

My name is Maria Bajwa and I'm pleased to be accepting a scholarship through the Calgary Bridge foundation for Youth and the Sien Lok Society of Calgary. I've been living in Canada for about 10 years, originally from Punjab, Pakistan, and I have been volunteering on a regular basis for three of those years. In those three years I've had the pleasure of working with the Summer Literacy Program, the Homework Club, and the Afterschool Programs around the city. I think volunteering is so important for not only me but for everyone, and I'm so glad that I started volunteering with the Bridge Foundation, because it's not only rewarding to see the difference I'm having in other peoples lives, but also it's quite enjoyable.

I think about my volunteering as a relationship, and most definitely this is one of those relationships that is so rewarding for both people involved in it. The rather obvious one is the benefit that the person who is one the receiving end of the volunteering gets. I see this part nearly everyday that I volunteer, and even when I'm not volunteering, it just seems to come up everywhere. I see it as I help a child learn to spell a word, or explain a math problem, or how to play a game, because it's immediately apparent how the child is benefitting from me volunteering, because I'm helping him/her. It shows in how they walk with confidence after, or even how they smile. I was listening to the radio the other day and I heard that about 70% of Calgarians volunteer on a regular basis, which made me smile, thinking about all those lucky people who live in Calgary, and receive so much from these volunteers. More important to me though, is the reward I get from volunteering, a less obvious fact.

I remember, moving to Canada in grade 2, and what a struggle is was for me to read and write and basically communicate with others in English. I personally was fortunate enough to be on the receiving end of a program that helps teach immigrant youth how to read. I personally believe that this is the one thing that helped me get to where I am today, and even today, I think reading is the most important thing that we can teach children. That's why, when I help kids everyday, helping children read, in the Bridge Club, and also in the library for their programs, it gives me a deep sense of satisfaction. I firmly believe that what I am doing is right, and it makes me feel wonderful to know that I am contributing to society, the very society which has helped me come to far. I've applied for university this year, something I would never have been able to have done while living in Pakistan, in the society I come from. I'm so grateful, because I've gotten early acceptance, already, and I know that the person that I am most grateful to is my mentor who taught me how to read, Melisa. The

sense that someday some of these kids which I help out might remember me is one of the most delightful feelings in the world, and I'm grateful to the Bridge Foundation for allowing me to feel that every time I volunteer.

I've applied for psychology in university, a decision that I could not have reached until I started volunteering with the Bridge Club. I had no idea what to do with my life before I started volunteering, but since I've started, I know that I will never really be happy with my life unless I help people. I decided that for me to do that to the best of my abilities is by taking psychology in university, and later, becoming a family psychologist. I want to feel the rest of my life the feeling I get when I volunteer and help children everywhere, and now that I've received this scholarship, I believe that it will help me get closer to achieving this dream of mine. I am grateful for the opportunities that I have gotten, and the experiences that I've had, because of my volunteering, and I hope that I keep that part of me, the part that likes to help others, in the future, and I wish to thank the Calgary Bridge Foundation and the Sien Lok Society for giving me this tremendous opportunity.