



Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – November 2017

Spreading Compassion

Our world needs more compassion. Whether it's the at-risk youth in the inner city who needs mentorship, social support, and help with their homework from weekly volunteers like Justin, or whether it's a university student like Jonathan who has been engaged in a lonely search for meaning, we all need the support of people who truly care about us. At its heart, compassion means to "suffer with" – to walk with each other in the midst of the struggles and challenges of life. To learn it, we need to experience it firsthand. Student Open Circles is creating places of belonging, where students can receive the care and support they need, and then reach out and spread that care to others in practical and life-changing ways. It's like a mini "School of Compassion," where the curriculum is mostly caught, rather than taught. Thank you for your support as we equip and empower young people to create a more compassionate world!

Marybeth & Jeff

Mentoring At-Risk Youth is Heartwarming

by Justin Brunet, student and volunteer group facilitator

I volunteer and facilitate a volunteer circle at Pathways to Education, a tutoring program for at-risk high school students at North Hamilton Community Health Centre. Not only do we assist in homework and assignments, we also act as a mentor and social support system for these students.

Helping and interacting with the same students every week for over a year has been extremely rewarding. Knowing that students, who may not have a mentor at home or school, are excited to see you at Pathways and specifically ask for your tutoring help is heartwarming. I have seen several students grow academically and emotionally over the past year that I would not have otherwise seen if volunteering inconsistently. Student Open Circles has provided such a positive and rewarding experience for me and offers an amazing opportunity for volunteers. The volunteers who have worked with me at Pathways continuously tell me that they enjoy being there each week and have provided large amounts of positive feedback!

What makes Student Open Circles stand out from other organizations is the post-volunteering reflections each week. Facilitating creative and rich reflections as a volunteer circle facilitator allows me to build on my strengths and weaknesses, and gain a deeper emotional understanding of my values. Volunteers have told me that the reflections have made their service experiences more positive and enriching. Student Open Circles has undoubtedly changed my view on the importance of volunteering and self-reflection, and I would not trade this for anything else.

Help Spread Compassion

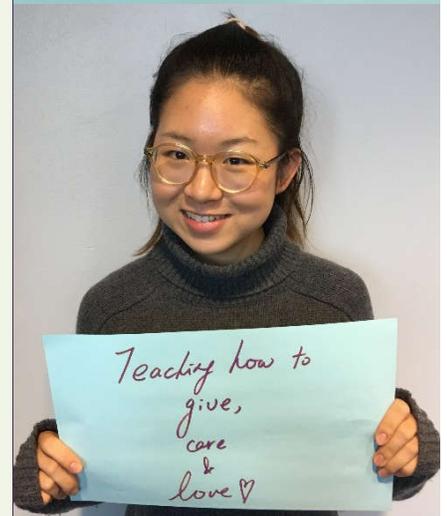
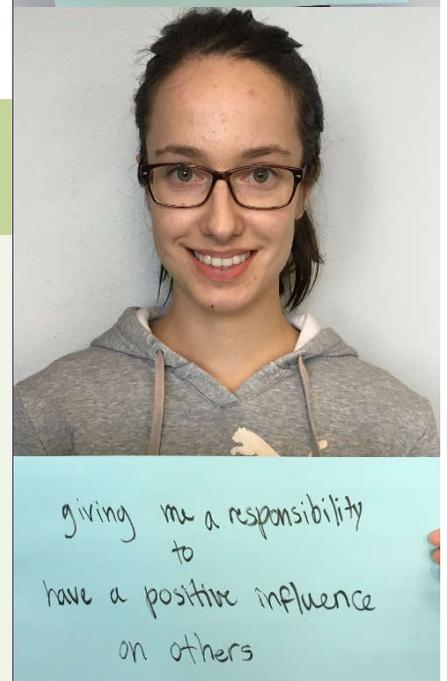
Join Our Crowdfunding Campaign!

Launching on Giving Tuesday (Nov. 28), the **first \$1,500 in donations will be matched**, thanks to a generous donor. You can make a donation at:

www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/student-open-circles/p2p/crowdfunding2017

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

Student Open Circles Spreads Compassion by...



Looking for ways to fix myself

by Jonathan Ong, Open Circle student



For most of my life, I've identified myself as a socially awkward child with a whole bunch of weird interests and few real friends. While most people were partying and hanging out with friends in high school, I spent my free time on the shore of Lake Ontario fishing for trout with my father. While most people were into contemporary music, I enjoyed 80's music, jazz, and J-pop. While most people played video games, I cooked for fun. Painfully aware of my loneliness, I began to look online for ways I could "fix" myself—I began on my journey of self-discovery and personal development. It was an avenue through which I could channel my energy and pain.

Fast forward through high school, two years in the Singapore Army, and first year of university, I had made my way through various influential texts, such as the Tao Te Ching and the Bhagavad Gita, as well as the works of several individuals, including Eckhart Tolle, Joseph Campbell, and Bruce Lee.

Despite having grown a lot, I was still very much on my own. If anything, I had used what I learned to construct a barrier between myself and others—an excuse for my loneliness, and a way to separate myself from those who I felt did not appreciate or understand how I viewed the world.

It was during Clubsfest of my second year at McMaster that I found Open Circle. I was glad that I had found a community to journey with on campus and was eager to learn more. I attended the introductory event, Soulstuff, and was instantly sold. I was impressed by the large array of approaches to personal development made available.

I immediately got involved with the club through attending its events and reflection circles. Over time, I gradually became more open to those around me and began to incorporate what I learned from Open Circle into my personal journey. Although it was often hard to figure out my boundaries and how much I wanted to share, I knew that it was something I wanted to work on. It was a way I could break the jadedness of my heart and reconnect with others. Even today, as I continue to unlearn my individualistic paradigm on spiritual development in finding a better balance, I am confident that I will succeed, knowing that I have the support of everyone in the group. From the start, I have always felt valued and loved, regardless of my quirks—it is something I am eternally grateful for, and something that keeps bringing me back to the community we have created at Open Circle.

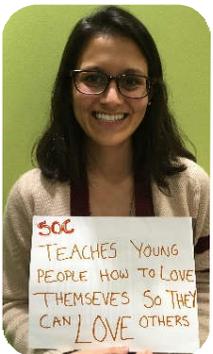
Author's Note: Now that it is 2:39 am and I want to sleep, I'd like to end by sharing a song that reflects everything I have shared and distilled it into something far more enjoyable and succinct: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XN7v-3k-bbc. Enjoy!

Open Circle student leader training activity



Alumni Corner: Continuing to Spread Compassion after Graduating

by Kala Grant, Student Open Circles alumni and board member



Last April I set off with 10 co-workers to build a school and educate a small community in Nicaragua for 9 days. This was my first opportunity to practice and teach (the best I could) mindful leadership: the act of slowing down and focusing, in order to make thoughtful decisions. Our group of volunteers was unique. What we all had in common was that we all worked in a fast paced tech based company. Our daily lives consisted of making phone calls, answering emails, ensuring customers were happy, negotiating with some difficult people, working late when needed and trying to get enough rest that night so we could wake up the next day and be amazing at our jobs all over again.

Leading up to the trip, I was having a fair bit of anxiety trying to figure out exactly what kind of impact I could possibly have. I was used to sitting behind an air conditioned desk and had enough trouble opening doors, let alone lifting 40 pound bricks and digging 5 foot ditches in humid 30 degree plus weather!

I was thrilled when our group leaders suggested that we reflect on our volunteer experience each day, because I knew what a positive impact it had, attending weekly reflection circles with Student Open Circles during my last year at McMaster. Naturally, I felt drawn to leading these daily reflections, and a resource library provided by Jeff and Marybeth ended up being the key to some brilliant group insights, team bonding and discovering how to serve the community we found ourselves in!

It was a special experience and I have Student Open Circles to thank in my journey to help spread compassion.

To read a more detailed account of Kala's experience: www.StudentOpenCircles.com/newsletter/17-11/KalaStory

How to Donate

Canadian Charitable Registration 891444309 RR0001

- Please make cheques payable to Student Open Circles
- Mail to: Hamilton Hall 103, McMaster University
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- For online donations, visit our website

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