

***Summary brief: to tell the story of a volunteer's experience at The Club to let potential volunteers have a glimpse into what it'd be like; to show the value of volunteers to The Club.***

***Short version, under 300 words, for people familiar with The Club or who already have other background information (e.g. as part of annual report).***

## **“We're all living life for the same reason.”**

Come to Drop In Club on a Tuesday evening and you'll most likely find Max and Gary huddled together playing Crazy Eights.

Max, a volunteer at The Club, talks about his time with Gary fondly: “I've had a lot of great talks and great experiences just sitting down with Gary for five or ten minutes playing cards.”

But there's always lots to do at the Drop In Club, so Max tries to help out wherever he's needed. Sometimes that's setting up activities, getting snacks ready or helping a member who needs assistance. Sometimes that's hanging out with members and socializing.

During the last 30 minutes or so, he likes to encourage more physical activities – playing with the soccer ball or hula hoops are popular. “When people get moving that's pretty much what people love. Anything where people get to socialize and be loud without getting into trouble,” says Max.

“It's been way more rewarding than I thought it'd be,” says Max. “I've volunteered at many places and I've done a few internships and practicums and this so far has been the most rewarding and comfortable experience.”

Spending a few minutes playing cards might not sound like much, but Max and the members know he'll be back next week. The card games – and the friendships - will continue.

“They're looking forward to spending another ten minutes of their day on next Tuesday sitting down and playing the same game. That's part of their routine and so it's become part of my routine,” says Max. “I think that's a big part of life for everyone – having those little moments you can look forward to on a daily or weekly basis.”

*long version, just under 900 words, for people not familiar with The Club*

## **“I get a smile on my face pretty much as soon as I walk in the door.”**

Like a lot of people starting something new, Max felt anxious the first time he visited The Club. But the jitters didn't last long. “Within the first ten minutes, The Club members were coming up and introducing themselves to me, and I became really comfortable and relaxed,” says Max.

He'd come to visit The Club to learn more about volunteering. A student of therapeutic recreation at Dalhousie, Max needed a volunteer placement for a project in one of his classes.

The Club is a Halifax-based charity that offers fun and educational activities for people with – or without - disabilities or special needs. Started in 2007 by two parents wanting a strong community and more opportunities for their children, it's grown to over 150 participants, with programs now in Bedford and Dartmouth as well.

Max's first visit went so well that he signed up to volunteer weekly. After his university project was over, he decided to keep volunteering with The Club. “It's been way more rewarding than I thought it'd be,” says Max. “I've volunteered at many places and I've done a few internships and practicums and this so far has been the most rewarding and comfortable experience.”

## **“I love the conversations.”**

There's no shortage of programs for members to enjoy at The Club: cooking, drama, music and Zumba are all part of the weekly offerings. But the Drop In Club is the heart of it all. Open six days a week, it's a time for members to relax and hang out together, with activities such as dancing, watching movies or playing basketball for anyone who wants to give them a try.

Max volunteers at the Drop In Club on Tuesday evenings. His first stop is the arts and crafts table, a popular gathering place where people come to draw or colour - and chat. “Almost every week I meet someone new. Someone stops in on a night they wouldn't normally. They want to get to know me and that's always nice,” he says.

There's always lots to do at the Drop In Club – for members as well as staff and volunteers. Max tries to help out wherever he's needed. Sometimes that's setting up activities, getting snacks ready or helping a member who needs assistance. Sometimes that's hanging out with members and socializing.

During the last 30 minutes or so, he likes to encourage more physical activities – playing with the soccer ball or hula hoops are popular. “When people get moving that's pretty much what people love. Anything where people get to socialize and be loud without getting into trouble,” says Max.

## **“I'm just an average person.”**

When he's not busy at university, volunteering at The Club or working part time as a cook, Max enjoys drawing, playing sports and hanging out with friends. Coincidentally, his interests match up well with the activities at The Club.

He enjoys spending time at the arts and crafts table. “I really get into my zone for 20 minutes. I don't do

anything spectacular. But I find that super enjoyable and then to talk about it to the members, it's super fun," says Max.

There can be some challenging moments at The Club. Max mentions times when members might be having a bad day and their behaviour is not what he's used to. But when this happens, he knows he has back-up from staff and other volunteers if he needs it.

Jackie Rivers, Program Officer at The Club, says that working with Max has been a great experience. "I could tell from his first day that he is the type of person that just fits perfectly into The Club," says Jackie. She adds: "It always says a lot about someone when they start volunteering for a school credit, but continue after it has finished."

### **“We're all living life for the same reason.”**

Most Tuesdays Max can be found playing Crazy Eights with Gary, a member of The Club. Max talks about it fondly: "I've had a lot of great talks and great experiences just sitting down with Gary for five or ten minutes playing cards."

Spending a few minutes playing cards might not sound like much, but Max and the members know he'll be back next week. The card games – and the friendships - will continue.

Jackie says that often volunteers can develop personal connections with members that staff cannot. "The Club relies on its volunteers to make it what it is," she says. "The members look forward to seeing their volunteer friends and often greet them with big hugs when they see them again!"

Max is a part of their lives and they're a part of his. "They're looking forward to spending another ten minutes of their day on next Tuesday sitting down and playing the same game. That's part of their routine and so it's become part of my routine," says Max. "I think that's a big part of life for everyone – having those little moments you can look forward to on a daily or weekly basis."