

My name's Jesse Basnak and I'm in my fourth year of Biomedical Sciences (Bachelor of Health Sciences) at the University of Calgary. I've been involved with The Between Friends Club for about two years now. I've worked/volunteered for approximately 140 hours, as a volunteer for the 2010 Winter and Fall Youth Swim programs; as a volunteer for the 2010 Twinkle Tour and Zoo Lights events; as a representative at the Calgary Learning Village Collaborative Community Fair, as a volunteer for Camp Bonaventure in 2011; and as a program leader for the 2011 Winter/Spring Youth Swim Programs and the Fall 2011 Move and Groove Program. I will also apply as leader for the Move and Groove Program this winter.

When I look at myself now, I see that I'm a different person than in 2010. And that's because of The Between Friends Club. Your organization has bettered my life: showing me the sense of accomplishment and purpose that volunteerism rewards. Volunteering has reworked my values and what I view as being important. I look now to long term goals as opposed to short. I'm more ambitious yet also more patient, more ready to lead and yet more willing to listen. When I first started volunteering, I was skeptical in how I'd handle helping children with disabilities. But within a year, I was leading a program.

My confidence and abilities came from observing the then-program leader and the other volunteers: how they interacted with the children, and with each other. I've learned to think outside the box and sometimes act counter-intuitively – a gentle touch or a softening of the voice, for example – anything that conveys positivity. I saw that any positive energy one imparts through their actions will be imparted in turn through the actions of others. By being energetic and enthusiastic, you encourage and incite others to do the same, regardless of their age or capabilities. These children have likewise shown me how to communicate, care, and empathize, in a way that can't be learned elsewhere in life, and that

they know my name and say it with a smile on their face is to me more rewarding than any other accomplishment.

I've accomplished a lot throughout university, and my goal afterwards is medical school. I've applied to a number of Canadian Medical Schools this Fall, and if accepted I would try for a residency in Pediatrics. After my residency, I plan to do a fellowship in behavioural and developmental disabilities. In this way I hope to give back to the community in general and members of the Between Friends Club in particular. I want to help children with disabilities lead healthy and fulfilling lives, as an advocate for those whose voice often goes unheard.

In our society, there's sometimes a stigma: people with disabilities are often viewed as being abnormal or disadvantaged, but over these last few years I've seen those children smile more than most of the professors and students walking the halls at the U of C. As a doctor, this is a message I'd send to the community: that to be happy is to be normal, to be natural. It takes fewer muscles to smile than to frown, after all. Over these last two years, I've realized that we can't readily judge another's purpose or happiness, all we can do is be sure of our own purpose, thereby ensuring happiness for ourselves, and for others. Through the recreational opportunities of your organization, happiness is given and happiness is received, as much to the staff as to the participants. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Between Friends Club for teaching me life lessons such as these, and for providing me with the opportunity to do something really meaningful (and fun!) with my time. Here's to another awesome year of programs, and to many more! Take care,

- Jesse