

Karyn Winters has served as the Director of the Genesee County Business Education Alliance (BEA) since 2017. The BEA is an organization that helps prepare K-12 youth in Genesee County for the world of work. Previously, Karyn had been Program Manager at JA of Central Upstate New York, in Rochester. Karyn was pleased to continue her involvement through the BEA's partnership with JA of WNY. In 2018-2019, over 1,200 students in Genesee County schools participated in a JA program thanks to the efforts of Karyn and the always supportive, Genesee County community! We had an opportunity to sit with Karyn to talk about her JA experiences.



Q. Why did you decide to get involved? Stay involved with JA?

A. My favorite part of my job as JA program manager was to volunteer my time to teach JA programs in local classrooms. I'll never forget how nervous I was teaching my first lesson at a 2nd grade class at Rochester City School District School #9! After that first lesson, I was hooked and always looked forward to my weekly JA lessons. After I left my JA position in 2015, I continued to volunteer at "JA in a Day" events and in local classrooms in Genesee and Wyoming counties. The BEA is very fortunate to have a wonderful community partner like JA of WNY to help Genesee County youth with career exploration opportunities.

Q. What grades/schools/programs do you usually teach?

A. I have taught almost every JA program, but I think my favorite grade levels to teach are K-5 because the activities are so fun and creative. An added bonus to teaching younger students.... the kids treat you like a rock star and are so happy to see you when you first enter the classroom. If I were to choose my favorite program, without a doubt *JA Our Community* (Grade 2).

Q. Do you have a JA memory that stands out?

A. The BEA has partnered with Batavia High School's *Introduction to Education* class, an elective that introduces high school students to the teaching profession. We implemented the *Junior Achievement High School Heroes* program where the high school students are the JA volunteers and are matched with Grade 1 & Grade 2 classrooms in Batavia CSD. JA allowed the students to get real-world teaching/mentoring experience in a well-supported environment, as the classroom teacher remains in the room at all times and assists if necessary. The feedback from both the high school volunteers and the Grade 1 & 2 teachers was incredible. My hope is that we can encourage other Genesee County school districts to adopt *JA High School Heroes* and help cultivate the next generation of educators (or at the very least nurture high school student public speaking and leadership skills).

Q. What is your favorite part about working with JA? What are the challenges?

A. My favorite part of working with JA is meeting the students and community volunteers - both remind me that there still is a lot of good in this world. The biggest challenge with managing the JA programs in Genesee County is finding and recruiting the volunteers needed to fill all of our requested programs. I think many people *want* to help, but figuring out how to fit it into a busy work/home schedule can be challenging.

Q. What advice would you give to a new JA volunteer?

A. Prepare, prepare, prepare! When I'm training a new volunteer, I always remind them how important it is to do a thorough study of the next lesson. Make sure you prep your materials, think about how you can connect your life situations to the curriculum, and showcase your career/industry when appropriate. I love the JA now offers quick 5-10

minute lesson prep videos on YouTube to help remind volunteers what they'll be doing in each lesson - many times I will watch these videos before I leave the office to go to my lesson.

Q. Why do you think it's important for students to have JA?

A. I've heard the argument from many employers and parents that graduating students lack the basic life skills that adults need to be successful - basic financial literacy and understanding debt, soft/professional skills, cooperation and collaboration with peers, etc. Junior Achievement exposes these concepts to students from a very young age and reinforces how the skills they are learning in school are used in the real world.

Q. What are any "side benefits" of participation in JA that you might see- either for yourself as a volunteer, or the students or teachers that you have worked with?

A. The big change I've recognized in my JA instruction since my very first JA program compared to today is my project management skills. My first-time teaching Grade 2 students how to make paper donuts did not go well because I wasn't clear or specific with giving directions. Now I am very thorough with giving detailed instructions to students and demonstrating each part of the activity FIRST before having the students begin an activity. I've noticed I am a much more efficient at doing my job and collaborating on multiple projects with different organizations because my communication and project management skills have improved.