://www.abbschools.ca)