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# CHANGE THE WORLD

*(by having fun)*

YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

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**YWCA**  
CANADA

A TURNING POINT  
FOR WOMEN  
UN POINT TOURNANT  
POUR LES FEMMES



Canadian  
Heritage

Patrimoine  
canadien

Canada

**THINK  
BIG**  
*(start small)*  
VACT UP

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# THINK BIG

(start small)



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# INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to the *Think Big/Start Small* youth civic engagement toolkit!

*Think Big/Start Small* is an exciting new project within the Y Act Up program of YWCA Canada.

Many of us want to change the world, we just don't know where to begin...

So we had this idea — show young women they have the power to tackle major issues in simple ways.

*Think Big/Start Small* is about celebrating what we, as engaged young women, are able to do, regardless of where we are and what we may have. Even if it seems like we have far to go.

It's about supporting each other as young women to trust our voices, celebrate our talents, and influence social change. It's about committing to making a difference.

And it's about understanding civic engagement as a learned and fulfilling experience, which in turn helps all of us feel more connected to our communities.



## WHAT IS "CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?"

Civic engagement means working to make a difference in our communities. And it doesn't require special connections or power — anyone with ideas and a plan can do it! Civic engagement is about promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. By combining our knowledge, skills, and motivation with those of others, we can make our communities better.

As the program unfolds, thousands of young women will take part in *Think Big/Start Small* activities right across Canada — led by Y Act Up councils in 22 communities, led by you and your friends in other places, led by anyone who wants to participate.

The first Day of Big Change will launch on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013. This Canada-wide day of action is a chance for young women everywhere to be heard. The date for this event was chosen because it is one week before International Women's Day (IWD), an annual commemoration that began in the early 1900s. Every year on IWD, thousands of events around the world are held to celebrate women's achievements and inspire new ones. It's a great example of *Think Big/Start Small* because all those diverse local activities connect women around the planet in a powerful way.

Our own Day of Big Change includes rallies, events, workshops, online features, and all kinds of creative actions. The goal is to raise awareness about the power of young women to address key issues and improve our communities.

## MESSAGE FROM PAULETTE

Communities are created;  
they don't just happen.

YWCA Canada was started by young women who wanted to improve their communities and has a long history of supporting young women and girls to become engaged, healthy, empowered leaders. Y Act Up is the perfect follow-up to the tremendous success of our national GirlSpace and Power of Being a Girl programs that support and enhance leadership development for girls.

When young women stop and say “my community would be so much better if...” we all benefit. It is the people who “step up” who define what a community becomes.

I encourage you to take your rightful place, step up, get involved and, create the community you want.

Think Big. Start Small.

Paulette Senior,  
Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada



## SO, WHAT'S Y ACT UP?

A civic engagement and leadership program for young women between the ages of 16 and 29.

In the fall of 2012, 22 participating YWCA Member Associations across Canada established Y Act Up councils to help young women develop leadership skills, build community, and share their experiences. If you're in an area where one of these councils exists, be sure to get involved. But even if you're not, there are so many ways to be a part of things. This toolkit will help.

Participants in Y Act Up have the opportunity to connect with peers in communities all over the country on a dynamic social networking website: [thinkbigstartsmall.ca](http://thinkbigstartsmall.ca). It's the place to be for all kinds of resources, a discussion forum to dialogue about key issues affecting our communities, and to promote our activities and achievements.

There's so much to gain!

Through the *Think Big/Start Small* project of the Y Act Up program, young women like you will:

- build self-esteem and a unique voice
- recognize talents and develop new ones
- learn how to identify, address, and change problems
- become aware of community issues facing us locally and across Canada
- develop advocacy, planning, and fundraising skills



## HOW IS Y ACT UP FUNDED?

With funding from Canadian Heritage (a federal government department) through its Youth Take Charge program.

- improve communication skills
- design initiatives and events around important issues
- forge support teams
- mentor younger girls in YWCA programs
- foster appreciation of Canada's diversity
- reaffirm connections to community
- grow! explore! influence change!

We hope you will find this toolkit useful. Take advantage of all it has to offer, but feel free to make it your own — add to it, edit things, create new sections.

Remember, this project is ALL ABOUT YOU, your community, your ideas. Lead the way!

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# IMAGINATION

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## *WE ARE LEADERS.*

You may have heard the expression “If you can believe it, you can achieve it.”

Well, how about “If you can imagine it, you can become it”?

For all of us, that’s the best place to begin our journeys as leaders.

To spark the imagination, let’s talk about what leadership actually is...

When creating *Think Big/Start Small*, we asked young women from different communities across Canada what they believe are the characteristics of a great leader. They said:

- Active
- Altruistic
- Analytical
- Approachable
- Caring
- Confident
- Encouraging
- Engaged
- Generous
- Helpful
- Honest
- Humble
- Independent
- Fair-minded
- Persistent
- Politically aware
- Resourceful
- Strong
- Supportive
- Trustworthy and Trusting
- Welcoming
- Willing to share power

Leadership is less about “up” (gaining access to the top) and more about “deep down.” It’s a way of being, seeing, and

# Shazeen Suleman

While in high school in Cambridge, Ontario, Shazeen decided any child who wants to learn music should be able to. So she founded the youth-led and youth-run MusicBox Children’s Charity in 2002.

Ten years later, over 120 children are enrolled in MusicBox across Toronto while 50 volunteers mentor, teach, and take care of curriculum and operations. MusicBox partners with the Toronto District School Board and other local groups to help connect the program to the people who need it most.

MusicBox’s success can be attributed to the core beliefs Shazeen infuses in others: that music can make children feel strong when they otherwise don’t, and that music should be accessible to everyone, regardless of means.

treating others. And each of us is capable of becoming a leader.

Some people believe leaders are made, not born. Others believe some of us possess an innate leadership quality. Either way, leaders are usually inspired by someone or something that calls them to do more, to be more. Has that ever happened to you? **That calling stirs us for a reason — we need to hear it.**

The inspiration (or calling) to lead can come from many sources:

- an injustice we witnessed or heard about
- personal experience with an issue
- someone we respect who encourages us to take action
- concern about the future of our planet
- our desire for a better world

Leadership in Action:

- leading by example
- encouraging/motivating others
- mentoring/teaching
- showing respect

Leadership can't be forced — people have to decide if they want to follow. We gain respect as leaders when we respect the people we work with.

# Mira Hall

At first, a younger Mira Hall was reluctant to become politically active — because her mother was, and she wanted to rebel — but an innate sense of justice compelled Mira to become an inspiring activist in her own right. She now inspires countless other young women with her commitment to ending marginalization.

Passionate about matters ranging from food security to affordable housing, Mira is an advocate with Yellowknife's Centre for Northern Families. Each and every day, Mira comes face to face with the pressing issues that drive her activism. She also pursued the study of them in university.

Mira's feminist activism led her to become a delegate at a United Nations

Commission on the Status of Women gathering in New York. At the local level, Mira ran for School Trustee in Yellowknife in 2009 ... and won.

A young single mother to two children, Mira currently volunteers with Alternatives North, a social justice coalition, and co-chairs the steering committee of FAFIA (Feminist Alliance for International Action).

Mira's message to young women? "Keep your chin up and know that no one can represent you or your demographic better than you! Change the world, and keep pushing!"

## SEEING OURSELVES AS LEADERS

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With so many unattainable images out there of what it means to be appealing, beautiful, or popular, it can be hard for some girls and young women to feel positive about being exactly who we are.

Building self-confidence is something that happens over a lifetime. Feeling good about who we are and who we're becoming should start early. Many factors affect our overall sense of self-worth and happiness. We have to focus on the powerful effects that come from having self-esteem.

So what is self-esteem? It's how we value ourselves; how content we are with who we are. It's our confidence in our abilities and comfort in our bodies. It's pride in our intellect, ideas, and beliefs. And it's how we see ourselves as compared to others and how we connect to those around us.

Having low self-esteem can mean we fail to recognize our achievements, never mind feel good about them. It can make us feel isolated or disconnected from others. And it can make us want to conform to stereotypes that might not lead to healthy choices.

Building up our self-esteem is an important step in our development as leaders. Why? Because the better we feel about ourselves, the more we can take decisive action on our ideas, influence others, make positive contributions to our communities, and ultimately, change the world.

## WHY IS YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SO IMPORTANT?

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Young women's leadership is essential to social change, now and for the future. Our belief in our own voices, opinions, and power can lead to meaningful participation in decision-making.

Being a young leader can mean engagement in activist actions, or it can be an everyday thing. It can mean working within the systems and structures already built for us, or creating new ones. One of the young women consulted for Y Act Up said:

“We are all agents of change because even if it's just educating someone on an issue they didn't know before through conversation, we're always influencing others in one form or another.”



### WHAT'S PRIVILEGE?

We can do better anti-oppression work when we recognize the different power structures at work everywhere. For example, major power differences between white people and people of colour mean that being white has advantages that many can take for granted — that's white privilege. As another example, people who are wealthy have different levels of power than poor people — that's economic privilege. And so on.

For further inspiration, contemplate this excerpt from the “Empowering Young Women to Lead Change Manual” by the World YWCA:

“As young women, we are change agents and our leadership can bring vitality, creativity and courage for social change.

We have the power to inspire and mobilize others for positive action. We can encourage the questioning of systems and beliefs that limit lives and choices. With courage, we can confront even the injustices that have been in place long before our lives began.

By our leadership, young women ensure that social change will not stop when the generation before us is no more, but only when peace, justice, health, human dignity and care for the environment has been achieved everywhere, and for everyone.

By supporting each other we ensure that our leadership remains strong in the face of unfair gender and age biases, and maximize our power to change.

As we continue to develop and define our leadership, the advice and example of older, more experienced women are invaluable. By working together, women of all ages can help each other grow, maximize our strengths and fulfill our potential as change makers.”

## FOSTERING SELF-ADVOCACY

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Building our self-esteem and sense of self-worth is one thing. Expecting respect from others is another. That’s where self-advocacy comes in.

The idea behind self-advocacy is that no one can be a better advocate for you than yourself.

To self-advocate is to speak (up) for ourselves, defend ourselves, make our own decisions, and insist on being respected.

Self-advocacy is about attaching value to our self-worth and having the confidence to ask to be treated accordingly. If we are fighting for the equality and dignity of others, we have to demand it for ourselves — emotionally, politically, financially, even physically.

To be effective self-advocates within institutions and society, it’s helpful for us to know our rights and responsibilities, be informed about systems and processes, question everything, and gather support.

On an interpersonal level, we can self-advocate by leaving relationships that make us feel disrespected or abused, asking for fair compensation and healthy work environments, and caring for our minds, bodies, and spirits in order to always be giving our best selves.

Like any other skill, we can develop and improve our self-advocacy over time.

No matter what, the key to self-advocacy is persistence. Other characteristics of effective self-advocacy include assertiveness, fairness, inquisitiveness, and passion!

Self-advocacy on a movement level might refer to the action taken to empower and speak out on behalf of groups facing discrimination, such as women, people of colour, people with disabilities, queer/trans folks, and

others. Communities might self-advocate for their unique interests, needs, or citizenship. Advocacy of this kind has resulted in many important societal changes.

Self-advocacy is a valuable tool for people committed to making change such as young women like us. Be sure to look into self-advocacy resources in this toolkit's Appendix and beyond.

## LEADING WITH AN ANTI-OPPRESSION APPROACH

It may not always be obvious, but oppression still exists in our society. It lives in our language and behaviour. It's perpetuated in our systems and institutions. It is rooted in our complex and converging histories.

We need to work together and as individuals to combat all forms of oppression — racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, ageism, and more. Engaging in this kind of work is called *anti-oppression*.

## DEFINING OUR TERMS

Some of the terminology associated with anti-oppression may be new to some of us. For example, “ableism” refers to the favouring of able-bodied people as the norm, and “ageism” is bias or oppression against a person or group on the grounds of age.

Can you think of other “isms” that relate to oppressive attitudes and behaviours?

No matter the form of oppression, we all have a role to play: we can either perpetuate it or work to end to it for good. But we're not always aware of these phenomena in action, or how to interpret them.

# Yvonne Du

While in high school in Holland Landing, Ontario, Yvonne discovered that for years, staff shortages were leading caretakers at her school to dump recycling bins into the garbage. She responded by starting The Denison Environmental Club (D.E.C.), one of the first student-run recycling programs in the area. In just three years, D.E.C. was recycling twice a week with remarkable results. Yvonne went on to lead D.E.C. coast to coast, expanding their environmental network and knowledge while spreading messages of youth leadership and sustainability. Yvonne has spoken to thousands of people from all walks of life, mobilizing others to take positive action.

To get you thinking about persisting oppression in society, here are five principles of anti-oppression:

- Power + Privilege = Oppression
- Only when we understand how oppression affects each one of us can we identify how power and privilege play out broadly

- We are all susceptible to behaving oppressively and need to continuously think about it
- Developing anti-oppression practice is life-long work, requiring a life-long commitment to changing attitudes and behaviours
- We need to learn how to listen without feeling hurt or offended, and to communicate respectfully

## IDENTIFYING OPPRESSION



Describe an instance of an oppressive attitude or action you've seen lately, perhaps at school or in a public setting like a shopping centre. While you may not exactly have recognized it as a form of oppression at the time, naming it as such now will help you be able to identify and challenge oppression more often in the future.

A helpful way to develop anti-oppression practice is this personal anti-oppression checklist:

*I will always try to ...*

- interrupt the behaviour when witnessing or experiencing racism, sexism, homophobia, or any form of oppression (when I feel safe to do so); and address it on the spot or later, either one-on-one or with a few friends
- consider ways to address behaviour that encourage change and dialogue, not debate
- treat it as a gift when someone offers criticism of oppressive behavior, rather than challenging or invalidating her or his experience

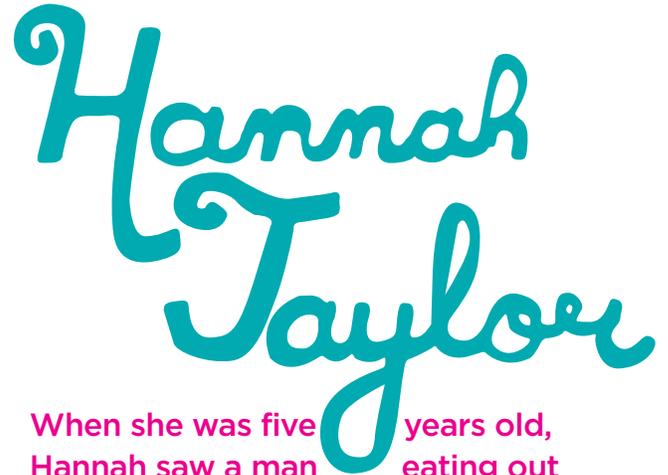
- give people the benefit of the doubt, not make assumptions
- keep space open for anti-oppression conversations anywhere, anytime
- respect different styles of leadership and communication
- be conscious of how much space I take up or how much I speak (i.e. does my energy, presence, volume dominate in such a way that others might feel intimidated or silenced?)
- be conscious of how my language may perpetuate oppression
- listen, listen, listen
- avoid generalizing feelings, thoughts, or behaviours to a whole group
- not push people to do things just because of their race and/or gender
- promote anti-oppression in everything I do, in and outside of activist spaces
- set anti-oppression goals and continually evaluate whether or not I am meeting them
- not feel guilty, only motivated

Oppression can multiply and intersect. You may hold privilege in one area of your life but experience oppression in another. People in oppressed groups do not want saviours, so seek leadership from those with lived experience. If living with privilege, you can commit to being an ally to others. What does this mean?

*There's no single way to be an ally, but here are some things to think about ...*

- Listen, listen, listen

- Recognize and count your own privilege — we are “living off the benefits” of an oppressive system unless and until we change it
- Try not to feel guilty or think of yourself as a bad person because you are a product of a society that is still racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, ageist, and so on
- Remember that from a position of privilege, such as white, heterosexual, or able-bodied, you can’t see oppression as clearly as the oppressed group can
- If you witness oppression in play, name and challenge it
- Avoid knowing “what they want” or “what’s good for them” — don’t take leadership in someone else’s struggle, take direction
- Don’t expect every member of an oppressed group to agree
- Commit to life-long learning about oppression — share, ask, read, listen
- Support the process of unlearning oppression with people within your own demographic group
- Constantly do your own self-work
- Respect — even celebrate — different styles of leadership, communication, and interaction
- When we’re in groups, keep in mind that we all have valuable skills to share, and that we should all be recognized and supported equally for our contributions



When she was five years old, Hannah saw a man eating out of a garbage can on a frozen winter day in Winnipeg. Filled with sadness, Hannah wondered, “If everyone shared what they had, could that cure homelessness?” Ever since, she has devoted herself to the issues of hunger and homelessness. At eight, Hannah founded The Ladybug Foundation Inc., a registered charity that raises money for projects across Canada providing shelter, food, and safety for people experiencing homelessness. Hannah has spoken to more than 175 schools, organizations, and events about her belief that everyone deserves a roof over their head and enough food to eat as basic human rights. Hannah also developed makeChange: The Ladybug Foundation Education Program, a K-12 resource for use in schools across Canada to empower young people to get involved and “make change” in their world.

In our work together on *Think Big/Start Small*, we can feel good about supporting anti-oppression practice by following even these four important steps:

- Promote anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, anti-ableist, anti-ageist messages and thinking in everything we do
- Create opportunities for conversations on discrimination and oppression, and for people to develop communication skills about these issues

Remember, these are incredibly complex issues that warrant a lifetime of exploration. We don't have to be experts to start a journey with anti-oppression in mind — just a commitment to challenge ourselves to be honest, open, and accountable. The rest will come in time.

*(If you want to explore anti-oppression more, check out some of the resources listed in the Appendix.)*

## RALLYING OTHERS

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There is a lot we can accomplish as individuals working for change. But we all know there is strength in numbers, so imagine how much more impact we can have as a collective force!

Rallying people behind a cause is once again about *inspiration*.

One of the keys to strong leadership is the ability to encourage and motivate others.

So what are some ways of recruiting others to join us in what we're trying to achieve?

**Pitching:** Clearly state the problem and solution you are advocating. Online and/or in paper handouts, all you need is a brief description of your campaign or idea along with easy and clear ways for people to get involved.

**Informing:** Make the case for collective action with statistics (“Did you know that one in four women will experience violence in her lifetime?”) and/or by referencing current affairs (“The suicide of a 16-year-old last month in Fort Smith reminds us that the teen suicide rate in the Northwest Territories is 65% higher than Canada’s”).

**Storytelling.** For an issue to resonate, people have to understand it in personal ways. So sharing stories of how the issue you're addressing affects real people is a powerful tool.

**Compelling.** Catchy design and compelling language are important for attracting support. If something appeals to you, it will to other people, too! And if you can come up with creative ways to communicate with people with different abilities (deaf, visually impaired, etc.), even better!

**Networking.** Become familiar with the people and organizations in your area who may be working on either the issue you are tackling or similar ones. Let them know about your action or campaign, seek advice, and see about recruiting others through their communities.

**Publicizing.** It's absolutely not the case that “if you build it, they will come.” To rally others behind your cause, you have to take it to them. Use plain old word-of-mouth tactics to get your message out there, both on and offline, remembering always to make it easy and clear for people to get involved.

**Brainstorming.** Once you have even one person with you, get together to come up with innovative ways to bring others on board. Be creative. Be bold.



# Amanda Furst

After graduating from the University of Winnipeg, Amanda learned about East African culture first-hand through volunteer experiences in Tanzania and Rwanda with the groups Right To Play, Voluntary Service Overseas, Youth Challenge International, and Friends of Rwandan Rugby.

Inspired by the positive impact young people can have on their communities,

Amanda co-founded Growing Opportunities International (GO!) in 2008 with a fellow Canadian youth.

Based in Winnipeg, GO! works with people in developing countries to bring ideas for sustainable projects to life. With a focus on rural communities, GO! programs help local youth grow, develop, and become successful adults who can continue creating positive change.

Amanda is an outspoken advocate for social justice and sustainable development, having presented to hundreds of Canadian students about Africa's inaccurate negative image and the need to get involved to make a difference.

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# INVESTIGATION

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This section is intended to provide you with information and ideas on some of the pressing topics that concern young women and girls. But it's just an introduction to the issues. On subjects that particularly interest you, take the initiative to do more research on your own — surf the Internet, visit a library, talk to folks who might be working on the issue. There's a world of resources out there that we hope you'll want to pursue!

so you  
want to...

## ... END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (VAW)

As long as there is violence against women, women's equality will not be fully achieved.

Women experience violence in many different ways — it can be physical or sexual abuse, emotional or verbal abuse, spiritual abuse, criminal harassment, stalking, or even being controlled financially. (This is called economic abuse.)

### DID YOU KNOW?

In Canada:

- Nearly four out of ten (39%) women report experiencing sexual assault sometime during their lives.
- In just one year, 427,000 women reported they had been sexually assaulted.
- On any given day, over 3,000 women (along with their 2,500 children) are staying in an emergency shelter to escape domestic violence.
- At least one and as many as two women are murdered each week by a current or former partner.
- Two-thirds of all women victims of sexual assault are under the age of 24 — young women are killed at nearly three times the rate of all victims of domestic homicide.
- Nearly four out of five victims of family-related sexual assaults (79%) are girls.
- Over half (55%) of physical assaults of children by family members are against girls.
- Women with disabilities and Aboriginal women are particularly vulnerable. Nearly 60% of women with disabilities will experience violence in their lifetime, and Aboriginal women are three times more likely to report being the victim of a violent crime.
- Violence against women costs Canada over \$4 billion each year (social services, criminal justice, lost employment days, health care, etc.).



## MISSING AND MURDERED

The Native Women's Association of Canada has documented over 600 disappearances and murders of Aboriginal women — a figure representing roughly 10% of the women homicides in Canada (Aboriginal women make up only 3% of the women population). Canada's failure to decisively address the alarming rate of missing and murdered Aboriginal women has even provoked an inquiry by the United Nations.

### ROOTS AND SOLUTIONS

There are lots of inequities in our society, and violence against women (VAW) is a reflection of some of them. We have to challenge the systems that contribute to VAW if we're going to succeed in ending it. For example, we have to challenge and get rid of stereotypes, empower young women and girls, and make sure our institutions and systems are set up so that equality is a given. We have to support one another as young women, listen to each others' stories. The idea of equality needs to be better understood and desired by everyone — men and boys, women and girls — and that has to do with how we are socialized from a very young age.

Men and boys should be part of the collective response to VAW. There are lots of initiatives underway to help them understand how they can and do address this issue.

We need to fix the things that make many women feel trapped in abusive relationships. If there were more affordable housing, they'd have more places to go. If there were

more well-paying jobs, they'd have more employment options. If there were more services (and better-funded ones) to help abused women and their children, they'd have added help. If the criminal justice system did a better job of addressing VAW, women would feel more confident about reporting and prosecuting abuse.

What's more, our entire educational system — from curricula to policies — can do so much more to empower children from an early age to experience and understand equality, and to demand it in society and personal relationships. We can always do better at helping children grow up with values of mutual respect, non-violence, and anti-oppression.

This might all seem pretty big. But remember, we can always start small.



## THE YWCA ROSE CAMPAIGN

Each year, YWCA Canada leads the Rose Campaign to remind communities that Canada is not yet a safe country for women. It kicks off on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and runs to December 6, the date 14 young women were murdered at Montréal's École Polytechnique in 1989.

The annual Rose Campaign sees YWCA Member Associations across Canada inspiring and engaging people to re-commit to taking action on violence against women and girls until our streets, campuses, and homes are safe.

This campaign coincides with the global initiative known as 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, sponsored by the United Nations.



## HARASSMENT CAN BE MANY THINGS, AND IT'S NEVER OKAY

When it comes to sexual harassment or sexual bullying, the line isn't always clear between what's unacceptable and what's just horsing around.

The terms sexual harassment and sexual bullying both refer to unwelcome or unwanted sexual comments, attention, or physical contact. And the person being targeted pretty much always knows when something is un-cool.

Someone continually and obviously leering at a girl's breasts, for example, is not okay. Someone patting a girl's bottom on the bus is not okay. Someone posting offensive remarks on Facebook about a girl's sexual orientation is not okay.

Unlike other bullying, sexual bullying focuses on things like a person's appearance, body parts, or sexual orientation. It includes spreading gossip or rumours of a sexual nature. Girls and boys tend to do it equally.

### HERSTORY

On September 6, 2008, Maisy Odjick and her friend Shannon Alexander went missing from Kitigan Zibi, an Algonquin First Nations reserve in Québec, not far from Ottawa. Sixteen-year-old Maisy was last seen at a dance. Her purse, phone, clothing, and other personal items were left behind, and the house door was locked. The police decided to treat Maisy and Shannon as runaways — even though Shannon was scheduled

to attend nursing school that semester. Forensics experts did not examine the house for evidence of a possible abduction. And neither the Québec nor reserve police would coordinate searches, so Maisy's mother, Laurie, did. The Aboriginal community helped spread the word and recruited volunteers to look for the girls. They put up their own missing posters and billboards around the area. But without the help of authorities, there is little more the Odjick and Alexander families can do.

### EXERCISE: YOUR STORY



Have you ever experienced harassment, sexual assault, or violence? Has violence touched a woman you care about? Whether or not you share your personal story with others, contemplating your own experience with violence against women is an important step to becoming more engaged with the effort to ensure every woman can live free from violence.

### THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO

**Chat it up.** Having conversations with friends, family, colleagues — even the media — about VAW is a great way to “start small.” It's all about increasing public awareness on the issue. Every single attitude or behaviour you influence is a valuable step toward a society that does not tolerate VAW, and has the policies to back it up.

**Join something.** Many organizations and campaigns that are working to end violence against women, provide services for survivors of violence, and advocate for women's equality can use your valuable help. Offer it.

**Get lobbying.** Some of the structural solutions listed above are the responsibilities

of provincial or territorial governments, while others have to do with the federal government. Something you can do on your own, or with others, is contact both your provincial or territorial political representative and your Member of Parliament — ask them point-blank what, specifically, they are doing to reduce VAW. Remind them that the problem of VAW persists and ask how they can make a

real difference toward ending it. Get clear commitments and follow up with them regularly to check on her or his progress. And if an answer doesn't feel or sound good enough, don't feel shy to press the issue — that's what our elected officials are there for (find out exactly who your elected reps are online, or ask around)! A fun follow-up would be to invite her or him to talk to your class or workplace about ending VAW.

# Jessica Danforth



At 26, Jessica Danforth has spent more than half her life working to mobilize individuals, families, and communities to reclaim their ancestral rights to self-determination when it comes to their own bodies and spaces.

She is the founder and Executive Director of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, the first and only organization of its kind in by and for Indigenous youth working on sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice throughout the United States and Canada.

Jessica is an internationally known activist, advocate, and leader. She is the Youth Coordinator for the National Indigenous Youth Council on HIV/AIDS,

and she is the North American co-chair for the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

She is a strong believer in the power of youth voice and agency, and you can see her writing on sites like Racialicious, or watch her monologues about activism and justice on TV Ontario.

She is the editor of two books; *Sex Ed and Youth: Colonization, Communities of Color*, and *Sexuality and Feminism For Real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism*. She is also currently writing sexual health articles for *Indian Country Today*.

[nativeyouthsexualhealth.com](http://nativeyouthsexualhealth.com)

so you  
want to...

## ... ENSURE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EQUALITY

In simple terms, economic equality is about a level playing field where everyone has the same access to the same wealth. Some people think that this already exists in Canada (we've all heard the saying "If you work hard enough, you can achieve anything"). But that's simply not true. Poor people aren't poor because they want to be. And not all wealthy people got what they have through hard work.

Lots of women's groups — including YWCA Canada — believe there should be economic equality between men and women. As long as there isn't, women's equality will not be fully achieved.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In Canada:

- Women are over-represented among the poorest people — seniors, women leading lone-parent families, women with disabilities, and Aboriginal women experience the worst of it.
- Single mothers have a median net worth of about \$17,000, while single dads have about \$80,000 (net worth is the total value of possessions such as a car, furniture, real estate, savings, stocks, RRSPs, etc.).
- In 2008, women working full-time for the full year earned 71% of what men earned, on average (university-educated women only earned 68% of what their male counterparts did that year).
- Unemployment continues to be a serious problem for women, with Aboriginal women and women with disabilities twice as likely to be unemployed as other women.
- Seven out of ten part-time workers and 66% of minimum wage earners are women.
- The wage gap between women and men has been stuck at 70-72% since the 1970s, and is often wider for women who are older, Aboriginal, or of colour.

## ROOTS AND SOLUTIONS

Women's economic inequality stems from several key factors.

First of all, women shoulder most of society's unpaid work (housework, childcare, meal preparation, eldercare, etc.), leaving less time for paid employment. This comes from a lack of institutional support (government, agencies) as well as oftentimes a lack of individual (partner, family) support.

The work women do for no pay is consistently undervalued by society. This undervaluing has become a systemic problem that negatively impacts women in far-reaching ways.

Too many women are forced to take part-time, seasonal, contract, or temporary jobs at low pay, long hours, no security, with few (if any) opportunities for advancement, and no health benefits or pension. The issues are compounded when looking at migrant women, women of colour, or women without immigration status.

Most poor women in Canada are working, but can't earn enough to lift themselves out of poverty.

Lately, there has been a lot of talk in the news about the market and the economy. When governments make decisions about how to tax us and how to spend our tax dollars, they are usually guided by the state of the economy. Because women earn less than men (on average), we are under-represented in terms of what's called "market income." That means we don't reap as many benefits when governments implement tax breaks, and we are more negatively affected when governments cut spending to various programs.



## INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SYSTEMIC

Sometimes, an idea or attitude is so dominant in a society, it's practically unconscious. When enough people see something as "just the way it is," a number of societal systems are impacted. Think of it as a vicious cycle: widespread attitudes about something lead to inequitable systems which, in turn, serve to reinforce the attitudes that created them.

Women's economic inequality will only worsen until problems like these are addressed:

- pay discrimination (the 2004 federal Pay Equity Task Force made some great recommendations which government has yet to enact)
- low wages and/or long hours (many people believe the minimum wage should be standardized across Canada — it currently varies between provinces/territories — and that it should be increased to the point where all full-time workers can live above the poverty line)
- lack of affordable access to services like child care and elder care
- lack of women-centred health support like prenatal sensitivity in the workplace

More unionization would also help the situation — did you know that women in unions earn an average of eight dollars more per hour? Governments need to make it easier for people to join unions, especially women.

(Labour unionization is when co-workers organize into a group to speak as a united body to their employer about various aspects of their work — wages, hours, benefits, workplace health and safety, equality, and other work-related issues.)

Government policies must take women into account better. YWCA Canada has called for the federal government to make better investments in the kinds of policies that will support women’s economic security.

## HERSTORY

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Drawing on the experiences she had with her mother, Sophia Gran-Ruaz decided that care packages would be a great way to show women and children in shelters, who are often overlooked and judged, that their communities care for them. She founded Snug as a Bug, Kids Helping Kids when she was just 11 to compile and distribute care packages containing everything from toiletries to school supplies to toys, solicited from businesses and individual donors. In its first year, “Snug” created 500 care packages for two Toronto shelters; the next, 1,000 packages for three. In January 2010, a whopping 3,300 packages were delivered to thirteen shelters across the Greater Toronto Area. All told, “Snug” has positively impacted thousands of women and children. Shortly after winning the Top Teen Philanthropist Award in 2010, Sophia appeared on a cover spread in *Vervegirl Magazine* that generated emails from hundreds of young women across Canada who were inspired to *Think Big/Start Small*. She also received a YWCA Woman of Distinction Award in 2011.

## EXERCISE: YOUR STORY



Have you or your family ever struggled to make ends meet? Had a hard time paying for tuition fees? Experienced employment that was unstable or low-paying? Have you struggled to care for your family due to a lack of benefits or pension? Whether or not you share your personal story with others, contemplating your own experiences with this issue is an important step toward becoming more engaged with the effort to ensure economic equality.

## THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO

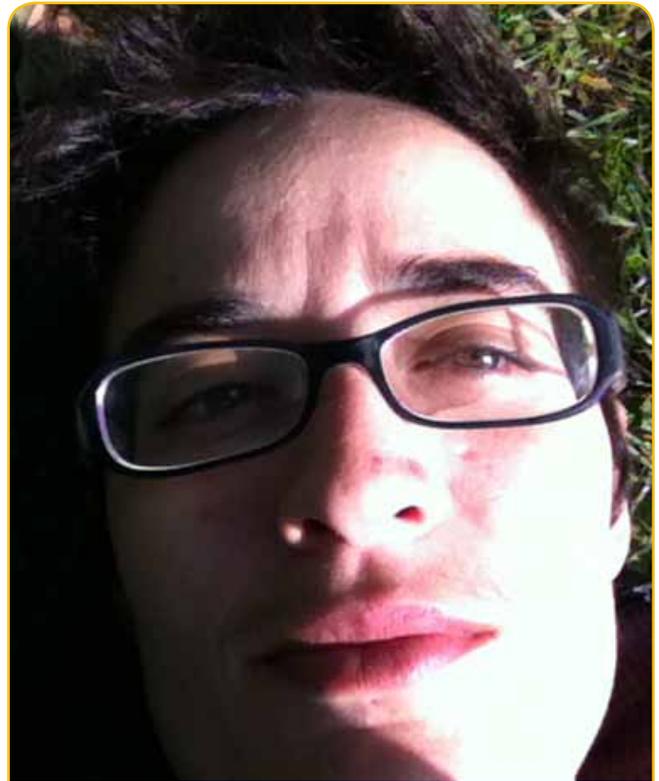
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**Get involved.** There are many groups working to create economic equality in Canada. Check out who’s doing what in your community to raise the minimum wage, advocate for pay equity, push for affordable child care, and to support women in poverty. They need you.

**Pass it on.** Discuss the matter of economic equality in your classes, at the family dinner table, at your extra-curricular activities, at your workplace, even at your place of worship. The more people who know about and understand the problem, the more likely they are to contribute to solutions.

**Volunteer.** While we address “big” issues like economic equality, there are a thousand “small” ways to make a difference close to home. Think about contributing some time to a local food bank, homeless shelter, or maybe an after-school program for students in low-income neighbourhoods. Not only is it rewarding to support community in this way, it gives you a valuable up-close look at inequality in real-life terms.

# Coco Riot



As a queer Spanish migrant artist living in Canada, Coco believes that art is not a tool for social change but social change itself.

A very simple but effective medium, drawing allows Coco to explore the relationship between art and community activism.

One of their most well-known projects, Genderpoo, is an installation composed of more than 80 different bathroom signs that visualize the struggles, communities, and experiences that are silenced by our oppressive social systems. Coco is also the author of the first queer graphic novel in Spanish, *Llueven Queers*. Coco has toured internationally with *Llueven Queers*, organizing discussion and art spaces around Spanish-speaking queer politics.

*Llueven Queers* has become an art blog for Spanish-speaking queer activism.

Interested in community history, Coco Riot is now working on *Los Fantasma*, a 16m mural that raises questions about who writes history and where silenced stories go.

Coco's work has been displayed in museums, galleries, and festivals in New York, Barcelona, Seoul, Buenos Aires, Toronto, Berlin, Oakland, and in many friends' living rooms. They are frequently invited to present their work at universities, conferences, and community spaces, and to contribute to publications and journals.

Coco is presently the studio coordinator of social graphic design studio *The Public* (Toronto) and the in-house cartoonist at *Shameless Magazine*.

so you  
want to...

## ... PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

Many of us recognize how important and precious the Earth is. But maybe not how fragile it is or how limited its resources really are.

Too many human decisions and behaviours have put the health of our planet in serious jeopardy. Lots of experts are sounding the alarm about the damage that's been done and how urgently we need to address it. As a result, people

everywhere have become increasingly concerned about environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, water quality, biodiversity, resource development, endangered species, and waste management, to name a few.

From green space to green power, from recycling to resource protection, young people across Canada are tackling environmental issues in exciting, powerful ways. So can you.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- One-quarter of the planet's wild forests, 24% of its wetlands, and 20% of the planet's fresh water are in Canada, and they're all under threat from both poor protection by us and climate change.
- Climate change has made Canada's Arctic one of the fastest-warming regions on Earth — shrinking (melting) of both the Arctic tundra and Arctic sea ice puts a huge array of species at risk, including walruses, seals, and polar bears.

- The tar sands (large deposits of heavy crude oil) in Alberta could destroy over 149,000 square kilometres of Boreal forest — an area the size of Florida — and they are expected to emit more than 141 million tons of greenhouse gases (GHG) by the year 2020 (that’s more than double what all the cars and trucks in Canada produce).
- Canada is one of the world’s worst emitters of GHG, ranked 15th out of 17 member countries of the Organization for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) on GHG emissions per capita.
- In 2009, the Conference Board of Canada ranked Canada 15th out of 17 wealthy industrialized nations on environmental performance.
- Around the world, it’s poor people (a majority of whom are people of colour) who are most negatively affected by the degradation of our planet. For one thing, they often live in areas where companies export hazardous, polluting waste cheaply, such as developing countries. Around the world, people living in poverty (especially women and girls) are those most negatively affected by the degradation of our planet, forced to live in areas where companies exploit land or dump toxins. Poverty and lack of access to education and resources make it difficult to counter such complex issues.

## ROOTS AND SOLUTIONS

Most experts agree that our industrialized culture is to blame for current environmental crises. Certain values behind modern society shape the behaviour that damages our natural environment: consumption, consumerism, and capitalism (our economic system), to name a few.

# Joanne Cave

A young feminist from Edmonton, Joanne knew from childhood that she wanted to cultivate leadership and social activism among young people. In 2006, at the age of 14, she launched Ophelia’s Voice, a project to help girls’ learning, empowerment, and self-confidence through art. While she was an undergraduate student in Toronto, Joanne founded a network of young non-profit leaders to discuss and strategize on everything from policy advocacy to non-profit funding. As of 2012, Joanne serves on the governing boards of the Toronto Women’s City Alliance and Frontline Partners with Youth Network. She was named one of Alberta’s 50 Most Influential People, awarded a YWCA Edmonton Young Woman of Distinction Award, and recognized among Global TV Edmonton’s Women of Vision in 2009.

Mira’s message to young women?  
 “Keep your chin up and know that no one can represent you or your demographic better than you! Change the world, and keep pushing!”

We are exploiting the Earth by rapidly using up both renewable and non-renewable resources. And the by-products of our production processes (often toxic) and consumer lifestyles are not only increasing, they are increasingly damaging to the environment. No ecosystem on the planet is free from the consequences of human activity — that's how pervasive our impact is.

Canada has some environmental laws, but they are weak and not very enforceable. We need to persuade governments to invest in renewable energy and green technology. Governments should reward those programs which strive to protect the environment and stop supporting initiatives that pollute (like the oil extraction in Alberta that creates those tar sands), worsen climate change, or threaten precious ecosystems.



## THE STOMP OUT SMOKE INITIATIVE

The Stomp Out Smoke (S.O.S.) initiative was born in 2005 when Ontario's YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin was approached by Youth Action Alliance for its long history of engaging youth in positive ways.

In partnership with Elgin St. Thomas Public Health, S.O.S. began with a few people wanting to increase awareness about tobacco products, encourage youth to be smoke-free, and influence policy changes around the use and placement of tobacco products.

More and more youth became involved with S.O.S., gaining valuable leadership, organizing, teamwork, and advocacy skills, as well as learning how to run effective meetings.

It wasn't long before a core group of young women peer leaders decided to focus on making parks and recreation facilities tobacco-free.

Michelle Olivier (then 16) and Taylor Longfield (then 17) spearheaded the My Park, My Game, My Air campaign. They researched, consulted, recruited support, wrote to decision-makers, booked delegations, and developed presentations. Along with fellow S.O.S. members Hayley Gustin (17), Rylie Hunt (16), Carrie McEown (17), and Shelby Champion (14), as well as many volunteers, My Park, My Game, My Air created and used visual aids and social media to drum up public support.

### What did the campaign achieve?

In October 2009, St. Thomas City Council implemented a Tobacco-Free Parks bylaw, which prohibits the use of tobacco within 30m of a playground, splash pad, or sports field. Not only was this a monumental success for S.O.S., it deeply impacted each of the peer leaders and volunteers as proof that a desire to make change and collective efforts can lead to victory.

# Estelle Lanteigne

As President of Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick (RFNB), an organization that advocates on behalf of the province's francophone women, Estelle tackles a wide range of women's issues: "The government has a responsibility to ensure human rights are respected for all."

Originally from Tracadie-Sheila, Estelle was active in student politics at the University of Moncton when she became one of the lead organizers of the 2008 young feminist gathering *Toujours rebelles* (which sparked an ongoing movement). Prior to being elected president of RFNB, Estelle spearheaded the development of its Young Feminist Caucus as well as a project on the representation of women in Acadian media. She was also active in New Brunswick's component of the World March of Women in 2010.

"We have a ways to go before achieving true equality and I strongly believe we can get there by organizing collectively."

In December 2011, the Canadian government pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol, a global international agreement that sets targets for countries to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. By doing this, Canada

is far less accountable for doing its part to help the planet's environment crisis. We need to push the federal government to sign back onto this agreement that millions of people around the world strongly endorse.

## HERSTORY

In 2010, YWCA Muskoka (Ontario) teamed up with FemmeToxic as part of a regional project called Women and the Environment. They hosted lively conversations about health, the environment, and cosmetics with the participants of the Girlz Unplugged summer program.

FemmeToxic was formed in 2009 in Montréal by young women who were seriously concerned about the amount of toxins in personal care products. They set out to advocate for stronger regulations for the cosmetics industry and change the ways in which Health Canada (a federal government department) labels and monitors cosmetics and personal care products. Another major goal for FemmeToxic is to empower women and girls to know more about toxins in our products and their health impacts, and to raise awareness regarding safer alternatives.

If you're curious, the project blog is still up at [FemmeToxic.com](http://FemmeToxic.com), along with tons of great resources!

## EXERCISE: YOUR STORY

Have you ever witnessed first-hand any threat or destruction to our environment? Maybe you found garbage littered in a park, or saw trees cut down to make way for a

new housing development, or smog hanging over the downtown of a city. Even if you've only seen environmental crises on the news (like the oil that gushed into the Gulf of Mexico for three months in 2010 when an oil well exploded), contemplating your own experiences with how the environment gets treated is an important step to becoming more engaged with the effort to protect it.

### THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO

**Act online.** Many pro-environment initiatives offer ways for people to take action on the Internet. From TheBigWild.org to EnvironmentalDefence.ca, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society to Canadian Wildlife Federation, there are countless campaigns to choose from that could really use your engagement and support. Think about the environmental issues you are most passionate about, then get clicking.

**Make good in your neighbourhood.** Check out what's going on in your area to help support the environment. There might be a community clean-up crew, a campaign to persuade your municipal council to implement composting, or an educational program to get kids interested in wildlife protection and helping endangered species. Seek out leadership from a nearby Indigenous community to learn more about existing resistance to environmental degradation. The actions you most want to take may already be in play. And if not, start something!

**Write to power.** Most provincial or territorial governments have a Minister of the Environment. This position exists

at the federal level, too. Your expression of concern over an environmental issue along with an appeal for her or him to take legislative action on it is a great way to "start small" on your journey to save the planet.

## The Miss G Project

In 2005, a few students at Western University wondered why eye-opening courses about sexism, racism, and gender studies weren't available to them in high school, or why women's perspectives were not represented in secondary school curriculum.

After some planning and discussions with other community members, the core group of five students began distributing a one-page photocopied flyer/information sheet that called for an introductory gender studies course in the Ontario Secondary School system.

Today, the Miss G Project is a well-respected grassroots organization of young feminists working to combat all forms of gendered oppression in and through education and are celebrating a victory, as they are currently working toward a gender studies curriculum in Ontario! Check them out online at: [themissgproject.org](http://themissgproject.org)!



so you  
want to...

## ... FIGHT FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

As long as anyone's sexual and reproductive rights are compromised, women's equality will not be fully achieved.

Sexual and reproductive rights are an integral part of our health and welfare.

Sexual and reproductive health is about complete physical, mental, and social well-being in matters relating to the reproductive

system and its functions and processes. It is also about being able to have a safe and satisfying sex life and the freedom to make informed decisions about if, when, and how often to reproduce.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The rate of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) for young people under 18 is nine times higher than the rate for all of Canada, yet only 9% of youth under 18 say they got tested — that's despite nearly half of them reporting they are sexually active.
- Although abortion is fully legal in Canada, only 17.8% of Canadian hospitals provide abortion services, only six of the provinces/territories have abortion clinics, not all abortions are covered by government health insurance, and some areas place additional barriers in front of women to access abortion (for example, New Brunswick requires the written permission of two doctors).
- Young people in Canada had less sexual knowledge in 2003 than counterparts surveyed in 1989.
- Rape and other forms of sexual violence are increasing, not decreasing, around the world.
- Of the 447,904 pregnancies in Canada in 2003, 39% (174,682) were unintended. That year, 103,768 pregnancies were terminated via therapeutic abortion.

- Throughout the world, a pregnant teenager is up to five times more likely to die as a result of the pregnancy than a pregnant woman aged 18 to 25.

## ROOTS AND SOLUTIONS

Sexuality is still considered taboo in Canada.

Youth are particularly affected by the sensitivity of this issue. Often too shy to ask questions about sex, sexuality, or reproductive health, we can make poor decisions due to insufficient knowledge. And being too embarrassed to purchase condoms or dental dams — especially in small towns where there’s no such thing as anonymous shopping — can lead to unprotected sex. Small communities are also less likely to have sexual health centres or clinics where young people can access unbiased information and support.

We need to promote the legitimacy of women’s sexual and reproductive rights, including the right to safe and accessible (geographically and economically) abortion services.

Our educational systems, including curricula, must be improved so young people have access to clear and thorough information regarding sexual and reproductive health.

Much more must be done to ensure everyone has access to proper sexual and reproductive health care, especially those who are the most vulnerable when it comes to exercising their rights around sexual and reproductive health across Canada: those in rural areas, those living in the street, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, the LGBTQ community, Aboriginal people, and new immigrants are among the most disadvantaged.

## HERSTORY

When Toronto police constable Michael Sanguinetti said that “[w]omen should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” during a January 2011 presentation about crime prevention at York University, Sonya Barnett and Heather Jarvis were fed up with two major issues: first, the idea that how a woman dresses is an invitation to sexual violence; and second, slut-shaming — the idea that if a woman is sexual, she should feel guilty or inferior (there can be slut-shaming even if the term “slut” isn’t used). So they created SlutWalk — now a global movement with organized activities in countries around the world. Say Barnett and Jarvis: “Women are tired of being oppressed, of being judged by our sexuality, and feeling unsafe as a result. Being in charge of our sexual lives should not mean that we are opening ourselves to an expectation of violence, regardless if we participate in sex for pleasure or work.”

## EXERCISE: YOUR STORY



Have you ever felt ashamed or unclear about sex or sexuality, or had trouble getting information you need? Have you thought about whether or how to address your reproductive health? Have you ever heard young women shaming one another for their sexual choices? Contemplating your own experiences with these issues is an important step to becoming more engaged with the effort to promote women’s sexual and reproductive rights.

## THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO

**Break free.** Why should there be any stigma surrounding sex and sexuality? If you can speak up and speak freely about it, others will be inspired to be courageous, too. Start a discussion circle, a Facebook group, a learning club ... any forum that will get people talking about one of the most important subjects we all have to deal with.

**Spread safety.** Many campus-based women's centres across Canada make free condoms available to students. If something like this isn't available on your campus, it should be. Same with high schools! It would be so worthwhile and constructive to make this happen. A good place to start is a local women's centre or health clinic — maybe there's a Planned Parenthood office in your town, or a YWCA. Tell someone there about your idea and plan, and ask for help in acquiring the free materials. Then, either distribute them "informally" or, better yet, persuade your school to make it standard practice.

**Make it mandatory.** Lots of us don't get adequate education on sex or sexuality, even though some variation of it exists in most school curricula. Sometimes, it's taught by teachers who are uncomfortable with the subject matter, untrained on it, or, even worse, who provide biased or inaccurate facts such as those found in abstinence-only education. In some schools, sexuality education is no longer taught in a specific class. If your school lacks this important learning, why not organize a campaign to institute those classes into the curriculum? You'd be doing a tremendous service for countless students today and tomorrow who will be better equipped about sex and sexuality!



deb singh

A radical feminist activist warrior. A queer, working-class woman of colour. A survivor of rape, sexual assault, domestic violence. A former sex-shop employee. A counsellor. An emerging writer.

These are the ways deb singh describes herself.

deb combines her desire for a safe, sex-positive world with her desire to explore her sexual self, through her experiences of survivorship.

Her work at Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape, her activism, and her leadership as a facilitator and speaker are focused on empowering communities. deb finds joy in turning "pissed-off-ness" into support and love for herself and others.

so you  
want to...

## ... END RACISM

Race refers to a group of people of common ancestry, distinguished by characteristics such as skin colour, eye shape, hair texture, or facial or physical features.

Racism stems from a series of historic events that sought to find legitimate and illegitimate ways to control large populations of people. Colonialism (the attempt by settlers

to control Indigenous populations) and slavery, for example, still dictate many of our assumptions about people, and influence many of our institutions (government, education system, etc.).

Racism exists in three main forms:

**Individual racism** is the easiest to spot because it's about a person's attitudes and behaviours.

**Systemic racism** has to do with the policies and practices of institutions that take advantage of peoples of certain races — it's often unconscious.

**Cultural racism** comes from the value systems embedded in society that support discriminatory actions based on perceptions of racial difference and cultural superiority/inferiority.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Racial ethnicity and “blood purity” were used as justification by European settlers to wipe out entire Indigenous populations all over the Americas.
- Half of all racially-motivated hate crimes in Canada in 2006 were property-related offences, while 38% were violent crimes.
- At least seven organized white supremacy groups across Canada have operated brazenly in the past decade or continue to. In 2009, a group of white supremacists in Vancouver

poured kerosene over the sleeping body of a Filipino man and then set him on fire. Later on the police found out that their organization had been assaulting Indigenous, Hispanic, and Black people all over Vancouver.

- Many Canadians continue to believe the myth of people of color stealing jobs from “more deserving” Canadians. Because of racial discrimination, Canadian people of colour are more likely to be unemployed, to have lower incomes, and to work in low-paid jobs, and are less likely to work in well-paid jobs. In 2001, the unemployment rate among visible minorities was nearly double the national average (12.6% vs. 6.7%).

## ROOTS AND SOLUTIONS

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Racism is rooted in history and lives through our systems today. It plays out between people through hatred, ignorance, and fear. Ending racism means stopping that cycle.

As individuals on a day-to-day basis, we need to call out racism when we encounter it (when we feel safe to do so) and advocate zero tolerance for it.

At a community level, we need to not be intimidated by hate groups that spew racism. We must constantly work to create communities that are so respectful and equal, groups like that couldn't even exist because there's no one to recruit.

Governments must proactively intercept racism through policy and legislation, while law enforcement should be more vigilant in addressing hate crimes.

# Sunpreet Bains-Dahia

She was crowned Miss White Rock in 2003 and Miss BC in 2004. And in 2007, she participated in the Miss India-Canada pageant. But no one worried Sunpreet would veer from her dream of pursuing higher education (she is currently completing the Doctor of Dental Medicine Program at the University of British Columbia) or community service.

Sunpreet co-founded High School 101, a peer mentorship program, and the Semiahmoo Mosaic Workshop Society, a non-profit that brings together people of all ages and races through city-beautifying art projects. In recognition of her achievements, Sunpreet received a Surrey Top 25 Under 25 Award.

“By traveling across the province [as BC Ambassador] to rural towns and Aboriginal reservations, I have seen the lack of resources for our youth. Our youth are our future, and we need to nurture and mend them to create a promising generation. I feel passionate about encouraging youth to succeed.”



## THE COLOURS OF CANADA

Despite the government-initiated mass migration of Chinese workers due to the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush in 1858, in 1923 the Chinese Immigrations Act (also referred to as the Chinese Exclusion Act) was passed to legally bar citizenship and voting rights to residents of Chinese origin.

In 1914, 376 Indian people were denied entry to Canada when the steamship Komagata Maru landed ashore in Vancouver, BC. In a true collective effort from South Asians living in Vancouver, the passengers were able to fight for their residency, and to get shelter and food.

In Canada, the last segregated school (whites only, blacks only) closed down in Nova Scotia in 1983, while the last Indigenous residential school was not closed down until 1996.

In August of 2010, the MV Sun Sea, a ship carrying more than 400 Tamil refugees fleeing the Sri Lankan Civil War, landed on the shores of Victoria, BC. To this day, many continue to be under detention, despite the United Nations' policy against incarcerating refugee claimants (see Appendix).

In 2010, *Maclean's* magazine published an article called "'Too Asian': Some frosh don't want to study at an 'Asian' University," quoting young white people choosing not to go to universities that had been characterized as having a large population of "Asian" students. This article was criticized for many reasons, mainly that it opened up a dangerous conversation about non-white students "taking over" "Canadian" Universities.

It's important to do anti-racism work with cultural sensitivity and respect. That means being aware of cultural differences and similarities, and realizing that they have an effect on values, learning, and behaviour.

In general, more needs to be done to counter racism — through public awareness and educational curricula, by challenging some of the systems that continue to fuel racism, and by learning more about its historical roots.

## HERSTORY

In 2009, the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) launched a national campaign called Students United against Racism. Various CFS members pursued anti-racism activities that were relevant to their particular campus or region. For example, the CFS-Ontario initiated an official task force on campus racism that held seventeen hearings on fourteen campuses. The task force's final report made recommendations for ending racism around four major themes: individual and systemic racism in campus life, institutional racism in hiring and curriculum, institutional racism in university policy and governance, and systemic racism in broader society.

## EXERCISE: YOUR STORY

→ Have you experienced racism personally, or seen it happening to someone else? Have you ever noticed that by the way it operates, an institution favours some people over others based on race? Contemplating your own experiences with racism is an important step to becoming more engaged with the effort to end it.

### THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO

**Ban it.** Follow the lead of young people in various communities who have taken the initiative of declaring their school or campus a “racism-free zone.” With a bit of awareness raising and persuasion of the decision makers, you can absolutely achieve this. Knowing their educational institution is a racism-free zone — and understanding the reasons why — can go a long way toward shaping positive, respectful attitudes and behaviours in students.

**Pin it.** They say a picture is worth a thousand words. So what about creating a board on pinterest.com to celebrate all races in the spirit of equality? Think about the endless possibilities! Riveting images of people of different colours, cultures, and backgrounds — looking beautiful, playing, collaborating, dancing, protesting — along with pinned quotations and messages about unity and respect. Even a humble pin board can have an impact on how people see and think about race.

**Flash mob.** Surprise shoppers in a food court or crowds in a downtown square with an impromptu performance. Set it to music with a powerful anti-racism message, or write your own. Not only is this a creative way to speak out against racism, you’d be stimulating public discourse on the issue, which is always beneficial.

# Tara Teng

Tara’s commitment to abolishing human trafficking grew from a childhood fascination with the Underground Railroad and the transatlantic slave trade. She pursued a degree in education from Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia, seeing that expertise as a rehabilitation and prevention tool: “Knowledge is power. Education provides resources for people to traffic-proof their lives, especially those living in poverty.”

She has been able to leverage her profile as Miss BC 2010, Miss Canada 2011, and Miss World Canada 2012 to get the word out about abolishing human trafficking. As a sought-after public speaker, she is constantly inspiring others to learn more and take action.

“I’m not a beauty queen, I’m an abolitionist. That is the heart of it for me: social justice, human rights, ending exploitation, speaking out for the oppressed and the marginalized, and raising awareness of ending modern-day slavery. This is just a platform and means to do it.”

so you  
want to...

## ... SUPPORT THE EQUALITY AND RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

For our purposes,  
“Indigenous” includes First  
Nations, Métis, Inuit, and  
Aboriginal peoples.

Indigenous peoples were  
on the land now called  
Canada for centuries before  
European settlers arrived,  
and they have long proud  
histories that include  
rich cultural and spiritual  
traditions. But a cycle of  
social, physical, and cultural  
destruction was begun

when European culture and  
values were forced upon  
them, Aboriginal lands were  
dispossessed, populations  
were wiped out, and foreign  
modes of governance were  
imposed. The effects of all  
this trauma continue to harm  
Indigenous people today.

Underlying most of the problems faced  
by many Indigenous communities are a  
profound loss of identity and generations of  
demoralization caused by cultural genocide  
(the systematic destruction of a culture).

However...

In the face of widespread oppression, poverty,  
and violence, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and  
Aboriginal peoples across Canada continue to  
fight for their rights. They are challenging the  
systems and attitudes that have perpetuated  
their oppression in order to realize their full  
rights and achieve equality.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Unemployment among Indigenous people in Canada exceeds 80% in some communities.
- More than half of Inuit people in the North cannot afford decent food for their families.
- One in four Aboriginal children lives in poverty.
- More than 100 First Nations communities have little or no access to clean water.

- Aboriginal youth graduate from high school at half the rate of all Canadians.
- First Nations youth commit suicide at five to eight times the general rate; for Inuit youth, the rate is six times as high.
- More than half of First Nations and Inuit people are under 25 years of age. This is the fastest growing population in Canada. If poverty is not addressed today, it will continue to negatively impact First Nations and Inuit families for generations to come.

## ROOTS AND SOLUTIONS

Centuries of colonization have left Indigenous peoples without the opportunity to enjoy basic human rights. Indigenous peoples across Canada are among the most marginalized, impoverished, and frequently victimized members of society, as they are everywhere else on the planet, too.

When the United Nations adopted an international Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, Canada initially voted against. But in 2010, the Government of Canada revisited the matter, leading to a Statement of Support endorsing the UNDRIP on November 12, 2010.

There is a long way to go before Indigenous people are truly free from imposed cycles of oppression. But Indigenous communities are making strides along their healing path. Countless Indigenous scholars, artists, activists, and leaders are challenging systems and attitudes. Meanwhile, more and more non-Aboriginals are becoming allies in that effort. Together, we can build a new society in which First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Aboriginal people are fully equal, enjoying their rights, and a thriving part of a fairer society.

## HERSTORY

Frustrated by the shoddy state of many First Nations schools and concerned that the truth about Aboriginal history was missing from curricula, Shannen Koostachin decided to take action. This young teenager from Attawapiskat First Nation launched a campaign to get safe and comfortable schools and culturally-based education in Aboriginal communities. Shannen advocated tirelessly on behalf of First Nations education before dying tragically in 2010 at the age of 15. The initiative now known as Shannen's Dream continues today — thousands of people



## WHAT IS THE UNDRIP?

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is an international agreement covering both the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples around the world. The declaration addresses issues such as culture, identity, language, health, and education. Based on the principles of equality, partnership, and mutual respect, UNDRIP's purpose is to guide the countries of the world, the UN, and other international groups toward building fair and cooperative relationships with Indigenous peoples.

UNDRIP is not the only document of its kind. There's also the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and others. But what makes UNDRIP special is that it was drafted with the direct participation of the very people it's about.

have taken up Shannen’s call for better educational opportunities for First Nations children and youth. In fact, the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion in February 2012 inspired by Shannen’s Dream, committing the federal government to boost financial support to bring First Nations schools on par with provincial standards elsewhere in Ontario. The motion also affirms that First Nations students on reserves have an equal right to a quality education as other students.

## EXERCISE: YOUR STORY



If you are an Indigenous youth, what personal experiences have you and your family had with the issues facing so many Aboriginal communities? And if you’re not, what contact have you had with the story and struggle of Indigenous peoples, either personally or through those you know?

What are your thoughts about how Canada came to be upon Indigenous land, or about the healing journey of Indigenous communities towards equality? Contemplating our own experiences on these issues is an important step to becoming more engaged with Indigenous issues — both as youth within Aboriginal communities and as allies in the fight for their rights and equality.

## THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO

**Soak it up.** If you are a part of an Indigenous community, talk to elders in your community and family about the histories, traditions, challenges, and future of Indigenous peoples. This unique aspect of Canada’s past has the potential to be a positive part of our shared future — if

we are able to respectfully work toward and achieve equality between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

**Dig deeper.** One of the most important things we can do to be powerful allies to Indigenous peoples in their struggle is explore our own identity. Remember the “privilege” we talked about earlier? We need to recognize it in ourselves — however that takes shape — and really think about what it means in terms of oppression. There are so many meaningful ways we can reflect on the issues in order to feel empowered to speak out about them. Learn more about power structures, how they function, and how they have influenced and continue to influence the experiences of Indigenous people. Ask questions. Listen hard. Be open.

**Keep up the pressure.** 2012 marked the ninth year of Sisters in Spirit vigils taking place in honour of the hundreds of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Over the years, tens of thousands of people in at least 84 communities have attended vigils as part of the pan-Canadian movement to end violence against Indigenous women and girls. Led by the Native Women’s Association of Canada, the vigils are just one means of keeping public and political attention on this urgent issue. If something like this isn’t already happening in your community, consider collaborating with Indigenous groups in your area to organize one, or another event around this issue. Learn about the vigils at [www.nwac.ca/programs/sis-vigil](http://www.nwac.ca/programs/sis-vigil)

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# REFLECTION

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It's time to reflect on the kind of leader you want to be and what you are able to do.

And it's time to recognize the powerful person you already are.



**NOW, IMAGINE HOW THOSE SKILLS  
COULD BE PUT TO EFFECTIVE USE AS A  
LEADER OR IN AN ACTIVIST INITIATIVE:**

Confidence — presenter, speaker

Public speaking

Addressing city council

Talking to random people on the street

Artistry — designer, marketer

Designing logos

Creating posters

Producing signage

Eloquence — communicator, persuader

Crafting slogans and taglines

Wording petition statements

Drafting letters to the editor

Friendliness — networker, recruiter

Engaging supporters

Getting the word out

Fundraising

Tech savvy — developer, programmer

Creating a website

Developing an interactive web campaign

Organizing/running equipment at events

# Vision board

A vision board is a collage of images, words, and whatever other visual prompts that represent what is it we want to do, be, and accomplish in life.

Vision boards began as a tool used by facilitators and life coaches to help people clarify and focus on specific goals. The idea is that a visual expression of our goals can serve as a powerful reminder amidst busy days and distractions of what we want to achieve, and why.

As young leaders and activists, vision boarding can be a great way to begin mapping our activist journey.

Over time, vision boards serve as inspiration. No matter what happens during any given day, a vision board is a constant reminder of where we intend to be. Because it appeals to both conscious and subconscious levels, a vision board can work wonders toward keeping our attention on our intentions, and ultimately, our activist journeys headed in the direction(s) we've chosen.

## EXAMPLE:

It's one thing to say "I want to work to protect the environment." A helpful and powerful step toward this goal is to create a vision board featuring:

- clippings of news articles that have motivated you to act
- photos of the endangered species you care most about
- actual scraps of stray plastic bags you've collected from the street or park
- pictures of the decision-makers you hope to influence
- quotes from environmentalists you admire
- copies of weather forecasts that so clearly illustrate global warming
- notes to yourself!

The sky's the limit with a vision board. You don't even have to finish it in one shot — add to it over time, let it evolve as you do, allow your experiences to shape who and what you are becoming ...

Tip: Take a digital photo of your vision board and share on [thinkbigstartsmall.ca](http://thinkbigstartsmall.ca).

# Vision board

# Quiz

**What kind of changemaker are you?**

Use this quiz to help you figure out your leadership personality — it's a fun way to think about the roles you are well-suited to play over the course of your activist journey. Share your quiz results with your friends, and pass it on!

## **YOU NEVER LEAVE YOUR HOUSE WITHOUT:**

- Flyers or postcards to publicize an upcoming rally
- Updating your Facebook profile first
- Water and yummy snacks
- Interesting reading material
- Pen and paper
- Your trusty Swiss army knife

## **THERE'S A LARGE POTHOLE IN THE ROAD IN FRONT OF YOUR HOME. TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE YOU:**

- Coordinate a letter-writing campaign among your neighbours
- Call a few friends who know people on city council to see who your best "in" is to getting that fixed
- Contact the appropriate town or city office to rectify the problem (and maybe sweeten the deal with some homemade cookies)
- Look into the local government budget allocations for road work and safety
- Make a street sign that warns people about it and maybe even paint the outside in a bright colour so it's more noticeable
- Fill it in yourself

## **WHICH WORD DO YOU MOST ASSOCIATE WITH "MAKING CHANGE"?**

- Envision
- Collaborate
- Heal
- Explore
- Fight
- Create

**YOU'RE AT A MEETING FOR A SMALL LOCAL PROJECT WORKING TO PROTEST SOME BUDGET CUTS IN YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT. SOMEONE SAYS, "WE NEED A FEW VOLUNTEERS TO HELP OUT WITH AN UPCOMING MEETING!" BEFORE YOU RAISE YOUR HAND, YOUR INTERNAL DIALOGUE PROBABLY SOUNDS SOMETHING LIKE:**

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- a. "I could design some flyers and create a Facebook group to help get the word out."
- b. "This is great! I'll call Eva and Jasmine as soon as I get home."
- c. "I could provide childcare for the meeting."
- d. "I can do some research into other communities who've done this well."
- e. "I hope we'll discuss whether to organize a rally or a sit-in."
- f. "Another meeting?! When are we going to get started with some hands-on projects?"

**YOU ARE MAKING AN IMPORTANT GROUP DECISION. IT MIGHT BE ABOUT FAMILY FINANCES, A KEY WORK PROJECT, A CAMPAIGN STRATEGY, OR ANOTHER CRITICAL ISSUE. YOU ARE MOST LIKELY TO FEEL FRUSTRATED WITH THE PROCESS WHEN:**

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- a. You feel like people aren't saying what they actually mean
- b. The broader community isn't consulted and choices are made in a vacuum
- c. There isn't an equal playing field
- d. Decisions are made without all the needed information

- e. People are too quick to compromise
- f. People complain about something and don't provide a path forward

**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING PHRASES WOULD YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY MOSTLY LIKELY USE TO DESCRIBE YOU?**

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- a. Always knows just what to say, or how to express themselves
- b. A true collaborator with a rich group of friends and colleagues
- c. A real backbone of the family or community
- d. Deeply inquisitive and in constant pursuit of new and better information
- e. Guided by an unwavering moral compass
- f. A real problem-solver

**IT'S SUNDAY AFTERNOON. YOU ARE MOST LIKELY:**

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- a. Leisurely wandering around a museum or doing some writing
- b. Throwing a big party with friends that you think ought to meet each other
- c. Cooking a special dinner for your family and friends
- d. Poring over the Sunday paper and doing some much-anticipated reading
- e. Attending a local screening, meeting, or community event
- f. Tinkering around in your workshop or garden

# RESULTS

## IF YOU SELECTED MOSTLY A'S, YOU ARE A ...

**COMMUNICATOR:** Communicators like you tell the stories and share information that build our power, bringing us closer together and closer to a better future. Here's how:

- Using your creativity and expression to share knowledge in compelling and accessible ways, whether through art, film, story telling, music, online, or infinite other ways.
- Reminding people about all the ways we're connected.
- Spreading news, information and ideas to other changemaker personalities.

## IF YOU SELECTED MOSTLY B'S, YOU ARE A ...

**NETWORKER:** Networkers like you play a crucial role in making change! Networker traits include:

- A love and skill for making introductions and making new friends and contacts.
- A skill for bringing all types of people and changemaker personalities together over common ideas, goals, and actions.
- An outgoing, open-natured personality that's constantly trying to strengthen and grow the community.

## IF YOU SELECTED MOSTLY C'S, YOU ARE A ...

**NURTURER:** Nurturers like you make change possible by:

- Providing support, care, and just about every other kind of sustenance to changemakers and change efforts.
- Having (and keeping!) a source of strength so large that it can be shared with others when they need it.
- Always being ready, able, and willing to help.

## IF YOU SELECTED MOSTLY D'S, YOU ARE AN ...

**INVESTIGATOR:** Investigators like you play the crucial role of exposing both the problems we face and the solutions. Here's how:

- Reading, inquiring and constantly learning.
- Researching facts, questions, issues, and stories thoroughly until the entire picture is clear.
- Asking the hard questions and exposing uncomfortable truths, even when it's challenging.

## IF YOU SELECTED MOSTLY E'S, YOU ARE A ...

**RESISTER:** Resisters like you are on the front lines of changemaking! Resisters help by:

- Standing up to the bullies and bad guys.
- Practicing civil disobedience.
- Halting destructive projects with a wide range of tools, from lawsuits to injunctions to blockades.
- Helping other changemakers find their own power to resist injustice.

## IF YOU SELECTED MOSTLY F'S, YOU ARE A ...

**BUILDER:** Builders like you are aren't waiting for the solutions, they're out there creating them. Here are just a few ways you might be doing that:

- Using engineering, design, or science to make stuff that doesn't trash people or the planet.
- Creating community gardens, time banks, or other methods for sharing resources and strengthening community.
- Starting new businesses that foster healthy communities and a healthy planet.

And if you responded with a variety of selections, you are a multi-faceted talent who will contribute to changemaking in a variety of important ways. Congratulations!

# Kim Crosby



Kim Crosby is an inspiring example of how our personal experiences with inequality can be transformed into powerful tools for empowerment.

Born in Trinidad and now based in Toronto, Kim is a multidisciplinary artist, queer survivor, activist, facilitator, and educator.

A core member of T-Dot Renaissance (a collective of emerging artists of colour), Kim is also part of a black queer ensemble called Les Blues that uses performance art toward decolonization.

She's the founder of two cutting-edge initiatives: The People Project, a movement of queer and trans people of colour seeking empowerment through activism; and Brown Grrlz Project, based in New York.

Kim once toured internationally with her one-woman play, *Hands in My Cunt*, which garnered much praise.

Being named one of *Go Magazine's* "100 Women We Love" in June 2012 is only the most recent of a long list of accolades.

"Freedom does not come at the expense of another group of people. We must fight for each other; it's either all of us or none of us."

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# APPENDIX

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Eager to learn more? This toolkit drew inspiration and information from a number of sources. Check them out!

Advancing the Leadership of Women and Girls, YWCA Canada

[ywacacanada.ca/en/pages/advocacy/priorities/leadership](http://ywacacanada.ca/en/pages/advocacy/priorities/leadership)

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Girls for a Change

[girlsforachange.org](http://girlsforachange.org)

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Empowering Young Women to Lead Change, World YWCA

[worldywca.org/Resources/YWCA-Publications/Empowering-Young-Women-to-Lead-Change](http://worldywca.org/Resources/YWCA-Publications/Empowering-Young-Women-to-Lead-Change)

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Creative Visions Foundation

[creativevisions.org](http://creativevisions.org)

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Do Something

[dosomething.org](http://dosomething.org)

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Dove Self-Esteem Activity Guide

[www.dove.ca/en/docs/pdf/ActivityGuide4YouthLeaders\\_10-14yrs.pdf](http://www.dove.ca/en/docs/pdf/ActivityGuide4YouthLeaders_10-14yrs.pdf)

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Millionaire Girls Movement

[www.millionairegirlsmovement.com/2011/12/the-role-of-self-advocacy-for-women](http://www.millionairegirlsmovement.com/2011/12/the-role-of-self-advocacy-for-women)

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How to Self-Advocate — 10 Steps to Success

[www.ndalc.org/publications.htm](http://www.ndalc.org/publications.htm)

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Tips and Tools for Self-Advocacy

[lawc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Tips-and-Tools-for-Self.pdf](http://lawc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Tips-and-Tools-for-Self.pdf)

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Champions for Change

[www.talktotherep.ca/Images/PDF/RCY-ChampionsforChange-web.pdf](http://www.talktotherep.ca/Images/PDF/RCY-ChampionsforChange-web.pdf)

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Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women factsheets

[criaw-icref.ca/publications/factsheets](http://criaw-icref.ca/publications/factsheets)

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UN Women's 16 Steps to End Violence Against Women

[www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/EN-16-Steps.pdf](http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/EN-16-Steps.pdf)

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Canadian Labour Congress “Power + Privilege = Oppression” workshop (co-developed with Pam Kapoor)

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Canadian Labour Congress factsheets on women's equality

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Kidshealth.org

[kidshealth.org/teen/stress\\_coping\\_center/stress\\_situations/harassment.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/stress_coping_center/stress_situations/harassment.html)

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United Nations Platform for Action Committee Manitoba, Gender Budget Project

[www.unpac.ca/gender/whatis.html](http://www.unpac.ca/gender/whatis.html)

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Canadian Women's Foundation

[canadianwomen.org/facts-about-poverty](http://canadianwomen.org/facts-about-poverty)

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YWCA Canada Press Releases

[ywacacanada.ca/en/media/press/6](http://ywacacanada.ca/en/media/press/6)

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The Big Wild

[thebigwild.org](http://thebigwild.org)

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Canadians for Choice

[www.canadiansforchoice.ca/rights.html](http://www.canadiansforchoice.ca/rights.html)

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Anti-Racism Resource Centre

[www.anti-racism.ca](http://www.anti-racism.ca)

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Canadian Race Relations Foundation

[www.crr.ca/en/library-a-clearinghouse/publications-a-resources/31/221-facing-hate-in-canada](http://www.crr.ca/en/library-a-clearinghouse/publications-a-resources/31/221-facing-hate-in-canada)

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Amnesty International Canada

[www.amnesty.org/en/indigenous-peoples](http://www.amnesty.org/en/indigenous-peoples)

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Native Women's Association of Canada

[www.nwac.ca/programs/sis-vigils](http://www.nwac.ca/programs/sis-vigils)

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Public Service Alliance of Canada

[psac-afpc.com/what/humanrights/june21factsheet1-e.shtml](http://psac-afpc.com/what/humanrights/june21factsheet1-e.shtml)

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The Story of Stuff

[storyofstuff.secure.force.com/changemakers/quiz](http://storyofstuff.secure.force.com/changemakers/quiz)

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# CREDITS



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Copy-editing and fact-checking: Jessica Hale  
Proofreading: Meg Pirie

## SPECIAL THANKS

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Aldeli Alban Reyna, Ambar Aleman, Raine Liliefeldt, Danielle Pearson, Laura Tilley, YWCA Program Workers and the Y Act Up focus group participants.



**YWCA**  
CANADA

A TURNING POINT  
FOR WOMEN  
UN POINT TOURNANT  
POUR LES FEMMES



Canadian  
Heritage

Patrimoine  
canadien

Canada

**THINK  
BIG**  
*(start small)*  
VACT UP

