

IBAT's Partnership with Junior Achievement (JA) to Promote Financial Literacy — A Staffer's Perspective.

I have been told on more than one occasion that I should have been an elementary school teacher. When I had the opportunity to volunteer my time to contribute to the IBAT Education Foundation goal of promoting financial literacy in Texas, I couldn't refuse.

The process was quite simple. I completed a volunteer application for JA. This consists of collecting data on which grades you would like to teach, the areas of town you are interested in teach, and granting permission for a background check [required for all volunteers working with JA's youth].

Once the application was submitted, I heard from the local JA Elementary School [surprise – my area of interest] Program Manager. The JA Program manager arranged for me to participate in an orientation training class (about an hour) which provided an overview of JA's financial literacy program, tips on teaching the grade I selected and a complete packet of information with all the materials needed to conduct the classes.

There are two options you can choose to teach the classes, JA in a day [teaching the whole curriculum in one day], or a traditional program [five 45-minute sessions]. Being a traditional kind of gal, I chose the latter. My JA Program Manager gave me contact information for the teacher and I was off and running.

I sent the teacher an email introducing myself and asking for permission to attend her class at the end of a school day to get acquainted with the class, teaching style, etc. and to introduce myself and the JA program. We set up a schedule together that ended up spanning four weeks (one session for two weeks, then two sessions for two weeks). I learned that teachers are very busy!

The JA program was easy to understand, fun for the children, and did not take a lot of preparation time. It also gives the teacher a well-deserved break! Someone who is not as detail-oriented as I am could probably prepare for each lesson in about 20 minutes or less.

I taught "Our Region," featuring economic and business resources in state and regional economies to Mrs. Susan Hansen's 4th Grade bilingual class at Patricia Knowles Elementary School in Cedar Park, which is right behind my home. One of my goals is to help the financial literacy program get well established at the school since my son will attend in a few years. I believe this program is important to help develop the future leaders of the world. I believe that the more exposure the children receive, beginning at a young age, the more intuitive financial literacy will become and that's a great thing that will have far-reaching positive results.

The finest moment for me during the sessions was when the students remembered what we covered in prior sessions and you could see the program coming together in their questions and comments. I loved seeing them have fun learning!

This program was worth investing my time and energy. I feel that I received more than I gave. There is such a demand for volunteers that there is plenty for everyone to do. Some people don't have want to teach on their own, and that could be a great thing. In fact, helping a volunteer teach — just assistance with the class — is extremely helpful.

It's simple. Just contact your local JA [if you need help with whom to contact at JA, email Mary Lange at mlange@ibat.org], fill out an application stating your preferences, and create an experience that you will look back on fondly, knowing that you did your part to promote financial literacy in Texas.

-Darlene Revers, Vice President – Member Relations & Advertising Manager