

turning point

By Lily Quan

Kim Beatty



How a sudden inspiration helped Kim Beatty turn over a new leaf and introduce thousands of inner-city children to reading.

After a 20-year career, lawyer Kim Beatty, 50, realized that the courtroom, though intellectually challenging, couldn't provide the emotional fulfillment she craved. "I wanted to use my brainpower to help the world in a more tangible way," she says.

But how? Her volunteer interests were broad: she'd organized book drives and collected hockey equipment for her sons' school. She was always looking for ways to responsibly recycle the usable "stuff" that families outgrow; she'd just finished a drive for the Furniture Bank, a charity that collects furniture for people moving out of shelters.

In one dazzling moment, the ideas came together. "I said, 'My God, a book bank!' It's perfect...it has all the elements that I love."

Kim envisioned a place where any child could take home a book for free. She sought expert advice, then found a space for rent near Regent

Park, a low-income neighbourhood in Toronto. Her husband, an investment banker, offered to help with expenses. She stopped practising law and, in May 2008, opened The Children's Book Bank.

The book bank resembles a cosy bookstore, its shelves lined with gently used children's books collected from monthly community book drives. Children can drop by with a parent or a school group, and select one free book per day. In its first year, the charity gave away 40,000 books.

Parents, teachers and community leaders praise Kim, who does not receive a salary for her full-time work - four days a week staffing the storefront, in addition to collecting books. She keeps a thick file of thank-you letters from overjoyed children.

"It's such a dream to be here," beams Kim, who has found the niche she was looking for. "How could I prefer law to this?" **hm**

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