

1. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

My name is Sayuri Guruge and I am 15 years old right now. I am in grade 10 in Parkdale C. I. I was born in Sri Lanka but I moved from there when I was seven years old. Then for three and a half years, I lived in England and then I migrated into Canada. I am a very social person who loves to hang out with my friends but my education is very important to me and I try to excel in every subject. My main goal in life right now is to become a lawyer one day.

2. When did you first join Parkdale Newcomer Youth program and why?

I first came to Parkdale Newcomer Youth program in grade 9, a few months after I started high school last year. I joined because my brother recommended this program to me and I wanted to engage more in my community to really get the experience and satisfaction of volunteering. After my first day in the program, I knew that I got both of those feelings so I decided to continue on with this program.

3. What about this program interested you the most?

What interested me in this program the most is our project, which was STOM-R from 2011-2012. More than the project itself, I liked how this group approached our project through movies and media because these are two approaches that teenagers in this group are interested in. The second thing that interested me the most is how devoted the members in this group was towards the project. This made me realize that programs such as this get youth involved in projects like this which keeps them away from negative things but also gives them the chance to promote the negativities of certain things. By seeing how our group members were so actively involved in this project, I was also encouraged to willingly take part, promote change and most of all, have fun while doing all these.

4. What is your involvement with Parkdale Newcomer Youth program?

When I first started to be involved in Parkdale Newcomer Youth program, I attended the language sessions weekly and helped the members to develop their language and communication skills. I also attended weekly tutoring sessions at Peer Tutoring Club and helped any youth who required assistance with homework or guidance in any subjects. I also learnt from other peer tutors. After completing one school term (Sept 2011 to June 2012) as an active program member, I received a Youth Community Leadership Certificate, which I consider a huge achievement. What I was most actively participating in was the STOM-R project where I was one of the 12 team leaders. For this project, I co-facilitated workshops, teaching visitors, peers about the dangers of smoking and how advertising companies influence people to smoke. I also watched movies and wrote reviews on its smoking contents on a monthly basis, which were all published in the Team Movie Review magazine and widely distributed to the youth and community.

5. What is your most memorable moment that you can recall being in this program?

My most memorable moment in this program was when I, along with all the other group leaders stepped out in our community and distributed flyers about the negativities of smoking and the negative influence the media gives about smoking. First of all I really enjoyed this experience because it was my first time going outside and advocating change. Secondly, I will never forget this memory because it was the first time that I felt as if I was truly engaged in my community and is doing something to make it better. I really

liked how people in the streets asked me what I was trying to promote and I got the chance to explain why smoking is dangerous so I am working limit it.

6. How do you think the program has helped you develop?

One main way that this program developed me is by increasing my confidence. This is because in this program, there are plenty of times where team leaders must speak out and share their ideas and feelings and this helped my long-time fear of speaking in front of people. This development helped me immensely in school as well.

7. What are some things you would tell a friend to influence him/her to join this group?

When I wanted my friends to join this project, I told them that this program will help them be involved in the Parkdale Community and will help them meet a variety of new people.

8. As a newcomer youth yourself, what are some challenges that you faced?

When I went to England from Sri Lanka, I faced many challenges by being a newcomer. It was a tough because I did not know English and was very confused all the time. It was very hard to get adjusted to the new lifestyle and different type of people. However I was very determined to learn this new way of life and fit in.

9. How did you manage to get the job as a page in Parkdale Library?

I got this job at the library be first doing well on a phone interview. Then I did very well on my face to face interview where I got a chance to show my stacking skills and literary skills. My references, especially Kalsang Dolma (the co-ordinator of the Parkdale Newcomer Youth) helped me to get this job by giving a good reference to the hiring committee. I also first learnt about the library Page opportunity from a session I attended last year in the leadership weekly program facilitated by Kalsang. Throughout all this, I think my confidence in myself and my abilities helped me for the most part to get this job because I showed that I am responsible and that they can rely on me.

10. Could you tell us a bit about your new job?

My new job as a pager in the Parkdale Public Library is to return book to their designated shelves after people return them to the library. I think that I will really enjoy this job because I have past volunteering experience in this field.

11. Do you have a message to all the newcomer youth based on your experiences?

To all the newcomer youth out there, the beginning is always the hardest, but do not give up! Try to get all the help you can with programs such as this and always have a goal for yourself. I know that when you are a newcomer, everything changes but you will always adapt to this change if you enjoy and take interest in what you have to do!