

Youth Advocacy – A Personal Perspective



Emily Chan is a recent recipient of an Easter Seals Scholarship and was invited to share her experiences at university.

Greetings blog readers! My name is Emily Chan and I've been graciously invited to be a guest blogger. To give you a bit of background, I'm currently in my third year at the University of Toronto Scarborough, double majoring in Mental Health Studies and Health Policy. I am also an active member of my community, being involved in many volunteer positions and extra-curricular endeavors.

I like pursuing volunteer roles where I can make a difference and impact change. For example, I have been volunteering with my university's AccessAbility Office's Outreach Team for two years now. I joined this position with the goal of helping other students, with special needs on campus, to overcome

barriers and strive for academic success by promoting the office's services and resources. I also encourage fellow students to volunteer with the AccessAbility office as volunteer note-takers and attendants for fellow students. This is an important role for me to pursue as I am a strong believer in equal opportunities for everybody, including, and especially, people with disabilities.

I am also involved in many other ways on campus, but to switch it up a bit, I'd also like to touch upon my involvement with another organization I treasure deeply, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. Within Holland Bloorview, I take on many volunteer roles. I am an active member of the hospital's Youth Advisory Council (YAC). YAC meets once a month to provide input, from a youth with disabilities perspective, on hospital projects to make sure they support children and youth to reach their full success potential. I am also a youth mentor which implies taking on leadership roles, giving advice and sharing personal experience, to provide guidance to the younger clients of Holland Bloorview. Furthermore, I'm involved in research at the hospital on an upcoming youth engagement project that looks at various hospital settings, such as in clinics, as well as life skills programs. My role is to provide the valuable youth perspective into the project by sharing my experience as a former Holland Bloorview patient.

I especially enjoy volunteering at Holland Bloorview as it gives me the opportunity to give back to the hospital that has played a vital role in helping me get to where I am now. I have also recently completed a summer internship in the Bloorview Research Institute in which I got the amazing opportunity to work under a Holland Bloorview scientist, assisting her on one of her current research projects. Upon completion of the project, I got the fantastic opportunity to present our findings, in the form of a formal research poster, to Holland Bloorview clinicians, scientists, and clients and

families.

Remember how I said Holland Bloorview had a special place in my heart? The reason for this is because I used to be a client of Holland Bloorview; in fact I spent the entire first six years of my life as an inpatient there. I was born with a rare neuromuscular condition that affects muscle tone in my body. This basically means I have weak muscles and because of this, I use a power wheelchair to get around as well as a breathing machine to assist with my breathing. From the moment I was born, doctors knew there was something off about me. After what I'm told was an emotional and frightful time, medical professionals were able to give my family a diagnosis. The journey after that was long, tedious, and tiring, but eventually with the help of Holland Bloorview staff, I was able to be discharged and go home and live with my parents.

To wrap up, I'd like to say to everyone reading that anything truly is possible with the right attitude and motivation. I started out my life with a very grim prognosis, but through the hard work and perseverance of many people, including myself, I was able to achieve many of my goals, including going to university and contributing to societal change. If you are going through a tough spot right now, don't give up, there's always a light at the end of the tunnel!