

PROFILE

Creating Spaces for Young Leaders

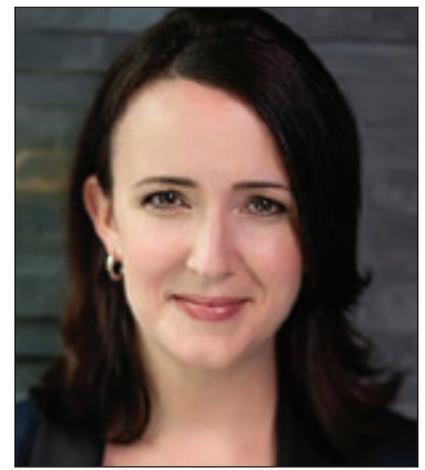
Over the past 10 years, the Rideau Hall Foundation (RHF) has worked with a variety of partners to encourage youth leadership. From Catapult Canada, a program focused on providing equity of access to learning opportunities for young Canadians, to Ingenious+, a new national youth innovation challenge, we have sought out ways to invest in our youth. But now is not the time to rest on our successes.

After two years of disrupted learning and lost experiences, it is more vital than ever that we work with partners in all sectors to create leadership opportunities for all of our young people, including groups who have traditionally been left behind when it comes to programs focused on youth leadership. Specifically, youth with limited family income, those living in rural areas, Indigenous youth and youth from underrepresented groups.

The RHF's new tagline, "Igniting our shared potential", articulates that bold vision for our collective future. Now is the time to invest in all of our young people, to dismantle every barrier to full participation and to create multiple pathways to engagement and leadership. In partnership with the Samara Centre

for Democracy, the RHF studied the impact of the pandemic on youth democratic engagement. In Learning Loss as Civic Loss: Addressing the Generational Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth Democratic Engagement, we looked at the state of youth civic learning and engagement, as well as the potential impacts—for them and for our nation—going forward. And we looked at how we could address those impacts.

One important takeaway is that we have to rethink how we define leadership and provide more accessible pathways to participation. What if we move away from creating individual leaders and focus instead on removing barriers for youth to engage locally and in support of their communities? By shifting the spotlight away from individuals to networks, neighbourhoods, and the overall collective, we start to move away from a leadership model that focuses on and rewards personal achievement. This alone might encourage a wider, more representative set of young Canadians to participate as creative organizers, decisionmakers, and active contributors in their local communities. Given the size, diversity, resources, strength of our industries



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and stability of our country, this approach stands to reinforce a uniquely “made in Canada” paradigm of leadership development that leverages Canada’s many assets.

So many of our youth are already engaged in global equality, climate change, and racial justice issues that matter most to them: Faith Dickerson, who started Cuddles for Cancer; Vishal Vijay, who started EveryChildNow and raised over \$100,000 to help children living in extreme poverty; and of course, Autumn Peltier, clean water and Indigenous rights activist, just to name a very few. Let’s meet these young people – and the countless others innovating and engaging across the country and around the world – where they are, on their own terms, and work to remove any barriers to the transformative impact they can achieve.

The Rideau Hall Foundation is a registered national charity that celebrates what is best about Canada while working with partners to meaningfully improve lives and foster the conditions for more Canadians to succeed and thrive. This year, the RHF celebrates its 10th anniversary. Learn more at www.rhf-frh.ca.