



Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – August 2016

Whether it's reflecting together after volunteering by drawing on a page, role-playing in a leadership meeting to solve a problem, or journal writing in a reflection circle, there is something about engaging our creative selves that helps young people to trust each other and to go deeper. Creative expression practices are highly valued and appreciated by students in our programs. Robyn, Maddie, and Marybeth share stories about how creativity makes a difference in their lives and communities. Thank you for your support as we nurture the creativity, growth, and contributions of young adults.

Marybeth & Jeff

Safe Space for Trusting Connections by Robyn Beckett, Open Circle student



Robyn (right) on a silent hike during an Open Circle retreat (clearly this wasn't the silent part of the hike!)

Open Circle is different compared to any other aspect of my life. I take part in the weekly Creativity Circle that allows me to express myself out loud and through art. Before this, I felt like I had no way to artistically or creatively express myself. Not only has Creativity Circle provided me with weekly creative expression, it has also helped me to appreciate other aspects of my life that are or can be forms of creative expression.

An added bonus are the friendships I have made through Open Circle. The nonjudgmental, kind, caring, and encouraging atmosphere within Open Circle has allowed me to open up to these friends and to build deep, trusting connections with them. I've learned so much from these friends. I believe they have opened up in the same way I have and in doing so have shared so much of their wisdom with me. Because of the creative expression and chance to see these friends, I look forward to Open Circle meetings every week.

A Vision for My Community: volunteers reflect on hope

by Marybeth Leis Druery, Student Open Circles staff

Reflecting on our hopes for the community we serve, our Friday morning breakfast volunteer group began our weekly reflection with a reading of a quote (left). I then led the group into a process of creating a collaborative poem. Here's what the group created:

Hope is a powerful force that can facilitate change.
The kids' bright light of openness, creativity,
caring and resilience
softens the morning and my heart.
Hope is about believing in a better future,
For me it is recognizing that my hope isn't limited
to my personal ambitions
but hope can also be my vision for my community
Doing what I can do to engage in the community
True hope is realistic
Recognizes the hardships that come along with it
I hope these kids gain confidence
and have good days at school
That more kids come to enjoy the breakfast
Hope is a reason to continue
to put your best effort forward
You're never too old to try something new
To be loved and know we are loved,
worthy and gifted

Hope, unlike optimism, is rooted in unalloyed reality... Hope is the elevating feeling we experience when we see – in the mind's eye – a path to a better future. Hope acknowledges the significant obstacles and deep pitfalls along that path. True hope has no room for delusion. (Jerome Groopman)



Bringing Creativity and Compassion to Life

by Maddie Gritzan, *Open Circle student and volunteer group facilitator*



I started going to Open Circle because I had a desire for more reflective time in my day. I felt like I was enjoying university, but it was going by too fast and I wasn't taking moments to breathe and discuss my experiences. In my second year I took the Personal Discovery Course. This was a four week "course" (there was no grading) that allowed people to explore their values, their life mission, and discuss these as they unfold in their lives. I think university can be a kind of scary time for individuals, where we are "supposed" to figure out who we are or where we are going afterward, but this pressure leaves a lot of us just feeling disoriented.

Following this, I started getting involved with Open Circle in other capacities: through weekly reflection circles on spirituality, simple living, and creativity. Going to Creativity Circle became an important part of my week. I started to re-evaluate my notion that creativity was limited to specific art mediums. The ways

we meditate, the ways we reflect, and the ways we interact with others are equally artistic. Creativity is a valuable part of my mental health, my personal growth, and my connection to others. Open Circle helped me develop the idea of 'living creatively.' Creativity doesn't just turn on and off depending on the activity at hand. It can permeate everything I do — how I work, how I interact with loved ones, how I make choices in my life, and how I serve.

Soon I began volunteering with and facilitating volunteer groups at an after school program and a breakfast program. These volunteer experiences have helped me expand my ideas about the art of being compassionate to others. While compassion can be very heavy and it can require a lot of time and effort, it can also be very simple: a smile at a stranger, simply acknowledging that they are there and deserve warmth and attention. I have realized through my volunteer experience that it is very possible to slip into being selectively compassionate; that individuals could turn this compassion "on" while at a volunteer program working with children, pat themselves on the back for doing something good in the community and then leave. This switch could be seen as soon as the trip back to campus - while walking past someone asking for money downtown.

Every volunteer session with our Student Open Circles' volunteer groups includes a reflection activity at the end, where we discuss and challenge ideas like this. We reflect on how we fit into the community at large, what good we are doing, how to creatively meet needs but also the limitations that exist in our work. We discuss how we can extend our volunteer experience into the rest of our lives: that being compassionate and giving to others can go beyond the two hour block of scheduled volunteering in our week.

Student Open Circles, through volunteering and reflection, has helped me learn to be compassionate without judgment. I think it can be easier to be compassionate to some people, but I feel challenged and called to be compassionate to people when it's not easy. By thinking of others and how to help them, I have learned more about myself, my values, and how I want to contribute to my future communities. I'm graduating now and I don't feel that disorienting feeling about the future — I think it's been my service to others and my reflection on my experiences that has really helped me with this.



Maddie (second left) at Creativity Circle, who says: "creativity is a valuable part of my mental health, my personal growth, and my connection to others"

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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 music 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