



# Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – March 2019

## The Power of Listening

*Research on listening indicates that we spend about 80% of our waking hours communicating...*

*About 75 percent of that time we are forgetful, pre-occupied, or not paying attention*

*~ Kay Lindahl ~*

*In Student Open Circles, young adults are learning to listen. For many, it starts with tuning into their own questions and longings. Giving kindness and attention to their inner struggles and growth helps them to be more attentive and caring towards others. As Shantal describes, hearing people is not the same as listening to them. For Marisa, learning how to listen to herself has allowed her to be her best self and to care for others in a deeper way. In individual spiritual companionship, we help students to listen for where meaning is emerging in their life. Your support makes these listening spaces possible. Thank you!*

*Maybeth & Jeff*

## Everyone is Welcomed

by Shantal Martinez, Open Circle student

I have been going to Open Circle since the beginning of my first year. In my first year I really wanted to join a club that would take away stress instead of adding stress. Open Circle was perfect for me because I was not obligated to attend every session, I never felt I was not accepted, and every time I went was a little break I never knew I needed. Because of Open Circle, I believe I am more patient with myself and others.

Every week I try to go to at least one reflection session and really listen to people and myself. That is probably the biggest thing I have gained from Open Circle. It honestly took me a while to realize that hearing people is not the same as listening to them, and brushing off my feelings as insignificant does not mean I am not feeling something.

I know it isn't for everyone, but for the people who attend and really feel something every time they go, Open Circle is a little safe place where everyone is welcomed.



*Shantal (second from left) at our Winter Retreat*



*Creative practices in our reflection circles, retreats, and courses help students to give attention to their own questions, longings, and experiences*



## Learning to Listen

by Marisa Kohut, Student & Volunteer Group Facilitator



I started participating in Open Circle in September 2017, when I decided to break out of the engineering/grad student bubble and learn more about myself. Open Circle has given me a positive space to learn how to listen at a greater depth, allowing me to find and be my best self.

My first time engaging with Open Circle was through the Becoming Yourself series. This series taught me to listen to my inner life and how to use my inner self to guide me in my day to day life. During this course, I noticed Marybeth's ability to listen and create a comfortable space for growth to occur. One moment in particular that has shaped me this past year is when she asked us "how would you speak to your friends during difficult times" and then she asked, "how do you speak to yourself in difficult times?" Comparing my responses to both of these questions allowed me to notice how I need to be kinder to myself and I have since aimed to talk to myself like I would to my friends.

I was intrigued with what I learned from this experience and decided to continue learning from Jeff in the Personal Discovery Course, where he also demonstrated careful listening skills. I truly enjoyed being a part of these courses as they have helped me discover my values and lead a life that abides by them.

Last fall I joined a weekly volunteer group with Open Circle. I serve the community by mentoring high school students at Pathways to Education. Now, as a facilitator for a weekly volunteer group, I regularly attend leadership training meetings where I have been able to grow my experience from listening to myself to listening to

others. This has contributed to the sense of community I feel when being around my fellow volunteers and with the youth at Pathways to Education. When working with the students, I carefully listen to their concerns and difficulties and provide them with support accordingly. By attending weekly, I have been able to develop meaningful connections with them. My contribution to the community is noticeable as students walk into the tutoring center and are excited to share their accomplishments with me or are looking for me to assist them to tackle a problem. Each week after the youth leave, I facilitate a reflection activity with our group of volunteers, and that has provided me with the space to recognize and appreciate the contribution we are making in the community.

Thanks to Open Circle, I now treat myself with more kindness, have more meaningful connections with everyone in my life, and I am inspired to continue having an impact on my community. Moving forward, I believe the ability to listen will continue to support me on life's journey and be the foundation of my success in my career.



*Students sign up for weekly volunteer groups at our Volunteer Fair. Each year, more than 300 students give 10,000 hours serving at afterschool and nutrition programs for children and youth, shelters, and homes for adults with disability*

## How to Donate

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- Mail to: TSH B110, McMaster University  
1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, ON L8S 4M2

Canadian Charitable Registration 891444309 RR0001

289-426-5704

Marybeth Leis Druery: leismb@mcmaster.ca  
Jeff Druery: jdruery@mcmaster.ca

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