

# THE SELF-REG JOURNEY OF Early Years Leader Hillary Freeburn

In my current role as the Early Years Lead at Superior-Greenstone District School Board, I have the opportunity to spend time in all of our schools and to collaborate with some of the most committed educators and staff. In my personal life, I am the Mom to 2 amazing children, who help me daily learn and grow. Sometimes they are the provokers of my Self-Reg but more often than not they are the providers of Self-Reg for me.

## Why Self-Reg

The educators, ECEs, support staff and administrators I was working with shared how some of our students were struggling, and everyone wanted to help. I knew that we needed to look at our children differently and the quote by Stuart, "see a child differently and see a different child" hit me to the core. I dived into TMC's Self-Reg in Early Child Development Certificate. With every reflection and every conversation between Susan and Stuart I made connections to what I was seeing in schools. It created a life-altering learning experience that changed my outlook not only professionally as an educator but also as a mother. I couldn't unsee or unfeel what I was learning all around me.

## Big Picture

My excitement to share my learning became contagious. I included Stuart's quotes into my messages with staff, I noticed and named the strategies that I was seeing that were supporting Self-Reg and asked many questions. I had already experienced how Self-Reg changed my parenting and it was bringing me to a place of calm, peace and joy in my relationships with my children. I wanted that for other families too. With support from our Director of Education, Nicole Morden-Cormier, we ran a virtual parent book study of Stuart's book Self-Reg. I put it out on our board's social media and quickly filled the 10-person group with a wait list of 12 additional individuals interested. Once parents started talking about Self-Reg in their schools and communities' teachers and staff began to take more of an interest and wanted to know more too. I also planned a 3-part session with the Elementary school secretaries to discuss their important role as regulators of each of their buildings. This group was highly engaged and left feeling empowered to have an impact on the relationships they have with students, staff and families.

Sessions with administrators, board office staff, occasional teachers and our child care partners (Child Care & EarlyON) all helped our school communities learn more about not only the importance they play in the Self-Reg of students in our schools but also the importance of their own Self-Reg and the benefits it has on our own well-being. Changes have been seen throughout the system at all levels.

## Process at this Point

Professionally, I will continue to support Self-Reg in our entire school system, at all levels. It isn't simply something for Early Years. There are ongoing plans to continue to be responsive to the groups who this learning will be timely for. Ongoing conversations around Self-Reg through School Councils and PIC meetings will bring us together with the mutual goal of working together to better ourselves for children. The beautiful part about the

Self-Reg Journey is you may not know what the next step is YET. It may come to you in an interaction, an experience or reflection.



## Challenges

We have had many opportunities to grow and to change the status quo. Initially when I began asking "why" questions I saw that some educators would get frustrated because the conversation wasn't going where it may have veered in the past. With this shift, we had to take a step back and many times look at our own actions and behavior and how they were impacting a student's ability to regulate adaptively. This process is difficult because it becomes personal and we have to be vulnerable and reflective with others in a safe environment. Over time, there have been shifts in mindset and much less resistance to being reflective. Our conversations have truly become student-centered.

## Fond Memory

My most fond memories are of my own parenting revelations! One memory stands out for me clearly. I have a sign in my home that says, "it's the little things." My 7-year-old daughter asked me what it meant, and I told her that one day she will be somewhere and if she keeps soft eyes and an open heart that she will experience "the little things." Later that summer, I saw her sitting on a little rock by the water. She sat there for almost 30 minutes. Not moving simply sitting and humming a little tune. Later she came to me and said, "Mommy, I think I know what you were talking about. It IS the little things." Self-Reg has allowed our family to see, appreciate and hold the "little things" close to our hearts.

## Hope

Initially I thought this learning would be similar to other professional learning I have done. Absorb the theory, identify the strategies and implement. When I speak to others about Self-Reg I can only connect it to my own experiences and share my lived experiences and learning. It isn't something you can direct or dictate. It needs to be lived. There is no place for judgement or expectations. You need to forgive yourself when you make mistakes because you will. The learning doesn't stop but neither does the growth and strength in the relationships and connections you will have while having a Self-Reg mindset.