

# Perspectives... *on the Journey*

Student Open Circles Newsletter

## Student Open Circles Making a Difference

- Over 300 students giving 10,000 hours of community service each year
- 20–25 teams volunteering every week
- Hundreds of M<sup>c</sup>Master University students involved in Weekly Reflection Groups, Events, Personal Discovery Courses, and Retreats



I'm amazed how quickly students are transformed by the kind of community they experience with us in Student Open Circles and, as Patsy says, begin to "create the same attentive and encouraging presence for other students." Kyle's story shows how he learned to listen to others and create space for them to really be themselves. Whether taking the bus together to a weekly volunteer group, reflecting on a service experience, or leading a discussion at an event, these young adults are blossoming into leaders who practice presence, ask deep questions, and inspire others to be their best selves. Last night at a planning meeting, a student was expressing doubts about whether she has anything to offer in a leadership role. Another student enthusiastically spoke up with a deep exploration of the many gifts she sees in the doubting person and invited her to take more initiative to offer these gifts to others. Many times I'm full of wonder as I witness these young people becoming spiritual companions to each other, inviting others into the same kinds of reflection that they've experienced with Jeff or myself.

Thank you for your support as we walk with students like Patsy who, while "lost and dry," find a nourishing place in Open Circle where they can grow into who they are and offer their gifts to the world. We value your partnership with us!

— Marybeth Leis Druery

## Volunteers Speak

Even the smallest interaction can make a difference in somebody's life. Even if it cannot be immediately seen or ever measured, I have learned to simply appreciate the time you spend volunteering and to believe in my own ability to impact others in a positive way.

— Student Volunteer



*Student Open Circles volunteers prepare nutritious snacks and a healthy breakfast each day at Dr. Davey School in Hamilton's Beasley neighbourhood*

## Asking Questions

by Kyle Oosterman

*Student facilitator of a volunteer group at LAF afterschool program*

Becoming more aware and introspective has been the most meaningful way in which our regular student leader meetings have enriched my year. Specifically, one week's theme of asking meaningful questions prompted me to consider the intent of my questions that I ask my volunteer group members and the children I tutor. This reflection provided me with a new goal to become more conscious of what types of questions I ask, whether my questions allow for a meaningful dialogue, and how such questions are interpreted. Do my questions allow for a space where others feel they can share responses that are meaningful *to them*? Since that meeting, I have been more attentive to the questions that I ask on a daily basis. This has been incredibly valuable in the relationships that I've built in my volunteering role, and in my life overall.



There have been many highlights from being a volunteer group facilitator, including forming strong bonds with other volunteers, making lasting memories, and learning about myself as a person. The student leader training meetings have given me space to discover more about myself and to form many goals. The reflections have given material that I've incorporated both in my role as a facilitator and during my life in general. For this, I am very grateful.

## Taking a Step for Others & Myself

by Patsy Lee, Open Circle student

The first time I encountered Student Open Circles I was in my first year at McMaster and part of another club that was collaborating to plan an event with Open Circle. I remember the relaxing and warm atmosphere as Marybeth facilitated the meetings, encouraging us to listen and value each person's thoughts and presence.

In my second year I was more immersed in school than before, and eventually realized that I consistently felt lost and also dry. Over the Christmas break I remembered my thoughts about Open Circle from my first year, and decided to try out a Reflection Circle. It was one of the first times I had taken a step to respond to what I felt was needed in my life at school and, although I was scared and did not know what to expect, I was not sure what else to do.

The Reflection Circle, facilitated by Marybeth, became a weekly event in my life because of both the confidentiality and the warmth that it brought into me. My heart began to reawaken. That semester, the theme was "Vulnerabilities," and through drawing, meditating, free discussion, reading, and sometimes just sitting there, the small group cultivated an inviting and valuing environment where I could slowly explore what I had been feeling. I began to value my pain, sadness, and insecurities and met others who also shared in my questions and curiosities. In that way I began to value myself and also others.

I am currently in my third year at McMaster, and in addition to being a devoted participant at a Reflection Circle, I am also a part of the Open Circle planning team for various events so that I can help to create the same attentive and encouraging presence for other students. Although I will not say that I am now completely at peace with my vulnerabilities, Open Circle has been an invaluable resource and also a community of support and friendship. Each time I attend a Reflection Circle or planning meeting I am reminded of how lucky I was in first year when I stumbled upon this community; it was by chance I took a step forward, but now I gladly walk to help Open Circle flourish where I can.



*Student Open Circles volunteers are mentors and role models every day of the week at afterschool programs throughout downtown Hamilton.*

## Agencies Speak

The student volunteers are outstanding, responsible, energetic, and reliable. The residents they serve, who all are living with disabilities, thoroughly enjoy the enthusiasm with which they arrive for the afternoon and their dedication. Having a group of young volunteers enables the residents to get more one on one time. It is a wonderful and vital part of the weekly routine at Conway. The residents light up when the volunteers arrive. They come out of their rooms or plan ahead to do something with some of them. Sometimes the simplest of gestures like pushing a wheelchair one block to get an ice cap is worth a million and endless smiles and thank you's. The service you provide for us is outstanding and for that we feel very grateful!

— Kim McDonald  
Conway Opportunity Homes

## Student Open Circles

### How to Donate

Student Open Circles relies on the generosity of individuals and groups. To make a tax-receiptable donation, please make cheques payable to Student Open Circles. Online donations, automatic monthly support, and donations of stocks and mutual funds are available at our website. Jeff's CD's and Marybeth's art, prints, and greeting cards are available on our website, with all proceeds supporting Student Open Circles.

Canadian Charitable Registration 891444309 RR0001

P.O. Box 57292, 2 King St. W.  
Hamilton, ON L8P 4X1

**289-426-5704**

Marybeth Leis Druery:  
leismb@mcmaster.ca

Jeff Druery: jdruery@mcmaster.ca

**StudentOpenCircles.com**