

VOLUNTEERING WHERE HE KNOWS A DIFFERENCE IS MADE

'It is his nature to help others'

By Aaron Curtis

UPDATED: 01/08/2019 08:01:47 AM EST



Lowell High School junior Cameron Senechiam, 16, of Lowell, volunteers at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, where he went when he was younger. SUN/JULIA MALAKIE

Editor's note: This article is the latest in The Sun's "Be a Volunteer" series, focusing on people who join community nonprofits. Got a suggestion for a profile, email it to cscott@lowellsun.com.

LOWELL -- Though more than a month has passed, Cameron Senechiam still looks a bit stunned when reflecting on the complimentary and enthusiastic reaction he received to a speech he gave in front of roughly 450 people more than a month ago.

The 16-year-old junior at Lowell High School -- a member of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell since age 7 -- was selected to give the address for the Club's Holiday Auction on Nov. 29. The annual event at the Lowell Memorial Auditorium is used to raise funding for club resources and events.



Lowell High junior Cameron Senechiam, 16, of Lowell, second from left, who volunteers at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, where he went as a kid, with, clockwise from left, his sister Harlow Senechiam, 8, Ashley Heng, 8, Diana Heung, 12, Diandra Heng, 11, Jannaca Lang, 11, Destiny Rosa, 9, Lanakai Mahoney, 10, and Alexis Morales, 10. SUN/JULIA MALAKIE

A club member is selected each year to go on stage to talk about their experience at club, where Senechiam serves as a member of the club's junior staff. Senechiam was selected by club administration because -- as Program Director Alisha Harrison said -- he "embodies the essence of leadership, kindness and compassion."

"Life as we all know it, is the toughest thing a person can endure," Senechiam said during his November speech. "It is filled with hardship, cruelty, and most of all sadness. But with a little push and sometimes a big shove, you are able to reach the sky."

"This program allows me to come in everyday and make a change," he added in reference to his junior staff duties.

"Do not get me wrong, I do come here to do homework and hang out with friends, but my number one priority everyday is to change someone's life."

As he wrapped up his deeply thought out address, filled with themes of appreciation and love, he was met with a standing ovation.

"It was a little breathtaking, because I didn't really know any of those people, and they still found a need to get out of their seat and give me that respect," Senechiam said while sitting inside an office at the club recently.



Senechiam with Education Manager Frank Ponceano of Lowell, who s known Senechiam since he was about seven.

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The 16-year-old spends a large portion of his time at the Greater Lowell Boys & Girls Club each week. He said he usually gets out of school, goes to the club, and stays until 8 p.m. As Senechiam speaks about his time there and his plans to someday be a police officer, he also consistently references his grandmother who died about a year and a half ago.

"She was my hero," said Senechiam, who has a twin sister. "Her devotion was her grandchildren. She loved all of us with undying support. She taught me values -- everything I need to become the person I am today."

Senechiam carries that way of thinking to the children at the club who he says are like brothers and sisters.

"Ever since I came here, I wanted to be a staff member," Senechiam said. "I always wanted to be that person who reached out to other kids and helped them out."

"I want to see a better city," he added. "I want to see a sensible community stick up for one another."

Senechiam leads and assists various club programs, currently organizing a care-package event that will provide supplies to homeless shelters around the city.

"The way I see the world, I still see that the world has hope," Senechiam said. "We can make the world a better place. It all begins with one person at a time. You can't effect an entire population over a couple days -- it's going to take years and years. And we aren't going to be a perfect people, but we're going to be a people who can love each other."

Harrison and Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell Executive Director Joe Hungler are eager to praise Senechiam when asked about the teen. As Hungler points out, Senechiam has always taken advantage of opportunities to improve himself and the others at the Club.

"I remember him being our first art assistant and volunteering in the art room when he was 10-years-old," Hungler said. "Someone was just reminding me of the time he was helping to set up our art show at Western Ave Studios at about the same age. Whether it is washing out paint brushes, facilitating difficult conversations with his peers or helping at the front desk, it is his nature to help others."

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