

2023 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

2023 Long Essay Prompt

The past few years have brought the digital world into focus, with growing apps and platforms that create opportunities for virtual connection. This digital revolution has helped us connect to a greater number of people than we could in our immediate surroundings. But some argue that these connections are superficial, and cannot match the quality and depth of physical bonds. Physical communities bring people together, provide a sense of belonging, and imbue us with purpose and meaning. Sometimes, physical communities grow naturally through shared values and consistent connection. Other times, these physical communities or tribes take a more dedicated effort to build and sustain.

Describe a time when you took an active role in building your physical community or tribe. What circumstances inspired you to take action? What were some challenges that you faced, and how did you overcome them? What lessons have you learned from this experience that you can use in the future to bring people together and foster belonging?

HSU Sum Yi

Recently, the rise of social media and other digital platforms has created opportunities for virtual connection, allowing people to connect with others from all over the world. While these digital connections can be convenient and helpful in many ways, some argue that they lack the quality and depth of physical bonds. Physical communities, on the other hand, provide a sense of belonging, and it cannot be replicated online. As a secondary school student and a Hong Kong Young Ambassador, I have experienced building my physical community.

During the pandemic, I felt isolated and disconnected from others and society. The lack of community and connection among youngsters overwhelmed me, and I applied for the Hong Kong Young Ambassador program to have an opportunity to have a breakthrough. Fortunately, I successfully passed the interview and became a Youth Ambassador. After that, I started to find ways to build a physical community between other Young Ambassadors. I want to create a physical community where students could come together, to share ideas, and work towards becoming a better self and dedicating ourselves to society. I faced some challenges along the way, including a lack of interest and difficulties in getting people to commit to the community and meetings. At first, I was very shy and afraid to connect with strangers as there were many other Young Ambassadors coming from different countries, ages, and genders. However, the long-lasting isolation from the pandemic provided me with bravery to overcome the fear, and I took an active role in building a physical community such as participating in community service together, organizing projects, and more. This brought me and many other Young Ambassadors together and fostered a sense of belonging to Hong Kong.

After overcoming the challenges, I finally opened myself to welcome other people to build a physical community. Throughout these experiences, I learned many lessons that I can use in

the future to bring people together and foster belonging. The first lesson is to be inclusive. A successful physical community is one that is inclusive and welcoming to all. It is important to create a space that is open to different perspectives and experiences, and to encourage participation from everyone. Second, it is important to be persistent and patient. Even though I invited and tried to connect with many people, they may not give a rapid response if they have an interest in joining with me. Besides, I understand that starting with a clear vision for the physical community is very important. Having a clear vision of what I want to achieve is essential for building a successful physical community. The vision should be communicated clearly others and should guide all of our actions and decisions.

Overall, building a physical community as a young ambassador was a challenging but rewarding experience. I was able to build a thriving physical community that brought young people together and fostered a sense of belonging among each other. I hope to use the lessons I learned from this experience to continue building strong physical communities in the future.

SHAHANI Muskan Deepak

My interest in helping other ethnic minority children began with a poorly drawn picture of a mermaid. During my time in kindergarten, my teachers only ever spoke in Cantonese and I couldn't comprehend a word. I had no prior knowledge or assistance.

During one of my classes, my teacher dimmed the lights and played through a slideshow while explaining the task in Cantonese. The presentation had various pictures of the vast ocean, unusual seashells and tropical fish. Although the task was to draw about our trip to the shore, when I got my paper, I started doodling a scene from 'The Little Mermaid' because I was four at the time. It seemed to fit the task in my head because Ariel lived in the ocean, wore seashells and had a fish as her companion. I ended up getting into trouble for it even though I didn't understand my mistake. That set me back because I always felt like I was dim-witted when in reality, I just needed a bit of guidance.

We are the most impressionable when we are young and that's what makes our childhood the essence of who we grow to be. So, when I heard of an organization, called 'Kids4Kids', which would give me a chance to teach other ethnic minority children in Hong Kong, I knew I had to join. I've attended numerous sessions of both this organization and the 'Leadership Club' offered in my school, both of which give me an opportunity to interact with these students. Each of these sessions lasts a little over an hour.

My biggest obstacle presented itself early on as the children were quite shy during sessions. I started a session off with 'Simon Says' which proved to be the perfect icebreaker as the children started giggling and letting their toothy grins shine whenever they lost. The children started joking around with us as well. One of the kids said I looked 75 years old! (or at least I hope that was a joke). I read books with them, played spelling games and even did some arts

and crafts where the children could make tiny paper octopi.

“I’m sorry, my English isn’t that good,” a child said to me during one of the sessions. I was helping her make her octopus and started a conversation about her school life and her studies when she felt the need to apologize. For a split second, I felt as if my body had made a replica of my four-year-old self. I reassured her that I understood every word she said and actively engaged in conversation with her. While she was initially reluctant, she proved to be quite the conversationalist and soon felt more confident in her speaking ability.

My journey began with an ugly rendition of Ariel but continued with the drive to help other ethnic minorities who bear similar experiences. Through this, I gained insight into the value of supporting others in my community and became the help I wish I got.

CHEN, Ka Man

Born to Bond

I participated in the Sai Kung Youth Ambassador Leadership Training Programme jointly organized by Sai Kung District Office and Sai Kung Youth Ambassadors before. In contrast to my original purpose which was only to focus on self-improvement, I found that this programme had a deeper meaning as time went deeper and explored more. Moreover, it changed my mind and made me realize that I have a closer connection with society. I can also use my own power to bring people together in the community.

After a long period of training, we were told that the final task was to hold an event in the community. The organizer did not limit the type of event and the object, but gave us \$1000 as a fund. After receiving this news, we felt stressed and didn’t know what to do.

Because of the approaching of the Mid-Autumn Festival, one of the team members proposed to distribute mooncakes to the elderly living alone in Sai Kung District. However, it is just a hollow talk. We did not have enough funds for us to distribute moon cakes to all the elderly living alone in the vicinity. In view of this reason, we gave up this idea.

When I was bored, I turned on my phone and found a lantern made of red packets. Suddenly, I had an idea. I thought of holding a parent-child activity in the community center, teaching them to make lanterns with red packets. It is a great way to anticipate the arrival of the Mid-Autumn Festival, and enhance mutual affection. I put forward my opinions to the team members, and we reached a mutual decision. We started preparations immediately.

By the day before the event, all preparations were completed and several families had signed up to attend. Unfortunately, one of the teams was also teaching others how to make lanterns, and their activities took place on the same day, at the same time, in the next room. At that instant, a surge of anxiety flushed through my veins and sweat dripped from my forehead. The team leader comforted me and said: “Our purpose is to strengthen the relationship between

each other and the community. It is not about the score. You don't have to be frustrated. We are unique in our own way. What we have to do is to try to give them an unforgettable memory." At that moment, I understood the exact meaning of holding community events.

I personally taught the families who signed up to make lanterns, and they all responded to me with a smile. Looking at their happy smiles, I felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in my heart. In the future, I will actively participate in volunteer services to help others, and bring them more happiness and fond memories. What's more, I believe that even if only a weak force, it can also deepen the bonds between people and jointly create a better community.