

Scottsdale Sister Cities – Author Entry

“Connecting Isolated Pawns”

By Jack Swenson

Chess is my favorite game, but since I am used to playing with opponents directly across the board from me, I felt completely alone on the chessboard during the pandemic. Quarantined at home, I found myself staring at a specific pawn in several chess games. As I focused on the pawn, the other pieces on the board started drifting further and further away, leaving the pawn unsupported and vulnerable in the center of the board. Like so many during this time, I went about my own activities like this isolated pawn.

According to chess.com, an isolated pawn is a pawn that cannot be supported or protected by another pawn. Isolated pawns are considered much weaker than connected pawns, which remain intact and support each other during many parts of a chess game. In the first few months of the pandemic, I missed being a connected pawn: having face-to-face interactions with others and creating new memories that strengthened me as an individual. Since connected pawns are always a superior force in a chess game, I began strategizing unique ways to not only become a connected pawn myself, but also to help transition others from isolated pawns to connected pawns.

Mahatma Gandhi, a famous Indian lawyer and civil rights leader, once said: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” Reflecting on this quote, I realized that I could discover purpose during this time by helping others who are struggling. By June 2020, the COVID-19 crisis hit Arizona hard and many families struggled with food insecurity. I wanted to use chess as a tool to help raise funds for those in need. So, I brought together the chess community to play in my online charity “Chess Peace Tournament” to support the United Food Bank. We raised enough money to serve 9567 meals to Arizona families. This tournament allowed me to connect with friends again while leading everyone towards a common goal: helping our community.

I also began teaching chess for free online by connecting with students through Skype. I organized mini chess tournaments online and reached out to friends individually to connect with them. Many of my classmates told me how happy they were that I brought chess into their lives during this difficult time.

I believe that my passion for chess and ability to unify people around a common purpose is a combination that has helped me to have a positive impact on both the local and international communities through my non-profit organization, Chess Peace. The pandemic has taught me to pursue life with the intent of continuing to bond with others. My hope for the future is that people all over the world will strive to become connected pawns, rather than to divide like isolated pawns. As connected pawns, everyone is capable of bringing out the best in each other.