



Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – May 2018

Making Meaning-Full Connections

Student Open Circles helps young adults make connections that give meaning to life. For Yechan and Danya, it started with making a positive difference in the lives of children and youth through our volunteer groups. Reflecting with their peers helps them to connect their service with their motivations, values, growth, and plans to make meaningful connections to others in the future. And, as Danya describes, we provide additional supports for students on campus, helping young adults connect to spiritual, emotional, and mental health. Thank you for partnering with us in creating meaning-full connections!

Maybeth & Jeff

Nurturing spiritual, emotional, and mental health

by Danya El-Ahmed, Open Circle student and volunteer group facilitator

Student Open Circles has influenced my life in every way. Through the volunteer groups, I found my closest friends. I can't think of anything that can make people feel closer to each other than being in a space dedicated to giving. Also, despite initially finding it hard to find my voice and speak out in public, through reflections after volunteering each week, facilitators provided a safe space that allowed me to share comfortably. Since I became a volunteer group facilitator, I have developed my leadership skills and now feel confident talking and sharing a lot more than ever before. Most importantly though, it has allowed me to learn about my local community in a way that reading articles or attending classes rarely can. Meeting and connecting with Hamilton community members made me realize that I wanted a career and lifestyle that gave me opportunities to listen to and help empower my neighbors. I want to make sure I continue to immerse myself in the community to understand societal issues that otherwise I wouldn't be aware of.

Open Circle "helps me recalibrate my compass every time"

Through Student Open Circles' on-campus groups and events, I have learned (and continue to learn) to find myself and my motivations. It is easy in university to lose sight of what matters most, but the reflection circles, events, and extracurricular courses help me recalibrate my compass every time. Open Circle has such a positive influence on my spiritual, emotional, and mental health, I cannot imagine having had a wholesome university experience without everything it has provided me with.

Spring Volunteering Retreat

Our "Giving Back in Nature" retreat, where 30 of us gave a weekend to assemble boardwalks and restore nature trails that had been damaged in floods at Five Oaks Retreat Centre. When we weren't working outdoors, we engaged in soul-nurturing activities that provided much-needed perspective and rest from the usual stresses of school.



Full Circle: the child I mentored grows up

by Yechan Kim, student volunteer group facilitator



Throughout my life I have been involved in the community through school, church, volunteering, and extracurricular activities such as Air Cadets. As such, volunteering and helping the community was no stranger to me. But, once I was finished volunteering, that was the end of that. No take home messages, no chance to really reflect on what I am doing and how it is helping, and no space for growth. At the time, I thought that was all there was to volunteering.

Student Open Circles opened my eyes to other opportunities that volunteering can open up for me. I have been involved since my first year of undergrad as a volunteer, and currently as student-facilitator of the Learning and Fun (LAF) afterschool group on Tuesdays. I first heard of this group through a senior of mine who I looked up to and

considered as a role model. He was a facilitator for the LAF program, so I joined his group. The actual volunteering was a familiar scene to me because I had experienced working with children before. What made this different were the reflections that were led by the facilitator after every session. Reflection was a time to nurture volunteerism in the group, a safe place where all voices can be heard without judgments, and an opportunity for growth. It could range from open conversation to an activity that teaches about statistics and demographics of the people we are helping, or how we can become more mindful of others as well as ourselves. Volunteering was previously something that I could not take home, but Student Open Circles changed my mindset. Now, even if I am volunteering through a different organization, I still take time to reflect, even if it is by myself.

I have been with the LAF group for over 5 years. In LAF you are paired up with one or two at-risk children to mentor them throughout the year. So, volunteers really have a chance to build rapport with their mentee. One mentee in particular has left a considerable impression on me. I have known him since he started 7th grade and was there when he graduated from the program at the end of his 8th grade. I mentored him for two years, and if I had to describe him in a few words, I would say that he was full of energy towards playing but lacked academic enthusiasm despite being smart. Although we would always have a blast when it was activity time, it was a struggle to keep him on track with his studies. But over the years, it slowly became better and better. Once it was time to say goodbye to him, I was worried about what the future held for him, but was also excited for how much more he would continue to grow. It has been 3 years since he graduated from the program and I don't have to worry about or guess how he is doing right now, as he is volunteering with me for LAF. He is an honor roll student and he is considering his plans for post-secondary education. Every time he comes to LAF and tells me how he aced a test or about his future aspirations, I feel proud and nostalgic at the same time, because the young mentee that had trouble paying attention for 15 minutes on academics grew up to be this excellent student who is now thriving. By no means do I take all or significant credit for how he turned out, as I am aware that he had this potential in him all this time, but it is interactions like these that helped me decide to stay in Hamilton when decisions had to be made on which school to go to for graduate studies.

My young mentee that had trouble paying attention for 15 minutes on academics grew up to be this excellent student that is now thriving



(above) A Student Open Circles volunteer reads with his mentee at Welcome Inn's Learning And Fun Afterschool Program



(above) Food prep at Wesley Centre Soup Kitchen



(right) Leadership training for volunteer group facilitators; playing the "helium stick" game

How to Donate

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