



Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – September 2015

Back to school!

This season of change means many things to many people. Anticipation is in the air! Students beginning their first year at University might feel excited yet “confused and awkward” as Stephanie describes. Some will get involved in Student Open Circles for the first time and, as Madeleine says, have “no idea what to expect.” Others look forward to continuing their journey of growth, like one person who e-mailed yesterday saying: “I’m getting more excited for the fall every day. More Open Circle soon! Looking forward to meeting next week to discuss more fall events!” And for those entering their final year of school, there’s often a sense of uncertainty as they face the question: “Now What?”

Thank you for your support as we embrace a new school year: meeting new students, deepening connections with those we know well, and mentoring new student leaders.

Marybeth & Jeff



Our summer volunteers at Pathways to Education high school tutoring program. Some of the Pathways program graduates are now McMaster students themselves!

“This year’s group of Student Open Circles volunteers has been excellent and highly engaged. They are an exceptional and reliable group and are among our best volunteers. We look forward to each day they are going to be here.”

– Jack Bernacki, staff at North Hamilton Community Health Centre (Pathways to Education)

Defining who I am as a leader by Madeleine Bondy, student facilitator

When I walked into my first Open Circle meeting one sunny September afternoon two years ago, I had no idea what to expect. What I found was a caring, open group waiting to welcome me to one of the best experiences of my undergrad. Student Open Circles has given me so many gifts. Listing these would take pages and pages so I’ll just focus on one, my growth as a leader. Marybeth and Jeff are wonderful mentors who have helped me over the course of my leadership journey and given me opportunities to shape and practice my skills, which I now continue to pass on to others. In my role as a facilitator of a volunteer group at Inasmuch Woman’s

Shelter where I witness the hardships of abuse, I strive to contribute as much as I have gained.

Student Open Circles has taught me to adhere to a set of values that includes respect, courage, collaboration, encouragement, and open dialogue. At the same time, I have realized that leadership is very complex. I have learned the importance of listening with full intention and at the same time remaining organized and on task, working within a team to assign individual roles to plan our various Open Circle events. This has turned out to be a very effective form of leadership that I will continue to practice.

Learning to reflect has been wonderful, helping me to clarify patterns and to see each experience as an opportunity for growth and persevering despite the challenges of life. Through my own process of reflection such as maintaining a journal, meditating, and being involved in Open Circle, I have become slower to anger, more patient, compassionate and understanding. This reinforces my own desire to live mindfully in the present, rather than dwell in the past and to focus on actions that can be taken now in order to avoid being overwhelmed or disheartened in the future. Reflection also helps me to remain true to my values of honesty and integrity. Student Open Circles has helped me to focus on the way I want to live and interact with others.

Our communities face more challenges than ever before. In the face of such significant problems, society will need to rely on the leadership of each member of the community. I am so grateful to Student Open Circles for helping me develop into a leader, and I know that this organization will continue to create a generation of leaders ready to become even larger agents of community change.



Madeleine, left, talking with Isha at an Open Circle retreat

From Confused to Empowered

by Stephanie Neufeld, *student volunteer group facilitator at Conway Opportunity Homes*



University is confusing. Coming from a small, conservative town, this is the first time in my life I was able to pursue different interests and ultimately be myself. This is a great opportunity to explore yourself, but without guidance it can be very overwhelming.

I first got involved with Student Open Circles in my first year, looking for a volunteer experience. I was scared to venture out into the city (I've never been on any type of city transit before, so this was my biggest worry) but Student Open Circles made that easy by having a facilitator go to the placement with my group. I loved my first year experience so much that I decided to become a group facilitator in my second year.

I started to learn more about the different programs that Student Open Circles offers like the Personal Discovery Courses. After feeling really confused and overwhelmed with my university life, this was the perfect solution. I was able to talk through my ideas with like-minded individuals, and identify different aspects of my life that needed support.

Looking back at the individual I was in my first week of university, I see a really awkward and confused girl. My experiences with Student Open Circles have given me the confidence and knowledge about myself to grow, and now I feel empowered to better my leadership skills even more. I know when the time comes to graduate I will have the skills I need to be independent and determined.



Stephanie with the volunteer group she facilitated at Eva Rothwell afterschool program

Upcoming this Year

In the community, 300 students volunteering in 22 weekly groups at:

- Conway Opportunity Homes
- Beasley Breakfast Program
- Eva Rothwell Community Centre
- Hamilton Mission Services
- HARRRP YOUth Create
- North Hamilton Community Health Centre
- Wesley Urban Ministries
- Welcome Inn Community Centre
- YMCA Newcomer Youth Centre

On campus, students participating in:

- Weekly Reflection Circles
- Spiritual Companionship
- Personal Discovery Courses
- Retreats and Events
- Student Leader training and mentoring



Reflection and potluck: our monthly series to follow up on a weekend retreat experience

Found on Facebook

Enthusiastic excerpts posted by Open Circle students:

- Fridays are awesome because it means it's the end of the week, but also because CREATIVITY CIRCLE IS ON FRIDAYS.
- IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT THAT WILL MAKE YOU VERY HAPPY: PERSONAL DISCOVERY COURSE 1 & 3 ARE COMING UP, SO YOU BETTER SIGN UP BECAUSE IT'S PROBABLY GOING TO BE THE BEST MONTH OF YOUR LIFE.

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 and greeting cards are available on our website, with all proceeds supporting Student Open Circles.

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