



## Service dog at her side, Saginaw Township Spanish teacher aims to inspire

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**SAGINAW TOWNSHIP, MI** — Meagan Muladore knows what is different can be unsettling.

That makes the foreign language teacher at Heritage High School in Saginaw Township embrace those differences even more.

Muladore, 27, navigates her classroom and the school hallways using a motorized chair. She has assistance from a yellow English Labrador retriever named Link.

"This is my normal. I don't know anything different," she said. "Everyone has difficulties, it's just some are more visible than others."

A Saginaw Township native, Muladore has cerebral palsy, a disorder that affects her movement. She has limited movement in her left hand, and Link picks up anything she drops.

"Different tends to be scary," she said. "When people see me, they see the chair. Once they get to know me, they don't see it."

Embracing differences in culture and language has taken her to Costa Rica four times and to Montreal. She's speaks Spanish and French and also has studied Latin, Chinese and German.

And now she's bringing those experiences and open-minded attitude back to her students.

Muladore is a 2005 Heritage High School graduate, and she earned her bachelor's degree at Saginaw Valley State University.

She has passion for the languages and cultures she teaches.

"She is eternally happy as an individual. She always has a smile on her face," said Doug Trombley, Saginaw Township Community Schools superintendent. "She's very welcoming. I think the students feel that."

Muladore has an unwavering passion for education and is committed to her students, he said.

Muladore gets to her job early, stays late and goes out of her way to make sure her students get the help they need, said Mike Newman, Heritage High School principal.

"Meagan's got a fantastic attitude. She's extremely positive all the time," he said.

### **Help from Link**

Link and Muladore have been together for three years, and their bond is evident.

He rests his head on Muladore's knee, foot or chair and watches her with his dark brown eyes.

When his vest is off and he's not on duty, Muladore said he's a regular dog. Link sleeps on her bed and loves to play.

While he's at school, student volunteers take him outside a few times a day.

"He helps me with so much," Muladore said. "I drop stuff all the time."

The lab is trained to pick up paper, but sometimes he eats it, she said with a laugh. Yes, that means the dog could eat someone's homework.

"Even service dogs aren't perfect," she said.

### **Committed to education**

One of Muladore's goals is for her students to learn to value human interactions in person, rather than through technology.

Language and culture is a natural way to learn, and she shares her stories of studying abroad as examples.

She first studied abroad in Costa Rica as a student at SVSU. Her host family speaks no English. She became so close to her family, she's visited them three times since.

Muladore said she loves the affectionate Costa Rican culture, and the country is where she learned to try new things, such as cow tongue. She was hesitant to eat it, but thought, "why not?" In the end, she enjoyed it.

Being in another country also showed Muladore how much she can adapt. Rice and beans, which Muladore didn't like, are a Costa Rican staple. She learned to like them, she said.

Muladore's inquisitiveness and love of learning is a benefit to her students, Trombly said. Her ability to look at

things from another viewpoint can help her in explaining the same perspective in another way to her students, he said.

"Meagan is a fantastic person, and we're glad to have her here," he said.

— *Lindsay Knake covers education for MLive/The Saginaw News. Follow her on **twitter** or contact her at 989-372-2498 or **lknake@mlive.com**.*

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