

### Activity 1: Debate and Public Speaking Coach

I joined the UTS Speech and Debate Society in grade seven. The debate scene is competitive in nature, but in my first year, I placed first at the Nora McRae Public Speaking Tournament and third at the Ontario Jr. Qualifier for the National Public Speaking Championship. Public speaking and debate equipped me with skills applicable in my daily life; however, the most important lesson I learned was not from competing, but rather taking on the role of a coach.

As a senior member of the Speech and Debate Society, I taught novice debaters Canadian-Parliamentary style debate principles over the past two summers. I was responsible for planning lessons, judging and critiquing debate rounds, and guiding twenty campers to realize their potential within five days. With the skills and knowledge that I have gained from this activity, I have been able to provide encouragement and criticism when appropriate.

During preparation for the debates, I would talk to the teams and challenge them to see the topics in a new light. I had one camper who was shy, reticent, and unable to express her wonderful ideas in competitions. Although she would withdraw into herself, I challenged her with more questions during preparation to steer her in the right direction, instilling confidence in the arguments she had formulated. One issue that I observed through coaching at a debate camp was the lack of encouragement and support from teammates. Debate breeds a hyper-competitive environment. Fear and embarrassment had restricted her from realizing her potential in debate, and as her coach, it was my duty to bring out the best in her and allow her to gain trust in the process.

My co-workers and I realized that we had to take a step back to assess the situation and address the issues of hyper-competitiveness and self-improvement. Without a positive mindset, novice debaters come down hard on themselves because a debate room often becomes toxic for individuals. Our team of experienced debaters decided to deliver the “sandwich” model: honest, respectful, praise as well as criticism in order to maintain a healthy environment. We determined this was the most effective way to instill a supportive and safe environment, while also showing the campers that there is always room for improvement. The richness of my experience in debating and public speaking has trained me to examine information more thoroughly and to evaluate different perspectives.

### Activity 2: Best Buddies

Best Buddies, an international NGO, aims to make every community and school more inclusive and accepting of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). As an executive member of the UTS Best Buddies Chapter for the past two years, I have built friendships with teenagers with IDD from our partner school Heydon Park Secondary School. Our chapter is made up of thirty UTS students, as well as fifteen students from Heydon Park.

Frequently, subconscious biases are formed against people with IDD. When I discovered the Best Buddies program, its mission resonated with me: to break the stigma surrounding people with disabilities, especially among UTS' primarily able-bodied students. As an executive

member, together with other executives, I planned monthly events, such as Hip Hop and Master Chef.

During last year's Pink Day, a day set aside to combat bullying, Heydon Park students visited UTS to speak about their personal experiences. One story resonated with me: a Heydon Park student spoke about her family's adverse reaction to her coming out as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Her parents quickly blamed her identity on her developmental disabilities and Heydon Park's all-girl environment.

When I raised this with my fellow executives, we discussed how quickly society tends to dismiss the feelings and beliefs of those with disabilities. Recognizing this harsh truth, we reminded ourselves how our Chapter seeks to combat this very notion. Instead of trying to resolve all of their problems, all we could do was to provide a listening ear and a safe, supportive place, striving to show others outside of our community that regardless of disabilities, everyone is ultimately deserving of respect and acceptance.

After joining Best Buddies, I wanted to find other ways in which I could become more involved in such an inclusive community. This was when I started volunteering at Holland Bloorview Rehabilitation Hospital. During my time there, I was a counsellor at the Spiral Gardens Camp, an integrated art, garden, and play program for in-patients and campers with and without IDD. I ran activity stations and supported hospital staff to ensure the security and comfort of campers. At Best Buddies, I built meaningful friendships and learned the values of acceptance, understanding, and compassion. At Holland Bloorview, I applied the same skills in a professional setting.

As an executive of UTS' Best Buddies Chapter, I have learned to confront difficult issues and seek appropriate resolutions. As a result, my team and I have been able to create an inclusive community for both UTS and Heydon Park students. Published in Successful Western Ivey Essays