A UNIVERSE OF POSSIBILITIES:
YOUTH BUILDING PEACE

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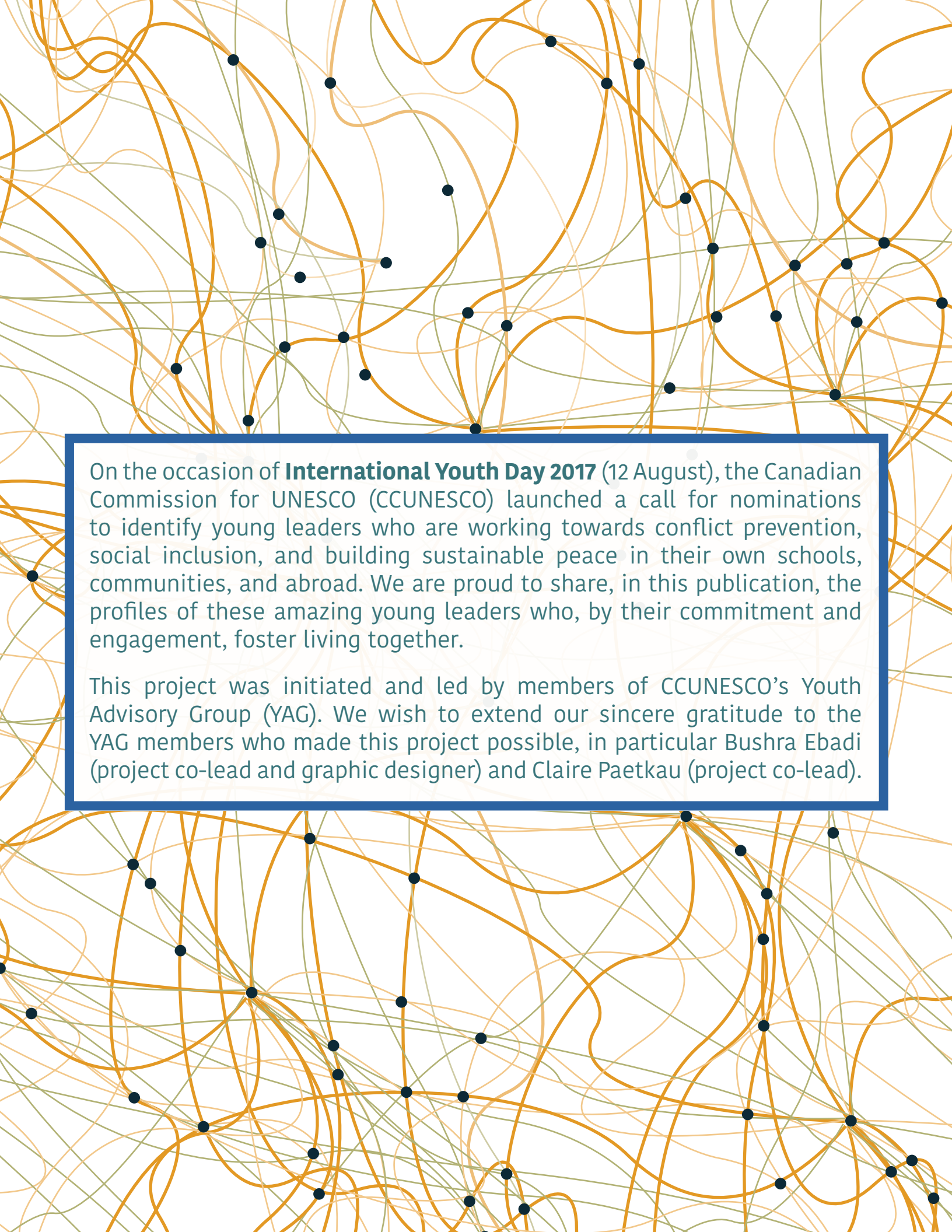
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The Canadian Commission for UNESCO serves as a bridge between Canadians and the vital work of UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. By promoting UNESCO values, priorities and programs in Canada and by bringing the voices of Canadian experts to the international stage, the Commission contributes to a peaceful, equitable and sustainable future that leaves no one behind. The Commission is a network of networks that helps Canadians share knowledge, locally and globally, in order to build peace in the minds of men and women. To do so, the Commission facilitates cooperation in the fields of education, sciences, culture, communication and information to address some of the most complex challenges facing humanity. Their activities are guided by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other UNESCO priorities. The Commission operates under the authority of the Canada Council for the Arts.

On the occasion of **International Youth Day 2017** (12 August), the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) launched a call for nominations to identify young leaders who are working towards conflict prevention, social inclusion, and building sustainable peace in their own schools, communities, and abroad. We are proud to share, in this publication, the profiles of these amazing young leaders who, by their commitment and engagement, foster living together.

This project was initiated and led by members of CCUNESCO's Youth Advisory Group (YAG). We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to the YAG members who made this project possible, in particular Bushra Ebadi (project co-lead and graphic designer) and Claire Paetkau (project co-lead).

Apefa Adjivon

Calgary, Alberta

Empowering girls to reach their full potential

Arriving in Canada as a refugee with her family at a young age, Apefa is attuned to the differences in how women are treated in Canada and her country of origin, Sierra Leone. Majoring in international relations and a peace, conflict and justice at the University of Toronto, she is dedicated to improving the lives of people in developing countries, and of women internationally.

In 2016, Apefa represented Canada as a Youth Delegate at the Youth Assembly at the United Nations (UN), working on sustainable development goal #5: Gender Equality. Apefa successfully competed against thousands of delegates in the United Nations' Social Venture Challenge, pitching the idea for her social venture, the Pearl Project. The centre pairs girls in low-income communities with mentors, offering them skills-based opportunities to help them achieve their goals. She has won both a fellowship and a start-up grant towards her organization and was also selected by the UN and the British Council to receive social enterprise training. Apefa is the youngest person to present her social enterprise concept on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

Connect with Apefa on Twitter or LinkedIn.

At the forefront and behind the scenes for the rights of girls and women

Ishita Aggarwal is an advocate for STEM education, gender equity, and human and sexual rights. "[S]he hopes to give a voice to those who often go unheard and [to] use the power of storytelling to inspire reflection and encourage action." She served as the University of Toronto's first Access and Equity Student Blogger, communicating accessibility and diversity issues to more than 80,000 peers. As a research associate for the International Women's Rights Project, Ishita analyzes case studies on women's participation in climate change, conservation, and maternal health governance efforts. She also drafts guidelines for gender mainstreaming for projects supported by the United Nations Development Programme.

A radio personality in Vaughan, she reports regularly on gender equality, and has launched the international Behind the Scenes Magazine, which features anonymous stories of gender discrimination. In 2016, Ishita founded MOM'S THE WORD, an organization offering free prenatal workshops for low-income pregnant women.

Ishita has received the RBC Top 25 Canadian Immigrants Youth Award, and a Commonwealth Youth Award, for which she was one of only seventeen finalists globally.

Connect with Ishita on LinkedIn.

Ishita Aggarwal
Vaughan, Ontario

Fatima Munir Alvi

Mississauga, Ontario

Connecting with community

"Each [community engagement] opportunity has broadened my understanding of the social realm and allowed me to address and give importance to social issues." — Fatima Munir Alvi

Fatima Munir Alvi is a community volunteer dedicated to social engagement and community outreach work. She started her involvement as head of her high school's student life organization. As a community engagement activity assistant at the University of Toronto Mississauga's (UTM) Centre for Student Engagement, Fatima recognizes that each position she has held has provided her with a platform to extensively connect with her community.

Fatima has taken part in numerous community day events, such as a Habitat for Humanity site build and a Canadian shoreline clean-up, and was a project leader during her university's alternative reading week. Fatima's commitment to supporting her peers and community has increased even more following a global experience trip to Guatemala in 2016. She has been a study group leader at the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre and has worked with UTM's chapter of the national Islamic Relief organization. Fatima has organized various activities with Islamic Relief, including volunteering for soup kitchens and distributing care packages to the homeless population in downtown Toronto. Fatima was a participant in the 2017 Harvard National Model United Nations conference and is a research assistant at UTM's Lange Lab.

The power of education to promote peace

"The core philosophy of [STEM Fellowship] is providing students with educational tools, such as data science and scholarly communication, to empower them to better advocate for issues they are passionate about." — Mohammad Asadi Lari

An advocate for peace and sustainable development, Mohammad Asadi Lari co-founded STEM Fellowship in 2015 and is now its managing director. The federal not-for-profit organization has set out to redefine how STEM is taught and offers interested youth with the educational opportunities and tools to better advocate for issues they care about, from sustainable development to health care to rural education. The social enterprise has expanded to every province across Canada, with a team of more than 200 people.

Mohammed brings stakeholders, from community leaders to international partnerships, to STEM Fellowship initiatives in schools and on campuses. He serves as a youth advisor for the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, the Canadian Red Cross, and British Columbia's Science World. In 2014, he started a nationwide ambassador program for Gene Researcher for a Week. He also organizes interfaith and intercultural events at the University of British Columbia and is treasurer for the university's Thaqalayn Muslim Association chapter.

Connect with Mohammad on Twitter.

Mohammadhossein (Mohammad) Asadi Lari

Vancouver, British Columbia

Zeynab Asadi Lari

Vancouver, British Columbia

Working for peace by improving mental health

"There is one weapon stronger than any other: education." — Zeynab Asadi Lari

Zeynab Asadi Lari immigrated to Canada from Iran in 2013 and has advocated for mental health and youth ever since. She has used her skills and growing science knowledge to intern with World Health Organization's regional office on Iran's Sustainable Development Goals microbial resistance data and action plans and is now researching ovarian cancer stem cell markers at the University of British Columbia.

Zeynab's own mental health experiences drive her to work for openness and mental health awareness, both through the UBC neurology club and as a mental health coordinator with the Youth Mental Health Association, where she helps build a safe community for youth struggling with mental illness. Zeynab is committed to creating positive global and local impacts for the next generation by raising awareness about youth issues like mental health and by building youth platforms, from animated videos to active communication techniques, enabling youth to express their ideas and launch their own community projects.

Connect with Zeynab on LinkedIn or Instagram.

Engaging tomorrow's community leaders today

"One of the greatest obligations of every citizen ought to be doing what one can to uplift one's community." —Thomas Banks

Thomas Banks wants more young people like himself to get involved in the process of governing their communities in a meaningful and comprehensive way. An Edmonton resident his entire young life, he continues to look for ways to engage with and serve the community he lives in. While advocating and proposing policies related to the views of young Edmontonians, Thomas has created opportunities to connect youth with local organizations, the civic order of government, and each other. In the past, he served as an Edmonton Public School Board student senator, a member of the Justice Canada Youth Action Committee, and an organizer for the Strathcona Initiative. Most recently, he has been campaigning to lower the municipal voting age.

Connect with Thomas on Twitter or LinkedIn.

Thomas Banks
Edmonton, Alberta

Jhon Caravajal

Sherbrooke, Quebec

Turning lives around, beginning with his own

"My life's mission is to make a difference in my Sherbrooke community." — Jhon Caravajal

Jhon Caravajal overcame adversity and changed his life at the age of 15 and has since dedicated his life to making a difference in his community. Born in Colombia, and following a difficult childhood, he has worked to overcome the challenges he has faced and become a youth leader in the process. Jhon travelled to Nicaragua in 2015 to provide disadvantaged children with food, clothing and school supplies through his church. Working to promote community engagement among other youth, Jhon is the youngest board member of the Colombiestrie Sherbrooke association, an organization promoting inclusion and harmony. He is actively engaged in sports and sports volunteering, and also works with Dialogue+; a local project to promote coexistence and combat racism, discrimination, and exclusion.

In 2015, Jhon received a lieutenant governor's medal in honour of his engagement.

Social inclusion and sustainable peace through mental health

"Health, physical and mental, is integral to everyone's ability to live life to the fullest, and, perhaps just as importantly, to aspire to their goals." — Geoffrey Ching

Geoffrey Ching founded the Youth Mental Health Association in 2014. The not-for-profit organization aims to destigmatize mental illness and establish youth leaders and innovators in the mental health sector. The Association develops youths' careers and skills to ensure they can innovatively improve the future of the mental health sector. As its presiding director, Geoffrey leads the Association, helping youth build their community engagement and work capacities through its development and outreach programs. The organization is currently planning a number of art, technology and policy development programs for youth, such as hackathons and case competitions, to further its mission.

A Doctor of Medicine student and former research assistant at the University of British Columbia, Geoffrey has also been a leader for the National Student Network.

Connect with Geoffrey on LinkedIn or Instagram.

Geoffrey Ching
Vancouver, British Columbia

Harleen Chohan

Vancouver, British Columbia

Building strong, inclusive communities

Harleen Chohan is passionate about engaging students to create communities championing social inclusion and intercultural learning. A pharmacy student at the University of British Columbia, Harleen supports youth in developing their vision for the future. As a tutor, she has built meaningful relationships with her students and teaches the value of sharing and supporting each other to create a conducive learning environment. She has supported and empowered students to navigate adversities in both their personal and academic lives. As an international student camp leader, Harleen has worked on social inclusion programs, bringing students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds together, connecting with them through team initiatives such as sports and talent shows, and fostering intercultural learning.

While working in her university residence, Harleen created programs on engaged citizenship and global issues, including the Totem No More campaign and a campus-wide Suicide Awareness Day. The programs worked to, reduce social oppression and improve student dialogue about sexual assault, consent and female equality, and to fight the stigma around mental health issues. Through these programs, Harleen has helped establish strong communities, united to support important causes.

Bridging cultural divides through nature

"To share a trail is to share a story." —Trails in Tandem

Jordan Lennie, a Sahtu beneficiary from Tulita in the Northwest Territories, teamed up with Erinn Drage and Nicholas Castel of Ottawa to launch the Trails in Tandem project in 2017. The trio of outdoor enthusiasts and young wilderness experts have been working with community partners to bring young people from different backgrounds and parts of Canada together to learn from each other's perspectives and cultures, while sharing outdoor experiences in the North. By giving youth the chance to take part in cultural dialogue during nature activities such as hikes, the team hopes to help bridge some of Canada's north-south divide.

With a vision of reconciliation rooted in the natural world, Jordan, Erinn and Nicholas and their project are advocating for environmental stewardship, creating safe spaces for cultural education, and using creative platforms to share stories about nature and culture. In July 2017, the three filmed a documentary, Written by the Land, that explores how nature can act as common ground for cross-cultural dialogue in an ever-changing country.

Connect with Jordan, Erinn and Nicholas on Facebook or Instagram.

Nicholas Castel, Erinn Drage, and Jordan Lennie

Ottawa, Ontario; Tulita, Northwest Territories

Ernest Edmond Jr.
Montreal, Quebec

Lifting youth up through sports

"Ernest believes that sport is one of the fundamental pillars for youth development and community cohesion." —Ernest Edmund Jr.

A community leader, Ernest Edmond Jr. has used his passion for youth, sports and languages to support a variety of causes, including the fight against poverty and discrimination, the development of culture and sports, and social inclusion. Born in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, he was named an ambassador for Montreal's 375th anniversary celebrations in 2015.

Ernest develops innovative ideas and ambitious projects in the not-for-profit sector, striving towards creating a better world for all. A basketball coach, he co-founded and continues to lead the not-for-profit Les Ballons Intensifs. The organization offers free athletic training sessions to disadvantaged youth, so they can become engaged citizens and create positive changes in their communities. Ernest also volunteers with coaching charity Pour 3 Points, the Organisation gonavienne pour le développement local and the Fondation MUNTU.

Connect with Ernest on LinkedIn.

Raising awareness and raising roofs

A recent immigrant to Canada from Colombia, Daniela Garabito is committed to raising awareness about global and national issues. A talented public speaker, she delivered a TEDx Talk advocating for sustainable organic food production, and changes to our relationship with food.

Now a student at McGill University, Daniela formerly attended St. Mary Catholic Secondary School in Pickering. There, she worked to raise awareness about the challenges facing LGBTQ+ and Indigenous communities. Working with her school's international outreach group, Daniela also helped raise funds to repair the roof of a refugee centre in Ethiopia, and to rebuild Haiti after the damage caused by Hurricane Matthew. She also volunteered with the Pickering Public Library's children's program and co-chaired the library's Teen Advisory Group.

Daniela Garabito
Gatineau, Quebec

Rita-Joëlle Harraka

Saint-Colomban, Quebec

Supporting communities for a more peaceful future

"Peace is a fragile concept in society and, more than ever, we have to unite in our diversity to sustain social cohesion." — Rita-Joëlle Harraka

A master's student in pharmacy at the Université Laval in Montreal, Rita-Joëlle Harraka strives for peace and social unity through engagement at every opportunity. The ongoing war and unrest in Syria, her country of origin, have affected both her life and her world-view. She is committed to supporting community organizations and promoting citizen engagement. For the past five years, Rita-Joëlle has volunteered with Pharmaide, the fundraising wing of Pharmacists Without Borders Canada. In 2013, she co-led efforts to mobilize some 100 students to raise $12,000 for the charity's mission in Haiti.

Through community outreach, Rita-Joëlle has educated 400 secondary students on health and sexual diversity issues in the past four years. In addition, she has supported nearly 15 other community organizations, such as Laval's food distribution network for students in need, La Table du pain, Little Brothers, and the Weekend to End Women's Cancers. She is currently raising funds for Rainbow, a project to help disadvantaged girls in India.

Working towards gender and language equality

Austin Henderson is a community leader and an advocate for gender equality, bilingualism, and civic and social engagement at the local and national levels. As a member of the Plan International Canada Youth Advisory Council and Speakers Bureau, Austin works to raise awareness of global childbirth issues and to promote positive masculinity.

A Lord Beaverbrook Scholar at the University of New Brunswick, he is actively engaged with the university and surrounding Fredericton communities, promoting physical activity to local children with disabilities and conducting research with the Fredericton Youth Council. Austin's research on youth homelessness resulted in a report of recommendations for the federal government. He has also presented to the federal Senate Committee on Official Languages.

Connect with Austin on LinkedIn.

Austin Henderson
Salisbury, New Brunswick

Husayn Jamal

Kitchener, Ontario

Fairness, equity, and inspirational learning

"[I]t has been an honour to work in the service of secondary students across Canada and provide essential programs and services to supplement the development of young people … and help students learn through experiential opportunities and gain skills that are simply not taught in the classroom."

Founder of the first model United Nations simulation exclusively for secondary students in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, Husayn Jamal, in partnership with the Mayor of Kitchener, attracted over 100 high school students to engage on pressing world issues such as climate change and the Syrian refugee crisis.

Now a political science and international development student at McGill University, Husayn contributed over 2,000 hours in service to his community and province during high school. He spearheaded a partnership with the Federation of Canadian Secondary Students to improve student access to mental health supports. He also worked on the Federation's Student Bill of Rights project, bringing students and other education stakeholders together to discuss the state of public education and how to ensure continued fairness. As an elected student trustee of the Waterloo Region District School Board, Husayn worked with the board to develop an accommodations policy for trans-gender students. He continues to be an outspoken member of the community for LGBTQIA+ issues.

Connect with Husayn on Twitter or LinkedIn.

Accounting for a bright future for all

"Canada has made significant strides in its efforts to enable persons with disabilities to lead meaningful lives." — Dilshan David Jayasinghe

A business student and learning support peer at the University of Guelph-Humber, Dilshan David Jayasinghe uses his outreach and business skills to help vulnerable members of his community. In association with the Royal Commonwealth Society, he helped raise funds for Mencafep, an organization that supports mentally challenged children and their families in Sri Lanka. As a former volunteer for the Peel chapter of Autism Ontario for five years, Dilshan organized Autism Awareness Day events to help youth with autism get an equal chance to access a good education and vibrant future.

As a member of the Mississauga chapter of the International Youth Council, Dilshan has collaborated with local and international not-for-profit organizations on community environmental sustainability initiatives such as education campaigns to encourage the reuse of items like personal computers, textbooks and eyeglasses. He is currently applying his accounting skills to help a number of community organizations.

Connect with Dilshan on LinkedIn.

Dilshan David Jayasinghe
Mississauga, Ontario
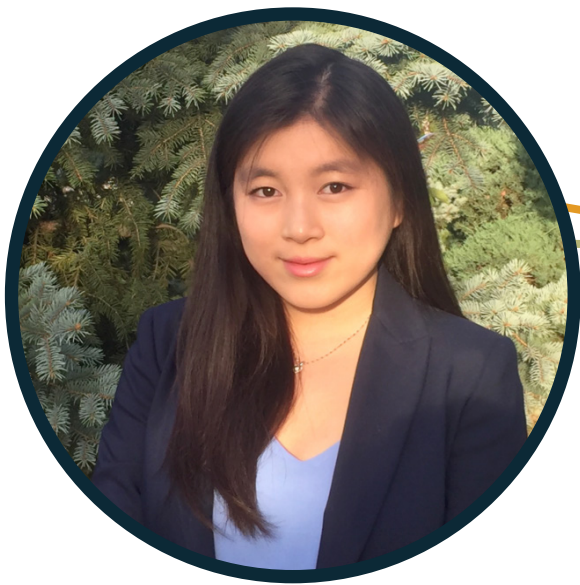
Ashlee Jiang

Markham, Ontario

Health and community, one person at a time

"Spreading awareness is vital for many diseases, charities and organizations, in order to help others. As the next generation, we are the future; we are the ones who can make a change, an impact on our community, no matter how small." — Ashlee Jiang

Ashlee Jiang began volunteering at the age of 13 in the geriatric centre of her local hospital. While helping, listening to, and engaging with seniors, she realized the impact a single person can have on others. Now, as a member of the Markham Mayor's Youth Council, Ashlee helps raise awareness and celebrate youth. By planning events to engage youth in her community, and by raising funds and awareness for local charities, she is helping Markham's youth community develop and flourish.

An advocate for the sciences, Ashlee is president of the Toronto branch of Project Pulse, a Canada-wide not-for-profit organization that gets youth familiar with health sciences. Ashlee plans the branch's annual Toronto conference bringing hundreds of health science students and professionals together. She is an active member of her community, leading clubs, tutoring, and serving as yearbook editor and grade representative at her high school.

Connect with Ashlee on LinkedIn.

Culture, land, and well-being

Angela Koe Blake is a practising advocate of Gwich'in culture, promoting the use and understanding of Gwich'in language and traditional practices such as drum making, hand games and drum dancing. Angela also volunteers as a Northwest Territories Youth Ambassador on her regional youth council. Through the council, she travels to other communities to represent the Tsiigehtchic region.

Angela advocates for cultural and personal well-being through living on the Land in a traditional way. She has paddled the Wind River, the Arctic Red River and the Peel River, campaigning for their protection. She also supports her local school by volunteering as a youth chaperon.

Angela Koe Blake
Tsiigehtchic, Northwest Territories

Sloane Bailey Kowal

Toronto, Ontario

Securing paths to peace through health and creativity

"To me, peace means encouraging others to pursue their best selves." — Sloane Bailey Kowal

Believing great leaders nurture other leaders, Sloane Bailey Kowal encourages others, including fellow students, to pursue their passions. In 2016, Sloane founded the TED Talks-inspired Create speakers conference, which invited speakers to share what they had created, with an emphasis on redefining traditional definitions of success.

An integrated sciences student active in academic organizations at McMaster University, Sloane has worked as a laboratory research assistant at McMaster Children's Hospital, and has volunteered with her local elder care facility and several other health care and charitable organizations. She intends to pursue a high-impact career in health care. She has been involved with a number of organizations focused on pushing forward mental health and well-being issues, hosting open, non-judgemental conversations, and gathering real data. She has represented youth perspectives at hospitals and has helped students as they try to better their communities and themselves through volunteering.

Sloane credits the strong women in her life for creating a solid foundation for her in times of hardship.

Connect with Sloane on LinkedIn.

Peace through diversity

"[D]iversity is Canada's strength and it's what makes our country so unique and so special." — Patricia Kumbakisaka

Patricia Kumbakisaka was born in Romania to parents from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, before moving with her family to Greece at age 3, and eventually immigrating to Canada. With a degree from the University of Manitoba in political science, specializing in international relations, she has been promoting and building peace in her own communities and abroad with a strong emphasis on diversity. Currently serving as the regional coordinator for the United Nations Association in Canada, Patricia was also the 2016 chair of the Human Rights Council for the United Nations Youth Association of Romania, representing Canada.

Dedicated to strengthening Canada's role in global affairs, she has worked or volunteered with organizations such as African Communities of Manitoba Inc.; as youth international services director for the Rotary Club of Winnipeg; and as a mentor for international students with World University Service of Canada, sponsoring students from Jordan, South Sudan, Syria, and Kenya. She has organized large-scale events highlighting cultural diversity, including Winnipeg's Diversity Runway, a showcase for diversity and community inclusion, which raised funds for Welcome Place, an interfaith immigration centre for refugees in Canada; and an Indigenous cultural centre: Circle of Life Thunderbird House.

Connect with Patricia on Twitter or LinkedIn.

Patricia Kumbakisaka
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Zhang Hao (Jim) Li

Vancouver, British Columbia

Inclusion for all

Jim is passionate about establishing an interactive network of students transcending geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries.

A strong advocate for educational and professional equality in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), Zhang Hao (Jim) Li devotes his time to providing accessible mentorship opportunities for marginalized youth. A student at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Jim is also an executive for STEM Fellowship and leader of its STEMpowerment mentorship program, directing a national team in outreach to populations that have been traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields. Jim and his team are working to expand the program, which brings together students and mentors from a diverse range of backgrounds, including Indigenous, rural and low-socioeconomic-status youth.

Jim is also vice-president internal of the Science One Survivors Club at his university, organizing friendly academic contests between mixed teams from rival programs to promote mutual understanding and a sense of inclusion. He also serves as co-chair of UBC's Science Careers Month committee, providing educational resources and employment opportunities to diverse students.

Connect with Jim on LinkedIn.

Using fantasy to improve reality for Cape Bretoners

Alexandra Morrisson is building a future for youth in a place where they leave in droves. She understands what will get them to stay.

After watching many of her fellow youth leave Cape Breton, Alexandra Morrisson, with the help of family and friends, started something new on the Nova Scotia island. They used their love of animé, science fiction, fantasy, comics, movies, cosplay, gaming and more to create an inclusive annual fan convention, CaperCon. The event brings Cape Bretoners experiences and opportunities they typically wouldn't find unless they ventured five hours away, in Halifax.

In 2017, the CaperCon Pop Culture Society officially registered as a not-for-profit organization, with Alexandra becoming chair of its board of directors. The convention itself has grown exponentially since its launch and has not only contributed to the local economy but has also helped people in the community feel included, important and involved. Alexandra and the Society have major plans going forward, including playing an increasing role in ensuring people stay in Cape Breton by creating an inclusive environment, promoting geek culture, and creating a safe space for self-expression.

Alexandra Morrisson
Sydney, Nova Scotia

Anne Xuan-Lan Nguyen

Montreal, Quebec

Peace, reconciliation, and a future for youth

Anne Xuan-Lan Nguyen is dedicated to building peace and reconciliation in Canada and is realizing her dream of making a difference in her community. She has volunteered as an instructor with the Plein Air à Plein Coeur, charitable camp for disadvantaged kids, since 2014. Anne herself launched De l'air frais pour un sourire vrai, an initiative that organizes educational, athletic, cultural and artistic outings for disadvantaged youth.

As the elected official responsible for the action committee of the Conseil jeunesse de Montréal, Anne advises the city's mayor and other elected officials on youth issues. She previously volunteered for a student journal and the ecological committee at her school, the Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, as well as with the Giive Reconciliation Camp, Medlife and Tutorat Sans Frontières. Anne also organizes workshops to foster an inclusive world that recognizes the rights, history and contributions of Indigenous peoples.

Connect with Anne on LinkedIn.

An ambassador for global change

"I strongly believe that positive change takes place when youth create opportunities to expand not only our knowledge of social justice, but especially [that of] those around [us], as education is key in creating a more just, equitable world." — Chantal Peng

As the Nova Scotia Act 4 Global Change ambassador, Chantal Peng has facilitated global citizenship and social justice workshops for elementary, middle and high school students throughout Eastern Canada, focusing on the importance of the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and how youth can contribute in their own way. Chantal also serves on her high school's music, executive and student councils and is co-chair of her school's Me to We club.

As a first-generation Chinese Canadian, her appreciation of her Chinese heritage and Canadian roots has led to an appreciation for the wonderful diversity of cultures. During the 2016-17 school year, when Nova Scotian teachers were on a work-to-rule campaign that eliminated the possibility of on-campus workshops, Chantal contacted many libraries to hold a Global Citizenship workshop for young children outside of the school system. In 2016, she organized a benefit concert for a schoolmate undergoing chemotherapy. Chantal has received a Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia's Education medal and was a 2017 Nova Scotian Youth Volunteer award nominee, in recognition of her efforts to help others.

Connect with Chantal on Twitter.

Chantal Peng
Wolfville, Nova Scotia

Sophia Qaderi
Edmonton, Alberta

Inspiring student engagement for a better future

"I personally believe youth are the building blocks to a stronger generation, and will continue to get many involved." — Sophia Qaderi

Sophia Qaderi believes in using her resources to help others. A student mentor for incoming international students at MacEwan University, Sophia is also a member of the school's United Nations Club and is active in the on-campus campaign to end sexual violence. In addition, Sophia is the youngest member ever to sit on the university's Sustainability Advisory Committee.

Sophia has volunteered more than 900 hours and presents to youth at various schools about the importance of getting involved and how they can get started, in their own communities. She has received many accolades for her community efforts to date, including the Governor General Sovereign Medal for Volunteers, the Leaders of Tomorrow Award, and a United Nations International Women's Day award for her dedication to youth, environment and global humanitarian issues. She has also been named among the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation Top 30 Under 30. In 2017, Sophia was invited to present her ideas on community involvement to Canada's Governor General.

Helping others look beyond

Hannah Rahim aspires to form a network of passionate and innovative students and experts transcending socioeconomic, geographical and ethnic barriers.

Her passion for social good was sparked when she founded the Digital-Good club at Mulgrave School, using technology and art to advocate for human rights.

A University of Calgary health sciences student researcher, Hannah founded a local branch of STEM Fellowship at the university and serves as one of its associate branch directors. The not-for-profit organization offers youth traditionally underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) educational opportunities and tools to advocate for issues and conduct research at the university.

A 2016 Schulich Leader honouree, Hannah volunteers with various other organizations, including Amnesty International, an initiative for development in Afghanistan, and the Respect in the Workplace Program. She actively works to challenge reductive views of Afghanistan using the arts, and to empower children and youth through education.

Connect with Hannah on LinkedIn.

Hannah Rahim
Calgary, Alberta

Kharoll-Ann Souffrant

Montreal, Quebec

A powerful voice for mental health and survivors of violence against women

Kharoll-Ann Souffrant is a master of social work student and research assistant at McGill University pursuing a graduate option in gender and women's studies. Her research focuses on respect for victims' personal dignity during investigations into sexual violence against Indigenous women. The work reflects Kharoll-Ann's deep dedication to issues such as human rights, school dropout rates, mental health, and violence against women, which she has demonstrated since first getting involved with community organizations at the age of 12.

Born in Haiti, Kharoll-Ann is a Canadian leader in human rights advocacy, winning numerous prestigious scholarships and awards, including a Terry Fox Humanitarian Award. Named an ambassador for Montreal's 375th anniversary celebrations in 2015, she represented the city at an international fact-finding mission in Morocco. A gifted public speaker, Kharoll-Ann was a TEDx Québec 2015 presenter and also spoke at WE Day Montreal 2017. Diagnosed with bipolar disorder seven years earlier, she was named as a face of mental illness for the 2017 Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health campaign, which raised awareness about mental health issues across Canada, including through advocacy in the House of Commons.

Connect with Kharoll-Ann on Twitter or about.me.

A local focus for a better world

Denver Suttie believes peace starts in everyone's own community. He is actively involved with several volunteer and charitable campaigns at his high school, including its Bike-A-Thon and its global initiative fundraiser. The annual event has raised more than $1.5 million in the last 10 years.

He has co-authored three books, including the children's book Scared Skunk: A true story for the curious learner, in support of local animal rehabilitation centres in Alberta.

Connect with Denver on LinkedIn.

Denver Suttie
Calgary, Alberta

Daphné-Anne Takpanie

Montreal, Quebec

Sharing Inuit culture to help others

Daphné-Anne Takpanie is an Inuk born in Nunavut, Iqaluit, adopted and raised in the province of Quebec. With the help of her adoptive family, she managed to maintain a strong connection with the Inuit culture and community while growing up, despite the geographic distance. She is now an advocate for Inuit culture.

Daphné-Anne volunteers at Montreal's Inuit centre, acting as a role model for other youth growing up in situations similar to hers. She was the sole Indigenous representative among regional ambassadors for Montreal's 375th anniversary celebrations and travelled to Morocco to meet with other youth and community organizations. Daphné-Anne is also involved in environmental, cultural and social justice causes, with her environmental work taking her as far as Senegal. Daphné-Anne often marches for rights and environmental awareness. She sits on the board for Coule Pas Chez Nous, a nonpartisan Quebec organization fighting against the transport of dirty oil.

Connect with Daphné-Anne on Twitter and LinkedIn.

Inviting everyone to the table

"[T]he myCanada150 photo exhibit demonstrates that, here, pluralism is not some abstract idea but a commonly held Canadian ethic at the centre of our collective identity." — Ali Tejpar

As part of Canada's 150th birthday celebrations, Ali Tejpar worked with the Ottawa hub of the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers community to host myCanada150, a Humans of New York-style outdoor photo exhibit showcasing Canada's commitment to and championing of pluralism. The exhibit featured inspiring and heartfelt stories of Canada's Indigenous peoples, as well as of first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants from around the world.

Ali is a juris doctor / Master of Arts candidate at the University of Ottawa Faculty of Law and the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. He holds a bachelor's degree in global development and political studies from Queen's University and ranked first in his graduating class. Ali has been widely recognized for his leadership, community service, and academic achievements, and has been named a World Economic Forum Global Shaper and a Royal Commonwealth Society associate fellow. He has been a panellist at international conferences in Prague and Atlanta, speaking to academics, policy makers and diplomats about pluralism in Islam and the importance of interfaith dialogue.

Connect with Ali on Twitter or LinkedIn.

Ali Tejpar
Ottawa, Ontario

Sarah Walji

Mississauga, Ontario

Giving others a voice and a chance to succeed

"Each individual is able to make a difference, from a small act of kindness at a grocery store to a role as a youth advocate on a global health issue. Each person is important." — Sarah Walji

Sarah Walji has been involved in global volunteerism since 2009, when she first led a group of youth at a local mosque in a number of fundraising and social justice awareness campaigns. Today, she is using her skills and interests to showcase youth who haven't before been the focus of attention, and to help give them an opportunity to reach their own goals.

A nursing student at McMaster University, Sarah is also marketing director for the Global Association of Student and Novice Nurses, which provides an international voice for nursing students and new nurses, promoting their involvement and leadership as they start their careers. Sarah is currently working with the Association's international board to create a YouTube and podcast series similar in style to the ones she worked on for the Canadian Nursing Students' Association, developing engaging content for and about novice nurses. Sarah also sits on the Canadian Nursing Students' Association global health committee and is an advocate for Advance Care Planning.

Connect with Sarah on LinkedIn.

Peace and social inclusion

"STEM Fellowship's STEMpowerment program provides unique mentorship and educational opportunities to youth from communities underrepresented in STEM. This initiative supports, empowers, and cultivates growth and innovation in our country's next generation of young leaders." — Kay Wu

For six years, Kay Wu has served as a leader at organizations dedicated to promoting social inclusion and building peace. She began her journey at Baycrest, volunteering with the geriatric care hospital's adult programs. Inspired by the dedication of her fellow volunteers, Kay joined Baycrest's youth council, leading initiatives to improve the hospital's volunteer program to benefit both volunteer youth and the elderly.

Kay's interest in social issues has led her to leadership in several organizations raising awareness and reducing stigma around homelessness, poverty and mental health. As an executive for Operation Cooperation, she organized fundraisers and helped distribute care packages to Toronto's homeless. Kay later joined the United Way, Love Without Boundaries and Step Above Stigma committees at Queen's University, where she continues to lead events from bake sales to donation drives. Kay also teaches and empowers other youth. As part of the STEM Fellowship team, she leads outreach and educational initiatives that provide unique learning opportunities to youth, especially youth who are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Kay Wu
Toronto, Ontario

Leo (Jun Kai) Xu

Markham, Ontario

Youth advocating for youth

"I believe with all my heart that by taking initiative in the community and celebrating the diversity of faith, race and culture of Canada, anybody can become a young leader." — Leo Xu

At only 17 years old, Leo (Jun Kai) Xu had already put in nine years of volunteering and community activism. In 2017, he joined the Markham Mayor's Youth Council, a driven team of youth advocates working to promote social and political engagement by youth across the Greater Toronto Area. The same year, Leo spearheaded the council's annual youth conference, Think Tank 2017, inviting adolescent speakers to speak to more than 100 youth attendees and share personal tales of growth, development and opportunity. The conference focused on racism, community involvement and academia.

At the provincial level, Leo has served as an executive member of the Federation of Canadian Secondary Students, leading discussions with students from various boards of education as part of a public consultation on the federation's student bill of rights supporting equity and inclusion. Leo has also sat on the RCMP's National Youth Advisory Committee, discussing threats facing youth, such as drug abuse, domestic violence and mental illnesses. Leo worked with more than 100 members across the country to paint a mosaic of youth today and of possibilities for resolving challenges that prevent students from being successful.

Art and sustainability

"Amidst my difficult childhood against the backdrop of an immigrant family background, I coped by developing an early interest in writing that led me to publish op-eds on student mental health, culture and body image." — Diamond Yao

Diamond Yao is combining her passion for the arts with her devotion to global citizenship and community service to help build sustainable communities. In CEGEP, Diamond was part of the inaugural Montreal cast of The Vagina Monologues. Now an interdisciplinary bachelor's student in sustainability, science and society at McGill University, she organized a conference on biodiversity for the school's chapter of the World Wildlife Fund, and is a facilitator at ECOL, an on-campus experimental sustainable housing collective that doubles as a sustainability hub.

As an intern at the Climate Reality Project Canada, a charity founded by Al Gore, Diamond works with the Community Climate Hub campaign to connect ordinary citizens across the country with each other to create local initiatives that reduce carbon emissions. Diamond also works as a sustainability field agent, raising awareness about environmental issues in Montreal's Mercier–Hochelaga-Maisonneuve borough.

Connect with Diamond on LinkedIn.

Diamond Yao
Montreal, Quebec

Joannes Paulus Yimbesalu
Toronto, Ontario

Promoting international peace through safety and educational for all

"My stay in Niger made me appreciate what it means to live in peace—something we take for granted." — Joannes Paulus Yimbesalu

Joannes Paulus Yimbesalu has worked tirelessly for youth in Africa, spurred on after attending an "African Women and Girls Speak on Peace, Security and Development in Africa" press conference at the 59th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. A research consultant with World Vision, he now focuses on improving information about development issues and refugee needs in the area, visiting refugee camps in Niger and working to ensure comprehensive education for girls and women and to empower African youth. Joannes Paulus also co-founded Hope for Children Cameroon, a non-governmental organization with the goal of "Educating Every Child One School/Village at a Time" in that nation.

Since 2015, he has also been a global youth ambassador for A World at School, which brings together non-governmental organizations, faith groups, leaders from business and other sectors, youth and media to help ensure safe education, free from discrimination, for all children. Joannes Paulus has won numerous honours and awards for his work, including a Queen's Young Leader Award, Women Deliver Young Leader award, and a Youth Courage Award.

Connect with Joannes Paulus on Twitter or LinkedIn.

Creating Change

"Youth, we are both the future and the present. We must be leaders in our communities, who work towards diversity, peace, sustainability and development. You have the ability and power to bring about change. Be an advocate and an activist." — Rim Zeghai

As a student at Holy Trinity High School in Ottawa, Rim Zeghai realized her school needed to focus more on black lives during February, Black History Month, so she made a video for the school, reaching out to students and teachers to create an open dialogue. She used that same sense of dedication and leadership to volunteer at nursing homes and clean the land of an Elder, to represent her homeland of Eritrea at her school's cultural fair, and to take part in the 2017 National Student Commonwealth Forum on global water issues. She has also motivated other youth through her coaching and refereeing, ultimately MC'ing a Terry Fox Run and athletic banquet.

Now a public affairs and policy management student at Carleton University, Rim works with the Youth Reconciliation Initiative as a youth leader for Ottawa. Rim has already received numerous awards and scholarships for her academic, writing and community achievements and, in 2017, was honoured by the City of Ottawa as Torch Bearer for the city's New Year's celebration.

Connect with Rim on Twitter.

Rim Zeghai
Ottawa, Ontario