



Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – November 2016

Fast Facts

- 22 teams volunteer each week
- Over 300 students give 10,000 hours of service each year
- Over 100 students involved in weekly Reflection Groups, Events, Personal Discovery Courses, and Retreats

Helping Kids

We have one grade 2 student that was in JK when he started coming to the program. He never spoke to anyone, but the volunteers included him, and wow what a difference! It was even noticed in the classroom where he would talk about “his big friends in breakfast program.”

— Suzanne Giovannetti,
Dr. Davey Breakfast Club

I love coming to LAF because I get help with my homework and no one judges me.

— Anthony, Grade 8

Programs like ours could not run without your support. — Tom Wittreich,
LAF Afterschool Program

Students tell us that they need a place to step out of the frantic pace of school and reflect on what matters most in their lives. Emily, Alex, and Simon’s stories show how Student Open Circles creates this safe place to stay grounded, to be more empathetic towards others, and to gain a broader perspective. Thank you for your support as we engage young adults in quiet reflection, supportive community, and making a positive difference in the lives of others!

Marybeth & Jeff

You don’t have to do it alone

by Alex, Open Circle Student



I recently completed six years of university study. Upon completing my undergrad degree I returned for a Master’s in Kinesiology and to continue playing rugby for McMaster. I had to delay the start date of my grad studies after sustaining a severe concussion that sidelined me from almost all aspects of life and upon returning to school half a year later I definitely wasn’t well enough to continue playing rugby. I had always been extensively involved in extra-curricular activities and so this was a confusing and challenging time for me.

Shortly after starting my Master’s I discovered Open Circle and attended an open house to learn more. I immediately realized this was a group I could become involved in, not simply to pick up another hobby to fill space in my life; but rather to create space and inquire (in a playful manner) about life itself. I participated in multiple personal discovery courses, weekly meditation meet-ups, one on one spiritual mentoring sessions, and overnight retreats. This provided me with an avenue to engage in perhaps the most fundamental kind of study, and though one does not need much to do so, it is far too easy to get lost along the path. Open Circle provides a framework to do this kind of essential work. A spiritual mentor of mine says, “You have to do it yourself, but you don’t have to do it alone.” I am very thankful to Jeff and Marybeth, the excellent facilitators of Open Circle, as well as the rest of the crew, for providing me with an opportunity to realize what is truly important to me and steer my path in a direction that is conducive with my values and mission toward a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Changing Lives for 15 Years!

Student Open Circles has been *Changing Lives for 15 Years*, and we’re celebrating with a crowdfunding campaign to take us into the next 15! Launching on Giving Tuesday (Nov. 29), the **first \$1,000 in donations will be matched** thanks to a generous donor. You can make a donation at:

[www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/
student-open-circles/crowdfunding2016](http://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/student-open-circles/crowdfunding2016)

Please check out our team pages: we hope you will be inspired, as we are, by the stories and photos of our students, alumni and board members. Thank you!



(right) Dulani, one of our student leaders, shows how Student Open Circles changed her life

Staying Grounded by Emily Scott, *Open Circle Student*



Open Circle has been a source of peace for me ever since I first went to the retreat over a year ago. This was the first environment I had been in that incorporated spirituality and meaning in a way that was inviting, accepting, and encouraging. In the fast paced university environment, it can be difficult to slow down and cultivate an awareness of the present moment, and open circle is the place where I got to do that. Instead of running off to class in a hurry, I would calmly stroll through the crowds of students after a quiet and contemplative hour of meditation or discussion. This kept me grounded, open-minded, and in tune with my spiritual beliefs throughout the year. I am thankful for Marybeth and Jeff, who have an amazing ability to facilitate these experiences without taking an authoritative approach. Instead, they have provided space for myself and others to consider what is most important to us,

and to see the world in a new way. It is easy to let my schedule fill up and not make time for Open Circle events, but whenever I do I am always thankful for it.

Eyes Opened by Simon Haeri-Hendy, *Open Circle Volunteer Group Leader*



Week after week as I volunteered with the LAF afterschool program over the past 3 years, I could see how important the volunteers are to the kids. They look forward to spending time with the volunteers, playing games, and getting help with their homework. More importantly, they started to open up to us and gain trust towards us. They would see us every week with a big smile, as if we've just brightened up their whole day. And they see us as their friend, someone who they can look up to and see as a role model. They treasure these moments, even if they don't always want to admit it.

As university students, we take so many things for granted, and when I would hear some of the kids talking about the hardships they face at home it allowed me to become more humble and realize all of the positive aspects in my life. Even when there

were problems or conflicts with the kids, we would use our reflection time after volunteering to clear things up and to fully understand everyone's perspective. This allowed me and other volunteers to become less judgmental and to be more empathetic towards others and their circumstances.

Volunteering each week with Student Open Circles taught me to be aware of myself and to reflect on my goals. The importance of this cannot be overstated. I feel that most people will ignore this part of their life since there are so many other "urgent" things to worry about. Taking a few minutes to myself to think about what I'm doing, why I'm doing it, my strengths, weaknesses and so on, helped me to become self-aware and improve on my well-being overall. It is the cognitive dissonances, the mountains of stress piled onto us as a university student, and external pressures that we sometimes live with that cause tension in our mind. Reflecting on yourself helps clear your mind, look from a broader perspective, and improve on your self-esteem. Student Open Circles allowed me to become fully aware of what my goals and expectations are and I have never been so confident in what my passions are. I've been able to look at my strengths and weaknesses and improve upon them. Just as an example, I found it very difficult to be assertive and act as a leader. My nature was usually to be the follower. However, when I reflected on what it truly meant to be a leader, I realized that it's not necessarily the extroverted authority that we are all accustomed to seeing. Instead, it is about motivating change and inspiration in others, to facilitate and guide others to grow. For all these reasons, I have been so grateful for what I have learned in these three years and it's the reason why volunteering with Student Open Circles was one of the most unique and eye-opening experiences I've had through my undergraduate years.

Student Open Circles

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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 CD and Marybeth's art and greeting cards are available on our website, with all proceeds supporting Student Open Circles.

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