



## 2007 Top 20 Under 20™ Recipient Bios

### **Gavin Bennett**

**Age: 17**

**Brampton, ON**

Gavin Bennett had a desire to mentor underprivileged youth in his city of Brampton. As a result, he founded Rivera Technologies, a non-profit organization that offers youth from underprivileged families the opportunity for computer literacy training in partnership with the United Achievers. It is Gavin's goal that through his computer training program, enrolled youth will learn discipline and develop problem-solving skills in a fun learning environment, and subsequently excel in their academics despite their socio-economic circumstances. For his consistent and dedicated efforts, Gavin has earned the Inspiring Youth Award, the City of Brampton Volunteer Award, and was nominated for the Ontario Junior Citizen Award. He has also been appointed the Chair of the Brampton Mayor's Youth Council, which advocates on behalf of all youth in the city of Brampton

### **Perna Chandak**

**Age: 19**

**Windsor, ON**

Perna Chandak believes that there is nothing more powerful than the power behind an idea, and that there is nothing more noble to pursue than a dream. The idea that Perna turned into reality was becoming a 'life advocate' – a term she has coined for encouraging young people through her own actions on a day-to-day basis to do what they dream. Perna completed over 800 hours of community volunteer service in her home town of Mississauga, ON, even while completing her last four years of high school in the span of three. In 2004, she received the volunteer Recognition Award from World Vision Canada. In 2005, Perna successfully convinced the Mayor of Windsor to create a Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee to represent, engage and connect with youth in Windsor. More recently, Perna's efforts have turned to fostering youth entrepreneurship. As a member of the Windsor Chamber of Commerce, Perna created Windsor's first networking forum for young entrepreneurs to learn and interact with one another. This forum has since expanded to include the first international partnership between two Chamber of Commerce organizations (Detroit & Windsor), to promote youth entrepreneurship.

### **Cody Clark**

**Age: 12**

**Kemptville, ON**

Cody Clark has always wanted to help others, ever since his parents were diagnosed with cancer. The empathy that Cody shows for others comes from deep within, and a visit to the Emergency Department at Kemptville District Hospital prompted Cody to develop the idea for "Cody's Individual Comfort Kits". These individual kits are given to young patients to help make their visit to the hospital a more comfortable and less frightening experience. The free kits, for children aged infant to 16, contain books, blankets, videos, toys, rattles and other things to make a child's stay at the hospital easier. In four years, Cody has delivered 235 of these kits and has

raised over \$25,000. Cody was named an Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year for 2002 and was selected as North Grenville's Hal Anthony Citizen of the Year in 2003. In 2005, Cody received the Governor General's Caring Canadian award for outstanding volunteer efforts. He was elected into the Kids Hall of Fame in 2005.

### **April Dutheil**

**Age: 17**

**Tlell, BC**

In 2006, April Dutheil took the initiative to organize a meeting with her local fire chief, medical first responder and neighbouring ambulance attendants to discuss ways to improve health care for the approximately 6,000 people who call the Queen Charlotte Islands home. April identified a need for an increased number of trained public volunteers as the nearest ambulance was typically 25 minutes away, with the closest hospital being 40 minutes away. After securing a community grant, April organized two free CPR-C courses which educated 24 people from all across the Island. Given that the Island has no cell phone service, knowing CPR is an essential tool that can be the difference between life and death for residents. As April has been accepted into Pre-Med at the age of 17, her commitment to improving health care will surely continue on.

### **Sophia Gran-Ruaz**

**Age: 14**

**Mississauga, ON**

Motivated by the lack of volunteer opportunities in her community for young children, Sophia Gran-Ruaz founded a charity at the age of 11. "Snug as a Bug, *Kids Helping Kids*," is a charity that provides children staying in shelters with care packages, in order to make their stay a little less frightening. Each care package includes a variety of items such as: book/novels, colouring/activity books, pencil crayons, decks of playing cards, children's magazines and much more. In its first year, "Snug as a Bug, *Kids Helping Kids*" created 500 packages for Interim Place North and South. The following year, Sophia's charity doubled this amount and included a second shelter, Honeychurch Salvation Army Family; last year, 2200 care packages were made and a third shelter was added to the recipient list – Women Resources. This year, Sophia hopes for 2500 care packages to be made and the addition of a fourth shelter.

### **Saleena Hakim**

**Age: 18**

**Toronto, ON**

In 2004, Saleena (Sally) Hakim and her friends were watching television during the Christmas holiday and witnessed the disastrous tsunami which struck, and devastated, much of South East Asia. With scarcely a second thought, Sally rallied the student body which raised over \$32,000 worth of medical supplies to be used in the devastated region. This experience was the beginning of Sally's personal mission to inspire and raise the awareness of her school's student body to the state of the rest of our community and the world. Sally then went on to lead a project called, Brick-by-Brick, where they raised over \$13,000 towards building a school in Kenya. This past October Sally, with 12 other students, flew to Kenya to physically build one of the classrooms.

Upon her return, she realized that the most difficult part of her experience was not the fundraising or labour involved in building the classrooms, but rather the task of inspiring and motivating individuals to help create positive change in the world. Sally has found her calling.

### **Raymond Ko**

**Age: 19**

**Saskatoon, SK**

For as long as Raymond Ko can remember, music has always been his passion. After receiving diplomas in violin and piano performance, he read a study stating that “music therapy techniques have significant, positive influences in the treatment of autism”. That fall, he founded the Music Sensory Awakening Program after months of promoting the concept to the board of directors of Autism Services, Saskatoon. The Music Sensory Awakening Program has grown from three students in the first year to over a dozen at present, with many more on a waiting list. His students range in age from as young as 3, to as old as 18. As a result, he has had to develop various methods to engage his students. Last year, Raymond performed in a solo concert that raised \$5,000 for the Program, and combined with proceeds from his CD sales, he has raised over \$7,000. Raymond has also managed to attract corporate sponsorship, and the Program is now supported by Cameco Corporations, Point Optical, and Safeway Canada, to name a few. Music and helping others – these are the passions that will continue to inspire Raymond and direct his future career path as well as his community involvement, as he heads into his twenties.

### **Stephen Lake**

**Age: 17**

**Toronto, ON**

Stephen Lake is a budding entrepreneur and owner of two successful business ventures. At the age of 13, Stephen’s interest in engineering and robotics led to the creation of RC Tunerz. Having identified a need in the field of radio controlled vehicles, Stephen started to create high efficiency LED lighting systems for mobile vehicles. Stephen would import parts from China and Japan and create finished products which he would then sell on either his own e-commerce site or Ebay. RC Tunerz has sold thousands of these lighting systems to be installed on high end vehicles which can cost up to \$1,000. Two years later, at the age of 15, Stephen identified another gap, this time in the DJ/entertainment business and proceeded to start Harmonic Synergy Entertainment. This business has been hugely successful and some of his clients include Mary Kay Cosmetics and the Toronto District School Board. His goal in 2008 is to hit annual sales of \$100,000 with a gross profit margin of 85%.

### **Ronan Paul MacParland**

**Age: 19**

**St. John’s, NL**

The people of North Maragoli, Vihiga District in Western Kenya refer to Ronan MacParland as ‘the miracle boy’ and children have been named after him. In fact, since going to Kenya on a gap year project, the community has undergone a transformation, and is looking forward to a brighter future. This is all in recognition of Ronan’s genuine interpersonal and leadership skills and his

devotion to championing progress for the benefit of the community. In 2005/2006, Ronan went to North Maragoli as part of the United World College South East Asia project team. The objective of the visit was to promote sustainable development in education, and in doing so set up a fully functional Community Resource Centre comprising of a well stocked library, fully equipped computer training facility, and meeting rooms. Once there, he led an international team that coordinated and mobilized the local government to build the resource centre in less than 3 months, which is unheard of in that part of the world. Ronan also successfully mobilized international and local funds, including a grant from the Kenyan government. The Resource Centre is “ever busy” and has attracted the interest of the Kenya National Library Services, who are keen on rating it as a National Library.

### **Tracy Mah**

**Age: 19**

**Edmonton, AB**

After discovering that her lethal allergies were thanks to a complex immunological warfare, Tracy Mah became fascinated by the immune system’s responsibility for a myriad of disorders and in particular, diabetes. Through months of intensive research alongside scientists including those who were part of the Edmonton Protocol team, Tracy’s experiments suggested that the creation of chimerism – the co-existence of two genetically different populations of cells - may be a remarkably effective and natural alternative to immunosuppressive drugs. Tracy’s involvement in this project has earned her many accolades and national awards. She was also chosen by the Province of Alberta to share and highlight her science project to the Royal Family during the Queen’s Royal visit in 2005. In recognition of her involvement in science and extensive community volunteerism, she has also been awarded the Alberta Centennial medal which honours outstanding Albertans whose achievements have benefited their fellow citizens, community and province within the last century.

### **Samantha Milner**

**Age: 16**

**Beaconsfield, QC**

At the age of 11, after reading the book “Chicken Soup for the Pre-Teen Soul”, Samantha Milner became inspired to start her own retail gift business – Sassy Sams Inc. What distinguishes her and her company from others, aside from her age, is her commitment to donating a considerable portion of her profit to help the less fortunate. Sassy Sams Inc. products are carried by over 500 stores across Canada and has over one million dollars in sales. In addition, Samantha employs three full time adults and has over 12 regional representatives. Samantha’s success has meant significant financial support to multiple charities. Since inception, Samantha has donated over \$40,000 to the SPCA, YMCA International Youth Program, M.A.D.D. and Dans La Rue, a local homeless shelter. Samantha is currently working on a bracelet where 50% of the profits will go towards fighting AIDS in Africa. When she is not running her successful business, she is active in her school, serving as Student President for the past two years.

### **Ted Paranjothy**

**Age: 17**

**Winnipeg, MB**

Losing a close childhood friend to leukemia at the age of 5 has etched into Ted Paranjothy's mind the emotional devastation induced by cancer, and the pain that is inflicted upon friends and family. This memory is the basis for his motivation to rid the world of this vicious disease and Ted is well on his way. As a high school student, Ted spent over 2,000 volunteer hours doing research in a lab at the University of Manitoba, often with peers 10 years older and holding PhD degrees. Ted's innovative scientific project, which he designed and finalized on his own, has led to the discovery of a novel anticancer agent. Ted's work has caught the interest of the University of Manitoba, which has filed a provisional patent application. Ted's scientific wizardry has earned him the 2006 Manning Young Canadian Innovation Award, as well as distinction awards by the Canadian Cancer Society. Besides his hard work in the lab, Ted has also been extensively engaged in charitable work, earning him the United Way Community Service Award.

**Simon Pickup**

**Age: 18**

**North Vancouver, BC**

In grade four, the question-premise Simon Pickup chose for his science fair project was "How do we solve the fuel problem?" His answer was that hydrogen was the solution, and he built a device which used electricity to split water into hydrogen and oxygen. Eight years later, he is still working on a hydrogen project. His idea is simple, and postulates that young people are the key that hydrogen and renewable energy needs to advance as the definitive energy solution. Based on this assumption, Simon founded Youth Hydrogen in 2004. Youth Hydrogen is the only youth organization that fosters the development of young leaders while advancing the global shift to hydrogen and renewable energy. Youth Hydrogen is currently overseeing the ongoing design and planning for the construction of a hydrogen refueling station in the City of North Vancouver. When completed, it will be the world's first example of gasoline-competitive hydrogen.

**Nakita Sekhon**

**Age: 17**

**Victoria, BC**

"Passion to Action" is Nakita Sekhon's personal motto and an ideal she lives every day. In 2001 Nakita traveled to India and saw first hand the plight of many children on a day to day basis. Upon her return, Nakita founded Jamsher Children's Village an orphanage that, once built, will offer a home based environment for approximately 30 children. Nakita has since secured 3.5 acres of land in northern India, and is currently in the process of raising the \$500,000 capital needed to break ground on the buildings. Nakita's first volunteer undertaking was to help raise over \$9,000 to build a school in Zambia. Her most recent fundraiser was in November 2006, where she raised over \$13,000 for Jamsher Children's Village. Nakita is the immediate past lieutenant governor for Kiwanis Educating Youth International (KEY Club) in the Pacific Northwest District. She volunteers with B.C. Children's Hospital, and annually speaks to medical students about the issues surrounding youth in health care. Nakita has accumulated over

5,000 volunteer hours in the last 4 years. She was recently awarded the Kiwanis Educating Youth Opportunities Fund, the first ever Canadian recipient of this award, and an “Amazing Kids” scholarship from her local business community.

**Jasmeet Sidhu**

**Age: 19**

**Brampton, ON**

When Jasmeet Sidhu founded the Peel Environmental Youth Alliance (PEYA) in 2004, she envisioned a youth-led organization that would be a meeting place for high school students to comment on environmental issues and share project ideas. However from this modest idea, PEYA has grown to more than 300 members and is now recognized across the country as a strong, definitive place to pool the passion, knowledge and skills of student environmental leaders to create concrete change for the future. An example of this is the creation of a climate declaration in 2006 which was supported by many prominent community leaders and federal politicians, receiving a \$215,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to organize annual conferences called "EcoBuzz", facilitating the creation of new recycling programs within schools and helping the next generation of environmental leaders and innovators hone their leadership skills. Jasmeet's efforts have not gone unnoticed, she has also received the TD Canada Trust Scholarship for Community Leadership and is distinguished at the University of Toronto as a National Scholar.

**Yvonne Su**

**Age: 17**

**Holland Landing, ON**

Throughout Yvonne Su's high school career she has aspired to protect the environment and has pushed herself to the very limits doing just that. Three years ago, Yvonne started The Denison Environmental Club (D.E.C.). The club started with an idea – a protest against her school's deceiving recycling program. Yvonne learned that due to staff shortages, the caretakers in her school neglected the recyclables and, for years, threw them out as waste. Outraged and determined to make a positive change, Yvonne introduced Denison's first student-run recycling program. Three years later, D.E.C. is recycling twice a week with remarkable results. In addition, Yvonne has led the students of D.E.C. coast to coast, expanding their environmental network and knowledge, while spreading the message of sustainability. Yvonne and her D.E.C. team has also spoken to thousands of people from all walks of life, mobilizing the population to take positive action.

**Asha Suppiah**

**Age: 19**

**Deep River, ON**

In many parts of the world, including developed countries, there are extreme shortages of fresh water. When Asha was in Grade 6, she often wondered why two things that are freely available – ocean water and sunlight – could not be used to harvest fresh water. Over the next few years, Asha researched solar desalination and discovered that its use was stymied by low efficiency rates of solar desalinators and the cost of the systems. Asha then spent a few more years

exploring various ways of utilizing solar energy to produce fresh water, and eventually succeeded in developing a novel technique of spreading salt water on a corrugated rotating screen to increase the surface area required to evaporate the water. This technique is very valuable because the equipment is of low cost and the system can be constructed cost effectively. Asha's scientific accomplishment has not gone unnoticed. Asha is a two-time winner of the Pfizer Canada Award of Excellence, and at the Canada Wide Science Fair, Asha won gold three times and silver three times, along with numerous awards including the AECL Award of Excellence, Natural Resources Canada Award and the Ontario Power Generation Award to name a few. Asha's invention is currently patent pending.

### **Ryan Thirlwall**

**Age: 19**

**Victoria, BC**

Ryan Thirlwall is a survivor, overcoming monumental adversities and speaking to the needs of at-risk youth. Abused at a young age, Ryan sought escape through hard core drug addiction and crime, eventually ending up in the juvenile justice system. Now drug free and holding a steady, managerial level job, Ryan is committed to supporting youth and others in need. Ryan has spoken to thousands of young people in BC and throughout Canada and is a member of the board of the BC Positive Community Youth Development Coalition, which builds the capacity of communities in British Columbia to enhance the positive development of youth. Ryan's latest endeavour is "PAY IT FORWARD BIKE TOUR" 2007 where he will ride his bike from Prince Rupert to Victoria to raise money for his organization. His fundraising goal is \$1 million.

### **David Wang**

**Age: 17**

**London, ON**

David Wang is a multi-talented young person with extraordinary initiative and creativity. David came up with the idea of developing a plant-based edible vaccine for SARS after its outbreak in 2003 which killed nearly 800 people worldwide. After putting so much effort to the research, David produced transgenic plants expressing a protein antigen that has the potential for inducing neutralizing antibodies against the virus. David's research provided a solid foundation for the development of a plant-based, safe, cost-effective, edible SARS vaccine. Inspired by his great success in his first SARS vaccine project, he then began to work on developing a new oral immunotherapy for treating human autoimmune diseases. After two years' hard and creative work, David generated transgenic plants expressing a biologically active IL-13 protein and demonstrated it has a great promise against Type-1 diabetes. It is not surprising that David has received many scientific accolades including First Place in Botany in the 2006 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), Second Place in Medicine and Health Sciences in the 2007 Intel ISEF, and six National level awards in the Canada Wide Science Fair and Sanofi-Aventis Biotech Challenge. When David is not in the lab, he can be found playing chess and is a three time Canadian Youth Chess Champion and a member of the Team Canada World Youth Chess Championship.

### **Samantha Whiteside**

**Age: 17**

## **New Hamburg, ON**

In 1954, Marilyn Bell became the first person to swim across Lake Ontario. In the summer of 2006, Samantha Whiteside became the 38<sup>th</sup> person and the second youngest to accomplish this 52 KM feat. In doing so, she raised over \$25,000 for juvenile arthritis – the same disease that afflicts Samantha today. Not many people are aware of the preparation and planning that goes into the crossing - it takes roughly one year to train for the swim and many months to plan. Once in the water, the swimmer is not allowed to wear a wetsuit or use floatation devices, nor are they allowed to touch any person or boat during the swim. Samantha completed her swim, missing the World Record by 71 seconds. Samantha has vowed to return to Lake Ontario to not only raise more funds for the Arthritis Society, but to become the fastest swimmer, male or female, to cross Lake Ontario.