



Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – June 2019

Changing Lives in Hamilton 3538 Times

Every week, hundreds of Student Open Circles volunteers leave the university campus and go into the Hamilton community to make meals, provide homework help, assist adults with disability, conduct environmental cleanups, and mentor children and youth. When we add up how many people each group serves, the total is 3538. In this letter, we share just a few of the stories and comments from our community partners and our student leaders; we hope that it gives you an appreciation for the positive difference that Student Open Circles is making every week!

Maybeth & Jeff

Helping Future Generations by Emily Wagner, Volunteer group facilitator



Emily (right) with a few of the weekly volunteers in our Cootes Cleanup group

The staff at the Stewards of Cootes Watershed organization express that the number of clients our volunteers serve is: "One, but it's a big one: Mother Nature." Emily and our "Cootes Cleanup" volunteers conduct weekly cleanups and collect data in an environmentally sensitive area, and in the winter they analyze the data about contamination to waterways, sites of erosion, invasive species, algae blooms, and garbage dumping. Here are Emily's reflections:

I have been part of Open Circle for over a year now. I first got involved through the volunteer circles when I signed up for the Stewards of Cootes cleanup group. From there I met so many new people and had a number of terrific experiences. One example is when we were cleaning up near a waterfall, and there was a large black bag sitting in the river. Once it was removed, the rocks below looked beautiful after finally being open to the sun again.

Now as a facilitator, I have the opportunity to lead a group of volunteers into the watershed areas of Hamilton and participate in the big changes we are making to the Hamilton environment. I have picked up tires, straws, and even a chair during the many cleanups I have been a part of.

Not only were the cleanups fun and interesting, but they have had an impact on my future career goals. As a business student I am highly interested in working for a company that is making a positive impact on the environment and is striving to improve the world for future generations. I greatly appreciate the amazing work Open Circle is doing for McMaster students and the Hamilton community.

The Student Open Circles' volunteers are very enthusiastic and dedicated to completing their tasks. The new ideas they bring and the presentation they created will be very useful to recruit volunteers and spread our message. They bring a new perspective and fresh ideas to our approaches. (Denise Nacev, Stewards of Cootes Watershed Program Manager)

Planting Pollinators

At our recent volunteer retreat we completed a project that we started in the fall: planting a pollinator garden at Five Oaks retreat centre. The weekend was a chance for students to unplug from phones to reflect and relate to each other in a deeper way.



"There are so few opportunities in our hectic lives to get away and listen to ourselves and others in a distraction free space. This retreat has given me this blessing and I am going home ready to practice what I've learned"

Watch a video: bit.ly/2wnHEjf

Agencies Speak: How is Student Open Circles making a difference?

One of our residents is in a manual wheelchair and has limited mobility while in it. Often 2 of the volunteers will go out for a walk with him and push the wheelchair to the next corner so he can buy a Tim Hortons coffee. It is a highlight for him and something staff don't get to do for him very often. (Kim McDonald, Conway Opportunity Homes)



The kids love having them come in each week and we as an agency look forward to seeing them as they bring more support and positive role model figures for our children, youth and staff to learn from. (Jordan Baily, Eva Rothwell Centre)



Many of our program participants are facing significant personal challenges and our volunteers are stepping up to the challenge with real care and concern for our kids. It's a joy and a blessing to get to see these relationships blossom into real growth for our children. (Gladys Flores, Welcome Inn Community Centre)



Student Open Circles volunteers support the delivery of our Nutrition Program, read with students, and mentor Gr. 4 to 8 students, developing them in leadership and ownership of their school. Our older students developed a sense of advocacy and leadership working with the Student Open Circles volunteers on the nutrition program. Our younger students developed engagement around early reading with the volunteers. (Mary Finstad, Principal, Dr. Davey School)



We have some children who love to learn music and express themselves in the music room; however we do not have many musically inclined individuals to bring them in there and teach them something new, or help them grow in skills. It was amazing to see the Student Open Circles students ... open up the Music Room and run a music program. (Jordan Bailey)



The Student Open Circles volunteers present exciting new learning opportunities and enriching experiences for children residing at Inasmuch House who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence/abuse. They enhance the quality of care and services we offer and assist staff in providing therapeutic, trauma informed care. The children can get very worked up and rowdy during the excitement of having volunteers in playroom. The volunteers do a great job in trying to maintain a safe environment. The groups have been most helpful in taking the time to engage in one-on-one activities with children. (Nicole Gravina, Inasmuch Women's Shelter)

Having a reliable and ready group of volunteers with high academic ability is invaluable to our program and our youth participants. Having Student Open Circles recruit volunteers, coordinate them into groups, and have them ready to go, is an invaluable service for the Pathways to Education high school tutoring program. We could not do this without Student Open Circles, which has been an invaluable partner. (Jack Bernacki, North Hamilton Community Health Centre)



We could not have asked for a better group of volunteers! Youth LOVE to come on Wednesday because they know the Student Open Circles volunteers will be there! They all wish they had them in program every day because the one on one time they spend with the Youth make such a positive impact. (HARRRP YouthCreate program)

How to Donate

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- Please make cheques payable to Student Open Circles
- Mail to: TSH B110, McMaster University
1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, ON L8S 4M2
- For online donations, visit our website

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