



# Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – December 2015

## Stories we find ourselves in...

“How can I know if the story I’m telling myself is life-giving?” inquired a student at one of our reflection circles. Every day, the students we journey with are examining stories. The stories they were raised with, the story of culture or faith, stories from society of want and inequality, the stories they hear inside themselves. It’s a particularly poignant stage in life for sifting through all these beliefs. Together we explore what stories are ringing true for them. What do they find truly life-giving? This is forming our Open Circle themes for the year: “Stories we find ourselves in - who we are, where we come from, and where we might go.”

You might remember Elise who had a mid-night crisis of story while in her first year of University. Now, three years later, she describes how her journey has unfolded since then. And how her own understanding of her story has deepened and changed over time; the same events taking on new meaning when looking back.

Thank you for your support as we walk with students during their young adult years, a time in life when they come to a deeper understanding of their own story and experience so much change and growth!

Marybeth & Jeff

## Googling for Guidance: *the Story Continues*

by Elise Desjardins, *Open Circle Student*



Elise shows her reasons for involvement in Open Circle reflections and volunteering

When I first discovered Open Circle I had been going through a difficult journey, unsure of my changing values and the growth I was experiencing. I had gone to Catholic school for 14 years and had always considered myself ‘religious.’ The values that had once guided me during that period of my life no longer resonated with me. I didn’t really have direction, but I was searching.

At the time I didn’t know what I needed to find, so in a state of wild frenzy at 2 a.m. as my sleeping roommate snored, I googled the words “McMaster spiritual guidance and reflection”. Or something along those lines. I had no idea what I would find. I remember thinking, “You are probably the first person to ever put those exact words into Google. The search won’t come up with anything.” But it did, I discovered spiritual companionship with Marybeth and Jeff. I emailed her two minutes later. I can only imagine that she doesn’t get emails very often at 2 a.m., but she responded the next day and we met later that week.

(continued on page 2)

## Matching Grant Opportunity!

For our new *Creating Communities that Transform* crowdfunding campaign the first \$1000 in donations will be matched thanks to a generous donor. You can make a donation here:

[www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/student-open-circles/crowdfunding2015](http://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/student-open-circles/crowdfunding2015)

and find out more about our charitable organization at StudentOpenCircles.com. Please check out our fundraising pages: we hope you will be inspired, as we are, by the stories and photos of our students, alumni and board members. Thank you!



Our Board of Directors prepares to launch our *Communities that Transform* fundraiser. Visit the campaign website to see their reasons for being involved. (not pictured here: Duygu Nangir, Lori Guenther Reesor, Allison Drew-Hassling)

## Googling for Guidance *(continued)*

As I've reflected on that evening over the past few years, I'm able to see now what I couldn't then. I needed a new way of looking at my relationship with a spiritual being. I needed a new way of directing the personal growth that I was living so that I could become the human being that I was meant to be. I needed to direct my passion by becoming involved in a social justice issue that mattered to me. I needed a community of people who valued reflection, awareness and growth.

I've learned that even if there are no right words to articulate what I need, simply asking is enough. Life knows and so does a deeper part of myself that I trust more and more every day. I am thankful every single day that I was brave enough to ask that evening. And that somehow life knew what I needed.

Open Circle is a space that is so sacred to me. This is a community of souls, and I say souls and not people or individuals because we connect and share at the soul level, and that difference has shaped me so much as a human being. As an inclusive space, I've learned to embrace diversity, to disregard the reality of prejudice that colors our vision in society. The abundance of varied personalities and cultures and spiritualities is refreshing and offers new perspectives. As a community of souls, we nurture awareness, respect, compassion, a willingness to be authentic, and a desire to be of service to those in need. The intention to live out these values doesn't end when our meetings do. This type of change makes waves in the broader community, as Open Circle members encourage these values in other clubs, courses, jobs, and in the city of Hamilton.

Over the past two years, I have attended the Creativity Circle led by Marybeth every week and have facilitated a meditative art activity once or twice. Open Circle weekly reflection circles are wonderful not only because of the diversity of students that participate every week and make the space feel safe. This allows me to feel comfortable in my own skin. This is something that I have struggled with a lot over the past three years. To be comfortable in my own authenticity, not to judge it or wish it were different, but to embrace it. And then to let others see me. I still struggle every day. But being part of Open Circle and having a community of souls who welcome my authenticity gives me courage. I live with the intention to be aware, authentic, kind, open and of service to others because I have grown with Open Circle.

Life can rarely be simplified as 'Before' and 'After', but the gradual change and growth that I experienced is definitely rooted in the community that I have found in Open Circle. If I'm being honest, I chose to come to McMaster because there was something about this campus and this city that resonated with me. It instantly felt like home. I'm not studying exactly what I would have wanted to because it wasn't offered at McMaster, but close enough. I had to be here. I had to live here and experience this community. Three years ago, I didn't know why. I do now.



### Student Open Circles volunteers are mentors for children at Learning And Fun (LAF) and other afterschool programs

Marc\* is in grade 2 and struggles with ADHD. Focusing on his work is difficult for him and at times he can become easily frustrated and behavioural issues arise. He has also had a tough year at home after being removed by CAS from his mother's care and placed with his father and stepmother. Throughout this year Marc has really appreciated being a part of the LAF afterschool program. His Student Open Circles volunteer mentors have worked hard to create a safe space for him and he is happy to see them each week. Marc says "My mentors are my friends. They help me try harder on my homework." Marc has also built great rapport with the whole group of volunteer mentors. He is usually the last one to be picked up each day but mentors have let him join in on their reflections. Before leaving they've all given him high fives or hugs and left with cheerful goodbyes or encouraging words. Instead of feeling left behind Marc thinks of himself as special because he gets to be there with the volunteers he so admires!"

– Gladys Flores, Children's Programs Coordinator,  
Welcome Inn Community Centre

*\*name & photo changed*

## Student Open Circles

Canadian Charitable Registration 891444309 RR0001

### 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.

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**