

Sara Maki, BA, MA

As a socially conscious anthropology and global studies student, Sara Maki endeavoured to establish some clarity regarding her career path early on in her studies by seeking out **volunteer experiences** to help her realize her strengths and interests, while simultaneously making a contribution to the world around her. Sara's volunteer experiences during university began as a participant with the Laurier University Charity Council (LUCK) assisting with co-ordinating and promoting fundraisers to benefit local community organizations. Being interested in youth programming, Sara also committed many weekends and evenings to KidsLink where she rose to the challenge of assisting with programs designed for social, emotional or behaviourally challenged youth.



With a passion for communicating ideas to the public, Sara sought out a role where she could participate in planning events, which eventually led her to assisting with the design and implementation of a Personal Development Conference at Laurier. Given Sara's passion for international issues, she conducted some research on local organizations that performed global aid and development work which led her in 2003 to knocking on the door of an NGO called World Accord and simply asking "how can I help?" Sara's volunteer role with World Accord included contributing research and articles to their website. Eventually, her dedication and commitment to World Accord as a volunteer afforded her the opportunity to travel to Sri Lanka in 2005 to be profiled in a Canadian National documentary film about small loan schemes and their impact on Sri Lankan women and the local economy (documentary available in the Career Resource Centre at Laurier). Since Sara's graduation in 2002, she has continued to uphold a steady roster of volunteering as a Researcher with Mujeres en Accion, a women's social service agency in Guatemala, a Host with the KW YMCA Newcomer Program, and she also hosted an Irish student for two months through an exchange program offered at Lutherwood CODA.

Sara allowed her personal interests to dictate the types of volunteering she performed; however, she also strategically guided her decisions by a desire to find ways to utilize her already existing skill set while also developing new skills.

Sara's involvement with an international development organization had a significant **impact on her career development** as it affirmed her desire to work with an organization dedicated to humanitarian aid. Volunteering also allowed Sara to recognize that she did not enjoy dealing with lack of funding and resources to complete projects and needed clearly defined structures and expectations while working. Therefore, Sara found herself gravitating toward roles where she was able to facilitate and teach others and communicate ideas to the public. Four years following her initial introduction to World Accord as a volunteer, Sara began working for them in a part-time capacity before transitioning to her current role as a Senior Grant Writer with Right to Play, a

Toronto-based organization that utilizes sport and play programs as a means to improve the lives of youth affected by poverty, war or disease.

The diverse volunteer experiences Sara participated in both at a local level (such as her role working to improve quality of student serves at Laurier) as well as internally (such as her post-tsunami relief work) enabled her to acquire many new employable skills. Sara rarely recalls an employment interview where recruiters asked her about her ability to adapt. Given her rich involvement both on campus and abroad, Sara was able to very tangibly outline her global volunteering experiences where she had to conduct research and effectively deliver programming in a culturally sensitive manner, all the while adjusting to a dramatically new surrounding. What could be a better testament to flexibility and adaptability than that?

While assisting with the co-ordination of the Student Professional Development and Training workshop, Sara learned first hand the level of detail that goes into effectively implementing an event. Further, Sara developed her writing skills, editing, precision and articulation of thoughts and ideas while contributing to World Accord's website and newsletters and she honed people management skills while orchestrating 30 first-year students as a WLU orientation icebreaker.

Although Sara jokes that she probably received more benefit from her volunteer endeavours than did the organizations she assisted, it is very evident that the organizations she volunteered with have experienced a reciprocal advantage from Sara's motivation, skills and dedication as a volunteer with their projects.

The greatest **personal enhancements** from volunteering for Sara came in the form of first-hand experiences that taught her how to become more self-reliant, resourceful and independent and realize her love of motivating, coaching and mentoring others.

