



Student Open Circles

Perspectives Newsletter – December 2019

What sustains you? What does it mean to live sustainably? Students often struggle to choose habits and practices that sustain them amidst the overwhelm of school. For Vivian, Open Circle's courses help her to find balance and perspective. For Erika, serving and leading in our weekly volunteer groups connects her to what really matters. Thank you for supporting Student Open Circles to help students find sustainability in their lives, in their impact on the earth, and in their positive contributions to the world around them.

Marybeth & Jeff

A Harbor to Rest In

by Vivian Li, Open Circle student

I couldn't help but grin until my face hurt. Everything around me seemed so refreshing and my day was absolutely beautiful. That was how I felt when I walked out of my first Becoming Yourself Series back in March 2018 – just pure bliss and wonder for this world.

Back when I was drowning in self-doubt and worries, it was Open Circle that provided support and a space for me to reflect and to work on my inner peace. I was so grateful that this resource existed when I decided to reach out for help. The circle to me is like a harbour to rest in whenever I need to recharge and get in touch with myself.

Through Open Circle, I learned the importance of self-care that slowly integrated into different parts of my life. I started to eat better, became more organized and wrote in a journal every day to collect my thoughts. I was able to share Open Circle with my brother and best friends who were positively impacted as well. One of my best friends continued to attend all the Open Circle activities because she found it very helpful for calming her mind. I was happy that I was able to share this resource with my loved ones and to make a positive impact in their life. I also learned the importance of self-awareness and understanding. Now, I try to take some time every day to meditate or do check-in's to gain a better awareness of my headspace and the tensions in my body. I am able to relax better and deal more head-on with my negative thought patterns in this way.

Open Circle has become such an integral part of my life because I am able to get support and to also provide support for others like me just by being present in this community.



Vivian (front) with Open Circle student leaders during a "streetwalk" training session

Being a Part of Something Bigger than Myself

by Erika Keys, student volunteer group facilitator



When you go to university, it is so easy to get lost in the deadlines and assignments that you forget the larger picture and what matters. In high school I was involved with my leadership program and sports teams, but at university I became scared to dedicate any time to commitments that were not academic. Student Open Circles helped me step back and realize how great it felt to help someone else. Every Monday, when I volunteer, my group and I have the opportunity to laugh, share stories, and reflect on what has been going on throughout the week.

I have been volunteering with the Learning And Fun program (LAF) for two years now, and it has been such an eye-opening experience. Volunteering with LAF lets me help at-risk youth with financial literacy and social skills. I have worked with one young boy for a year now, and to see the progress from our first session to today shows me how simple it is to make a difference. Not only do I get to help him, but he also helps me by reminding me to let loose and have fun. Every Monday I am excited to play in the playground, and playing Pokémon helps me forget about all the stress I have going on at school and in my personal life. Learning about his story has helped me put my problems into perspective, and after every Monday even though I am tired from playing tag, my mind is so open and ready to start learning again.

Last year the Open Circle student facilitators who led my volunteer group created a positive and open space for people to reflect and de-stress. Their happy and welcoming attitudes helped me come out of my shell and make friends within our group. I enjoyed my experience so much I became a facilitator this year myself. I continue to volunteer with LAF, and my group's passions, dedication, and the friendships we have formed are so motivating.

Student Open Circles has inspired me to be a leader again in my community and with others. Marybeth and Jeff have equipped me with the skills to help empower youth and the people around me. I am very grateful for their support and what they do for students and the Hamilton community as a whole.

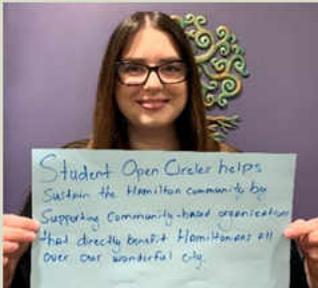
What Sustains You? Meet our Crowdfunding Participants

On Giving Tuesday, we launched our "Practicing Sustainability" crowdfunding campaign to help sustain our spiritual care, leadership development, and volunteer programs for students. This year, we are reflecting on what it means to practice sustainability in our lives and in our positive contributions to the world around us. By the end of our first day, many students, alumni, and community members got involved, and we reached over 50% of our \$10,000 goal! Our campaign asks: What sustains you? Here are reflections by participants.

The first \$5,000 raised will be matched by a generous donor. To read more stories or to donate, visit:

www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/student-open-circles/p2p/crowdfunding2019

Meet Two of our New Board Members



"What sustains you?"

It's an interesting question as every person will have a different interpretation; some think of self-care and others think of the work they

do. I think that for me, it's actually both.

Back when I was an undergraduate student it was very important for me to give back to the Hamilton community. I came across Open Circles and was given the opportunity to volunteer in a community center after-school program. This experience was the most transformative of my adult life, and I can truly say that it shaped who I am today.

I give back now in a different way; by supporting students through my work at McMaster. ... I would not be able to do the work that I do now without my volunteer experience and I am grateful to Open Circles every day. (Sarah Sullivan, SOC alumni)



I'm proud to say I've been a part of Student Open Circles (SOC) for the past few years as a community volunteer, group facilitator, and new member of the Board. SOC allowed me to break out of the McMaster University bubble, become more aware of the Hamilton

community, and realize my own potential and capacity to give. Volunteer groups range from assisting youth new to Canada with homework help to child-minding at women's shelters and more!

University can be a difficult time for many students. I definitely found it stressful at times. SOC helped sustain me and relieve some stress by providing a weekly opportunity to engage with others, meet new people, give back and feel good.

Any donation towards SOC is greatly appreciated and will help engage more students with volunteering in the community and support students emotionally by learning more about themselves! (Katherine Majerovich, SOC alumni)

Monthly Donors Needed: Kala's Creative Pledge

by Kala Grant, Open Circle alumni and Board member



This year will be my 5th year serving on the Board for Student Open Circles (SOC) and I am excited to say I can finally become a monthly donor. I've found some creative ways to pledge positive action for the community, the environment and myself — so I am able to forward the \$ saved from this towards the sustainability of my favourite charity: Student Open Circles.

SOC supports over 300 student volunteers and leaders each year in making meaningful and thoughtful contributions to the Hamilton Community. This contributes to the sustainability of the community and their own growth! To join me in my focus for sustaina-

bility, see my videos of my pledges and please consider supporting our campaign:

- Coffee Pledge: youtu.be/xfywdlwckrw
- Hair-cutting Pledge: youtu.be/oXvhVhLjIE

One thing that can help Student Open Circles sustain itself is the support of monthly donors. This does not have to be a heaping amount. You would be surprised at how much \$5-10 a month would help!

I invite you to consider pledging an activity that you can modify in your daily (or weekly/monthly) life. You can find information on how to become a monthly donor at: www.studentopencircles.com/donate

How to Donate

- For online donations, visit our website
- Cheques payable to Student Open Circles
- 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

StudentOpenCircles.com