



JANUARY MARIE LAPUZ YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

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LGBTQ2S+ JANUARY MARIE LAPUZ YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD WINNER BIOGRAPHIES



Christopher Nkambwe, Winner (\$1,000 prize)
30 years old | Toronto, Ontario

Christopher Nkambwe (she/her) is a Black transgender woman activist and human rights defender who came from Uganda to Canada to attend the Women Deliver conference in June 2019. She was not able to return home because of fear for persecution from Uganda police due to her sexuality and gender identity, so she started her journey as a refugee in the city of Toronto, Canada.

She is the founder of the African Centre for Refugees in Ontario-Canada and in October 2019, she successfully registered her charity organization that supports vulnerable LGBTIQ refugees from the African Continent from the time they enter the country until they are integrated into the Canadian setting.

In September 2020, she was selected by the Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants to sit on the advisory committee under the Positive Space Initiative that supports the settlement sector to more effectively serve LGBTIQ+2 newcomers. In November, Christopher was honoured with the Community One Foundation Commemorative Award of Steinert and Ferreiro (cash prize of \$10,000), which celebrates unsung heroes for their contribution in the Canadian LGBTIQ2S+ community. *(PHOTO CREDIT: MUZAMILU GOLOOBA PHOTOGRAPHY)*



Mohammad Al Akel, First Runner Up (\$600 prize)
25 years old | Toronto, Ontario

Mohammad Al Akel (he/him) was born in Beirut, Lebanon, a country with many hardships that shaped him into an enthusiastic leader fueled by grit and compassion. He is grateful for the MasterCard Foundation Scholarship he received at the American University of Beirut, where he developed into an advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights, human rights and climate justice.

After his coming out challenges, he was dedicated to pursuing his graduate studies even after his family temporarily rejected him. He completed his master's of climate change at the University of Waterloo. He aims to inspire and empower the LGBTQIA+ community and wrote and published his book titled *The Influential Story of a Gay from the Middle East*, and initiated the first private Facebook Group for marginalized Middle Eastern queer groups in Canada, LGBTQ+ Middle Easterners and North Africans in Canada.

He is currently working at the Alliance for South Asian Aids Prevention (ASAAP) as a settlement manager for LGBTQ+ Middle Easterners and South Asians, where he shares awareness about mental health, STIs, harm reduction and HIV prevention, in addition to aiding newcomers and refugees to settle in Canada.



Tai August, Second Runner Up (\$400 prize)
20 years old | Kelowna, BC

Tai August (two-spirit, non-binary, queer) is an Indigenous, third-year psychology student at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan Campus who grew up in Chase and Salmon Arm in British Columbia, both very rural areas. They are currently Etcetera's Lived Experience Peer Youth Facilitator in Kelowna and early this year joined Kelowna Pride Society as one of their education facilitators.

Living in Kelowna has opened up many opportunities for Tai such as being able to volunteer with the Pride Resource Centre on campus, pick up casual shifts in youth drop-ins and detox centres. They hope to continue toward a master's of social work at UBCO to be able to better help the people they work with in the future.



Sonali (Alyy) Patel, Second Runner Up (\$400 prize)
24 years old | Oakville, Ontario

Sonali (Alyy) Patel (she/they) is a trailblazing gay Gujarati gender fluid womxn and multi-award-winning Power Dyke™, who has made monumental strides for queer South Asian women in Canada through her research, community organizing and advocacy work. She is the founder of a thriving national organization, the Queer South Asian Womxn's Network, as well as the pioneer of research on discrimination against queer South Asian women in Canada.

Alyy began pursuing her passion for LGBTQ+ community building in 2015 by organizing Halton Region's first LGBTQ+ Pride Festival, and spearheaded countless queer initiatives across Canada thereafter. Despite a lack of family support, Alyy dedicatedly raises awareness about the issues and experiences of Queer South Asian diaspora through written publications, public speaking, and various media outlets (e.g. podcasts, documentary, social media). In 2020, Alyy made LGBTQ+ history as the first South Asian speaker at Pride Toronto's Dyke March.



Sophia M. Matthew, Honourable Mention (\$200 prize)
25 years old | Vancouver, BC

What are the politics of silence? This question framed Sophia M. Matthew's (she/her) undergraduate degree, where she analyzed dominant narratives of trauma. A first-generation university student, she graduated near the top of her class. Before law school, she worked at Pietrow Law Group, a queer family law firm in downtown Vancouver. She has focused her legal education on creating space for marginalized narratives, particularly those of LGBTQ2+ communities. She coded interviews on cohabitation as a research assistant for a gay

professor. She built community as UBC OutLaws' co-president (2019–2020) and a Small Group Mentor (2020–2021). UBC has recognized her with multiple awards, including the Marlee G. Kline Essay Prize, awarded for intersectional feminist writing. *(PHOTO CREDIT: SAPHREN LISE PHOTOGRAPHY)*

EMERGING YOUTH LEADERS PRIZES

In addition to the top five winners above, Sher Vancouver has awarded \$100 prizes to seven Emerging Youth Leaders to encourage youth who are starting to do great work with their advocacy for the LGBTQ2S+ community. This year's winners are:

Angelica Poversky, 22, Vancouver, BC

Angelica Poversky (they/them) is a queer trans non-binary, first generation Russian-Jewish community organizer and artist. They have collaborated with the Museum of Anthropology, Cinevolution Media Arts and Everybody Is In Downtown Eastside on developing programs for nurturance culture. They have produced events like the UBC LGBTQ2SIA+ Pride Festival and the Every Kind of Love show at the Chan Centre. Through Art Starts, they mentored a group of 30 youth to establish a poetry press celebrating healing justice, queerness and expressions of identity. Currently they are the artistic director for Jewish Queer Trans Vancouver. They actively write and perform on themes of gender expression, and the boundlessness of queer trans power.

Nel Jayson Santos, 22, Vancouver

Nel Jayson Santos (he/him) is an international student from the Philippines currently taking his master's in sociology at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. He has always been curious about the discrimination and inequalities faced by the LGBTQ2S+ community especially with representation and portrayal in the media as well its intersection with other social identities of race, gender, class and ethnicity. Nel is presently working part-time as a graduate assistant at the School of Graduate Studies at Memorial University. Nel has served as the president of his college's queer group. Nel was a research volunteer for the Community Based Research Centre-Vancouver, which aims to promote gay men's health in Canada.

Kyle Yeung, 18, Richmond, BC

Kyle Yeung (he/him) is a community advocate, mentor and leader who worked throughout high school to spearhead, implement and improve SOGI curricula in schools across Richmond. In addition to leading the first two interactive SOGI workshops, Kyle mentored younger advocates. He participated at district SOGI advisories and BC Ministry of Education mental health conferences to advance SOGI and mental health education. As a first-year student at SFU, Kyle hopes to pursue a degree in behavioural neuroscience with a certificate in urban studies. He hopes to devote himself to making mental health care more accessible, more affordable and more comfortable for queer, immigrant and BIPOC populations in Canadian urban communities.

Jane MacNeil, 17, Calgary, Alberta

From preschool to eighth grade, Jane MacNeil (they/them) attended Catholic school. They came out as a nonbinary lesbian and were motivated to create a safe space for any LGBTQ2S+ students. Despite being told they were free to start a Gay Straight Alliance, they were deterred from both starting the GSA, as well as using the words “gay/queer” in the name. They were forced to leave the school. They have been a member of the Camp fYrefly Youth Action committee for three years, spoken at a rally regarding Bill 24, spoken at the Alberta Gay-Straight Alliance Conference, and have been interviewed by *The Star* and the CBC twice. They also spoke at the Calgary Women’s March in 2018.

Maha Faruqi, 23, Kingston, Ontario

Maha Faruqi (she/her) grew up in a Pakistani Muslim household in the U.A.E., and, since 2015, has been an international student. She graduated from Queen’s University in 2019 with a bachelor of arts (honours) in gender studies, and chose to enroll in the master’s program. As a queer South Asian Muslim woman, her research is based on queer South Asian Muslim femme resistance to Islamophobia and queerphobia in particular, and on how this struggle is inherently linked to dismantling anti-Black racism, colonialism and patriarchy among other forces of oppression. Her podcast project “queer muslim resistance” can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and on Instagram @queermuslimresistance.

Ashli Au, 20, Ottawa, Ontario

Ashli Au (she/her) is currently an undergraduate student with a double major in law and legal studies, and human rights at Carleton University. In the coming years, she hopes to pursue a master’s degree focusing on LGBTQ2S+ experiences in the international arena and/or advocating on behalf of the LGBTQ2S+ community through public policy. She is an active member of Ottawa’s LGBTQ2S+ community having volunteered extensively with Capital Pride/La Fierté dans la Capitale as a Youth Operations Team Lead and as the co-chair of the Capital Pride Youth Committee. Ashli is also a committee member with the Ten Oaks Project, and the Equity and Inclusive Communities Advisory Group at Carleton University.

Azel Gallinger, 17, Ottawa, Ontario

Azel Gallinger (he/him) is 17 years old, and the oldest of seven children. He’s in Grade 12 in the International Baccalaureate program at his school and is going into a bachelor of science program in university next year. In his free time, he likes to do arts, whether it be performance or visual. He is involved in causes such as minority rights, accessibility, environmental protection and Indigenous issues. He finds it incredibly important to give what one can and take only what one needs.