

Volunteering Gave Me Faith and Trust in People

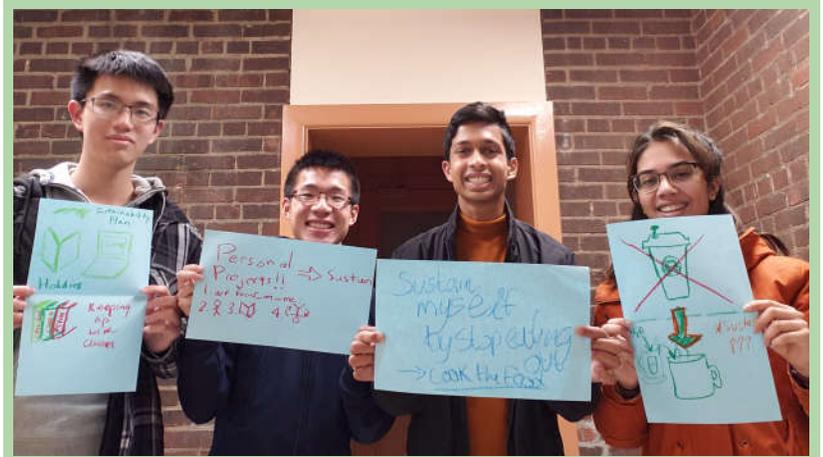
by Marvin Yan, Volunteer Group Facilitator

When I was in my first year at McMaster, my sole focus was on doing well academically. It was difficult having to be independent so quickly, so out the window went any sort of self-development or extracurricular interests. My only activity was volunteering with Conway Opportunity Homes through Student Open Circles. I initially did it so I could add more experience on my resume. Although I had volunteered with various organizations in the past, I still didn't have a passion for a particular social issue nor a strong drive to make a difference. However, within a few weeks of volunteering, I realized how unique and enriching of an experience Student Open Circles provides.

First of all, it gave me an opportunity to explore Hamilton; something I didn't think mattered much considering I had only come to the city for school. That being said, traveling through different communities gave me some perspective on my quality of life and my own upbringing in a different city. Secondly, it helped me (a lonely introverted first year at the time) make friends. Ironically, I also learned more about McMaster every week, as I left campus with my volunteer group who openly shared their experience with various clubs, classes, and events. Finally, and most importantly to me, it gave me faith and trust in people. I've always believed a person's actions were driven by hidden ulterior motives. As I mentioned, I initially volunteered because it felt easy to partake in and because it could be another addition to my resume. However, through volunteering, I have met numerous incredibly selfless and genuine individuals who are exceptions to my previous notion. While I don't believe everyone volunteers for the same reason, I do believe that at the end of the day, people do simply want to help make a difference.

As of writing this, I am in my first year of being a group facilitator. Although my work remains largely the same, what volunteering means to me has changed. Before it was just another thing to do, another activity if you will. Now I understand the value volunteers bring to agencies and how much of an impact they make. Volunteering is also a humbling and grounding experience that teaches me to be more considerate of my words and actions. Despite this, I admit there are still weeks where I don't feel up to volunteering. However, I know that once I am at my placement, I will be thankful for the experience.

For any readers who have made it thus far, I encourage you to volunteer regularly because no matter your initial mindset, volunteering will change you. At some point, you no longer give it meaning. It gives you meaning. And it means the world to someone.



Showing off the results of a group reflection activity: Marvin (2nd from left) with volunteers at the reading and nutrition program at Dr. Davey School



Our volunteers are mentors and tutors for at-risk children at the Welcome Inn's Learning And Fun program. During the pandemic, they continue to tutor youth, support isolated seniors, and help in other ways from a distance.

Breakfast at our January Winter Retreat: a weekend of "Disconnecting to Reconnect" with self, others, and meaning in our lives (remember the days of in-person gatherings? 😊)

How to Donate

- For online donations, visit our website
- Cheques payable to Student Open Circles
- Mail to: TSH B110, McMaster University
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