

TUTOR TALKS



EQ NEWS

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Becoming the Difference: An Inside View With Katie Higgins

In the second issue of EQ News, Whitney Byard had the opportunity to sit down with Katie Higgins, a Michigan State University student and Equiduct volunteer. Katie is a third-year student studying human capital and society through the School of Human Resources and Labor Relations. She is pursuing a double minor in business and leadership of organizations. Katie spoke about her past experiences with volunteer work and how she values her work as an Equiduct tutor and volunteer. For the first-ever Tutor Talk Spotlight, Katie sets the bar high in selflessness, drive, passion and pride.



WB: What is your role with Equiduct?

KH: “I am the head of human resources for Equiduct, and I am in charge of recruiting, onboarding and engagement with new volunteers and members. I get them set up for email lists, orientation for tutoring and such. All new volunteers come through me and my committee before they move to the mentorship or volunteer programs. So far I’ve done a lot of work recruiting interns over the summer through handshake and we’ve been working on starting new member engagement projects. I would really like to develop a community among all the members. Everyone dedicates a lot of time to the non-profit, so I am excited to set some things up that show appreciation to our volunteers. We’re thinking about pizza parties, get-togethers, and overall checking in with one another. A big reason I love human resources is because it deals with checking in with people and prioritizing their needs.”

“It’s really easy to assign tasks to people but in the end, it’s important to express care for their human side, not just their employee side.”

WB: What has your favorite part been about working with Equiduct?

KH: “I would say my favorite part has been how I got introduced to the nonprofit. I’ve known the founders of Equiduct for two years, but I really started to get involved last spring when I tutored for the first time. Meeting all the kids and engaging with them, playing games, coloring, drawing, not even really working on homework, more just getting to know them as kids, that was my favorite part by far. That first experience pushed me to do more within this organization, and I am incredibly grateful that they had a position open for me.”

What are you most looking forward to with Equiduct this year?

“Definitely the mentorship program! We’re going to have a lot of good new people and new activities to bring to the kids. We’re planning some fun fall activities, movies, Christmas festivities and parties, things that will be core memories for these kids. It’s all so malleable too, as much as you put into it, these kids get out of it. And you get more out of it, too. Once I am matched with my mentee, I want to make sure we have a good relationship. Another great thing is that the parents are also involved and can give insight into some activities that their kids have been looking forward to, so then we can plan activities we know will make a kid’s day. That’s another great thing about the program and something I am looking forward to, the interaction with the whole family and how supporting your mentee is also supporting their family.”

What is your favorite part about working with Lansing students?

“Good question! I like learning from them as much as they are learning from me. Even though they are a fraction of my age, they have taught me a lot about different means of growing up and different family functions and dynamics. I grew up at a small school and had the same inner circle pretty much K-12, and meeting these kids from Lansing, they honestly have a lot more experiences than I ever had at that age. It’s really eye-opening, especially going into human resources where I’m constantly going to be meeting people from all walks of earth, I am so lucky to meet these kids who can teach me about different life views. It helps me become more understanding and respectful of different situations than my own.”

When you’re tutoring, what is the first thing you do with the students?

“I always appreciate the initial greeting with the kids. They are always so well-behaved and well-mannered. They always say, ‘Hi Miss Katie’ and are so polite. I love to sit down with them and discuss our days before getting into schoolwork. You’re more than just a tutor to them, you’re also a support system. It was very valuable for me to just be able to ask, ‘What did you do?’ and, ‘What did you learn’, and just have a solid few minutes of catching up and being people together before you dive into the homework. I’ve had tutors in the past and I hated it when it was very transactional. We would sit and only do homework, I leave, you go home, and we never think about each other again. But for these kids, if you have some sort of friend relationship it makes the learning more fun and enjoyable for both me and the kids that need the tutoring for the day.”

“You both walk away feeling like the whole interaction was time well spent.”

“Eastside Community Action Center is really good at ensuring tutors know who needs more emotional support, who’s struggling in specific areas and who might need special kinds of attention for the day. There’s a great partnership between the tutors, kids and the center to make sure everyone involved is cared for.”

What is the last thing you do with the students before you leave for the day?

“The last thing I do, and usually what the other tutors do, is a final check-in with the students and the parents. I went with a past tutor and he would always do one final check-in with the kids before saying goodbye to make sure everything was all right. We would also talk to the parents who pick up the kids and make sure the center is clean. They’re kids, so there are crayons on the floor and food everywhere, so cleaning up and prepping the center for the next day is important.”

What do you think is the most important subject to work on with the kids?

“I think English. I’m a little biased because I love writing, but you’re always going to be using some form of writing tools, grammar, and punctuation, regardless of what job or

class you're in. Being confident in your writing skills and being able to express your thoughts on paper is very important for the kids."

What brought you to Equiduct?

"I actually had a very interesting way of getting involved. So my boyfriend at the time, who used to be on the Equiduct E-Board, lived with the founders and he would go into the center and tutor twice a week. Finally, I told him I wanted to go after hearing all of them talk about the program. I decided I wanted to meet some of these kids and tutor."

“I went in and it was one big, ‘I finally get why you dedicate so many hours to these kids’...”

"...and how it makes such a big difference short-term and long-term. From there, I connected with the program and tried to find a way I could bring my time and skills to the team. It was really those first couple of tutoring sessions, though, that had me hooked."

What does volunteer work mean to you?

"Plain and simple, it's a selfless, free thing that contributes to the greater good of a community. I am a big results person. I track everything I do from classes to job tasks, it's all written in a notebook or sticky note somewhere. The thing I like about volunteering or contributing to a cause is seeing the results build over time and that feeling where you can see the change and how things have grown into what you want them to be. That's why I really like to volunteer because you can see the results."

How has volunteer work shaped your college experience? Would you recommend it to other students?

"It's added so much dimension. Before coming to MSU I thought I was just doing school for four years. I never realized the sense of community I would find behind volunteering and being a part of a nonprofit. It's like its own little family within Michigan State. Everyone involved either graduated from here or is enrolled in classes. I was chatting with one of our current interns on Handshake over the summer, and on the first day of class, I signed into the class list and saw her name right below mine and I was like, 'She's here!' I asked if I could talk to her about Equiduct over the summer and now, I see her twice a week, and we catch up during classes. It made it a lot easier to talk about projects with people I now know. We can take on each other's tasks and responsibilities."

“I've always thought it's been hard to volunteer alone. It's easier to drag a parent, friend or someone to tag

**along with me. That's why I love Equiduct, because it's
one big volunteering family.”**

“I would definitely recommend volunteer work to anyone. It's a great way to expand your knowledge. You can only learn so much through schoolwork. You actually have to get out there and connect with real people and hear their stories and accomplishments. Also, you're going to have stories to bring up while talking to recruiters and employers who are looking for experiences that are out of the norm. Through my internships, I've really learned that anyone can go out there and get a job, but no one else is going to have the type of volunteer experience that you have earned.”

Do you have any advice for students thinking about volunteering with Equiduct?

“Try it at least once and I promise you'll be hooked. Once you start interacting with the schools and meet the kids it's incredible -trust me. Even if it's out of your comfort zone - try it! Take a step back the first time you volunteer and watch how others go about tutoring. Observe for the first time and take mental notes. It's a hard thing to get acclimated to, especially if you haven't done it before. Don't be afraid to ask for help from those who have been tutoring for a while. Try and get more and more involved. Start creating your own style of tutoring and approach. They're just kids, don't be scared! My favorite thing is thinking about how if I was a kid and someone in college came in, I would be like 'Woah that's an adult!' The kids will adore you regardless of whether you can do simple math or not. They're just glad someone's there to talk and help them out.”

What do you think makes EQ different than other volunteer experiences you've had?

“I like that it was founded by young adults and is catered for young adults looking to get involved in their community. What also makes it special is how we are all MSU grads or students looking to better serve the communities around us. We're giving right back to our local people.”

**“We're a local school giving back
to our local schools.”**

“I've never encountered an organization that is being run by the same people who are directly involved. I feel like it's always the people in charge who are completely separate. We're all just students working with students who are trying to help students. It's like, 'I know what's going on in your life since it's going on in mine too, so let's just work this all out together.'”

Are you interested in furthering your involvement with non-profits in your career?

“I definitely want to stay involved by committing to a nonprofit and contributing as much time as I have to my 9-5 day. I would say later in my career, once I’ve learned more managerial ropes in HR, I would be able to take on more leadership in the non-profit world. I want to always have aspects of myself within volunteering. I plan to pass on volunteer testimony to the people I meet and my family forever. My dad got me involved in the first place and to do the same would be very rewarding.”

If I gave you \$1 million to start a non-profit of your choice, what cause would you choose?

“So I never talk about this but I have a skin condition since I was five called vitiligo. Basically, it’s an autoimmune disease that causes your skin to be two different colors. I never met anyone with vitiligo until I was maybe 13. So, with one million, I would create something for young children with vitiligo to be able to meet and get to know each other and also connect with adults with the condition. They could learn from each other and express their hardships and find support in each other. It was isolating to grow up with something you can’t change.”

“Having a sense of community where you all share the same struggle and get through it together is something I wish I had growing up.”

Equiduct is a great way to get involved with the Lansing community and is committed to making volunteer work fun, accessible and convenient for college students. Keep an eye out for further issues of the monthly EQ News, as well as upcoming articles and Tutor Talks from Equiduct authors. Contact Equiduct via the website, Instagram, or email with questions or information about involvement.

Contact Us

We can help match your academic and personal interests with the right Equiduct volunteer activity.

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