

I am grateful to OHREA for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today about the awesome initiatives the Leddy Library has taken on improve the lives of some of our students on campus and some who have yet to come.

My name is Karen Pillon. I am a librarian at the Leddy library but also the head of access services, and the liaison librarian for education. Although the 2 roles give me the chance to impact those around me, I find that my greatest opportunity for impact comes from two other roles – namely, my liaison role with students who have accessibility challenges around access to information (print format or other) and also my liaison role with international students. In both of these latter roles, I am often pushed to think about perspectives that are not always obvious to me.

For example, it's hard enough to navigate the library website, but to do so as a student who is blind and who needs to write a paper using resources which are unfamiliar poses a challenge of sorts. However, I am very lucky to work with students who are so open about their realities. Often, it is I who becomes the student and they naturally become the teacher. In a way, I see my role as one of empowerment, where finally the student successfully transfers knowledge to me instead of the usual role I find myself in, which is me transferring knowledge to the students. Once this happens, the ebb and flow of the magic of teaching and learning begins. I am humbled by Allan Angus who came to me after graduating in the masters program and asked me to "check his website" as he embarked on his journey as he opened his own social work practice. The element of trust cannot go underestimated.

At Leddy, we also have a weekly program called "English Conversation Group" for international students. When we first see these students, they have been here only a couple of weeks, they have no friends and don't understand many of their professors. They are petrified of getting up in front of their Canadian classmates and giving rise to their own voices. So, we give them a safe space to practice their English all the while teaching them about Canadian academics – everything from how to address their professors, when it's ok to raise your hand, how to write papers, how to avoid plagiarism and the more pressing issues of dating etiquette, and how to successfully navigate a job interview. When the weekly class is over, we love hearing students say to each other – what is your email? And in an uncertain place, these students now have academic allies who can direct them to all of the services inside and outside the University to help them in their journey. I consider this a win when one of my favourite students said to me in passing – "Miss – I went for a job interview and I got the job – they asked me the questions you practiced with me". The role of an ally cannot go underestimated.

These experiences also impact my research around organizational culture and change. I have been invited to talk about this topic several times. I've spoken to librarians in universities, managers in different organizations, high school students, low-income members of our community all wanting to make changes in their personal or work lives and even at organizational levels. However, nothing prepared me for when I was asked to be a guest speaker at (WEST) Women's Enterprise Skills Training on how to navigate change with 15-19 year old Syrian refugee women in regards to their new life in Canada. As usual, I went in with a reflective exercise meant to create a connection between me and the participants and a sense of belonging between the participants themselves. Many of them had not yet learned to speak English so they spoke to me with the assistance of a translator. I decided that we would do this as a group and I would write their answers myself. I asked my first usual question – "Tell me

what you are excited about in your life right now". Right away a hand went up – and with broken English one of the young women said "we safe". I paused. This was not the usual answer. The usual answers were everything from – meeting new people, learning new skills, finishing this class to better myself, learning English....never "we safe".

I understood that this class would be very different from what I knew in the past. I put my prepared slides away and again, the true magic of teaching and learning began. I contradicted everything from "I don't get married at 15?" to "I want to be a doctor but my dad said no one will come to see me bc they don't like "our kind" here". I was stunned. Silence. I remember the good work we are doing in the Review Committee Employment Equity so that this exact type of situation doesn't happen. As one part of me stays positive and tells her that her nationality is an asset to us and we should be lucky to have different perspectives in Canada and that this helps us grow as people, I am also thinking that "my" Canada better not let this young woman down. In fact, I start thinking about the basic human rights we take for granted but how this somehow changes when we promise it to someone else. I think about how these women might come up against it – and this is the moment that changes in me- when, at the most fundamental level, we see how precious our most basic rights are. And how we cannot forget to recognize and name them and bring them to the fore in all we do especially in our roles as educators and leaders.

I've been changed for the better. I hope you have too.

Thank you.