

“THE GREATEST THING CRESTWOOD GAVE ME WAS A PLACE TO EXPLORE AND LEARN ABOUT MYSELF WHILE GAINING CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM. I [WOULD NOT] BE THE PERSON I AM TODAY IF NOT FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES I WAS GIVEN TO EXPAND MYSELF AT SUCH AN EARLY AGE

THE POWER OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

KATHRYN BOOTHBY

Danielle Da Silva speaks five languages, is working on another four, and stopped counting the number of countries she'd visited when it reached 50. The 29-year-old is founder of Photographers Without Borders and driver of the organization's mission to empower humanity through visual communication.

“Photography and video are powerful communication tools that transcend language barriers. They have the potential to carve space and voice for organizations in need that do the most impactful work,” she says. “Photographers Without Borders fulfils that need by providing free services to grassroots organizations worldwide.”

Her travels have further inspired Da Silva. Last year, while filming a documentary with the Orangutan Information Centre in Sumatra, the plight of the Gunung Leuser habitat and its inhabitants affected her to such a degree that she helped found the Sumatran Wildlife Sanctuary. The goal is to raise over \$100,000 to protect private forest lands in the area.

Da Silva credits the experiential learning she gained at Toronto's Crestwood Preparatory College for helping to guide her

heart and her art. The school offers a broad community service program that encourages children to become socially responsible citizens.

“The greatest thing Crestwood gave me was a place to explore and learn about myself while gaining confidence and self-esteem,” she says. “I don't think I would be the person I am today if not for the opportunities I was given to expand myself at such an early age.”

Fiona Schulte, alumni of Oakville, Ont.'s Appleby College, concurs. Schulte is currently research assistant professor with the departments of oncology and pediatrics at the Alberta Children's Hospital. She is helping to make a difference in the lives of families dealing with childhood cancer.

In addition to her work at the hospital, Schulte gives back at home, nationally and internationally. She volunteers with Kids Cancer Care in Alberta, is a member of the board of directors for the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology, and is a committee member with a North American co-operative of over 250 pediatric oncology centres.

“When I think about my education at Appleby, I don't think about math and science. I think about the many extra- and co-curricular opportunities that had a sig-



ZAC FACTS PHOTOGRAPH

Danielle Da Silva, founder of Photographers Without Borders, says Crestwood Preparatory College helped her develop confidence and self-esteem.

nificant impact. Exposure to and understanding of the world beyond the school gates, in places like Haiti and at Oaklands Regional Centre in Oakville, helped me realize that not everyone lives as we do,” she says. “Those experiences spoke to me and the school cultivated my interest. That is the real bonus of an independent school environment.”

A rich variety of experiential programs are completely integrated to the school curricula, notes Schulte. “They are not simply there to choose: they are a requirement. There is an expectation that every student will become involved in every component and that pushed me to explore things I many not otherwise have considered,” she says.

It's about providing experiences that deliver enduring life skills such as leadership, understanding, collaboration, empathy and courage, says Rob McGuiness, director of the intercultural and experiential program at Appleby College. “When we look at how complex, ambiguous and uncertain the world is, being able to understand and interact with new

communities and cultures becomes very important.”

The key is ensuring experiential programs are fluid. “Feedback from parents, students and faculty is incorporated into programs. While the addition of new partners, organizations and programs allows us to remain current and relevant,” says McGuiness.

With less bureaucracy and smaller size (averaging less than 200 students), private schools can quickly adapt to new opportunities, says Deani Van Pelt, director of the Fraser Institute's Barbara Mitchell Centre for Improvement in Education. “This agility allows them to embrace different strategies, such as experiential learning, that government schools haven't embraced so quickly or readily,” she says. “When learning has purpose it's a wake-up call to students and animates what is being taught in the classroom. It makes students stronger and provides a better understanding of the career path they would like to pursue.”

Programs that go beyond the classroom are also helping to broaden horizons and change perceptions, says Vince Pagano, Crestwood's headmaster. The ultimate goal is to motivate and inspire students to do good things, for the right reasons, he says.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JUNE			
BLYTH ACADEMY			
6	OPEN HOUSE Waterloo Campus 1:00 pm-3:00 pm 260 King Street W., (Kitchener)	7	ACADEMY PRESENTATION Mississauga (Adamson Campus) Grades 11-12 - 6:00 pm-7:00 pm The Adamson Estate, 850 Enola Ave.
			ONLINE WEBINAR 6:00 pm-7:30 pm GHS and Florence Presentation
			OPEN HOUSE Waterloo Campus 6:00 pm-7:30 pm 260 King Street W., (Kitchener)
			ACADEMY PRESENTATION Ottawa Campus 7:00 pm-8:00 pm 352 Danforth Ave., (Ottawa)
9	ACADEMY PRESENTATION Yorkville Campus 7:00 pm-8:00 pm 85 St. Nicholas Street	10	OPEN HOUSE Waterloo Campus 9:00 am-12:00 pm 260 King Street W., (Kitchener)
20	ACADEMY PRESENTATION Burlington Campus 7:00 pm-8:00 pm Village Square, 422 Pearl Street, Units 14-21	21	ONLINE WEBINAR 6:00 pm-7:30 pm GHS and Florence Presentation
		29	ACADEMY PRESENTATION London Campus 7:00 pm-8:00 pm Ignatia Hall, 1486 Richmond St.
THE GILES SCHOOL		FERN HILL	
14	BOOK A PERSONAL TOUR TODAY	20	FERN HILL SUMMER CAMPS START Camps run weekly throughout June and July only
JULY			
THE GILES SCHOOL		BLYTH ACADEMY	
12	BOOK A PERSONAL TOUR TODAY	12	ONLINE WEBINAR 6:00 pm-7:30 pm GHS and Florence Presentation
		26	ONLINE WEBINAR 6:00 pm-7:30 pm GHS and Florence Presentation
AUGUST		SEPT	
THE GILES SCHOOL		THE GILES SCHOOL	
9	BOOK A PERSONAL TOUR TODAY	13	BOOK A PERSONAL TOUR TODAY