

# Moving → forward



## Youth in Motion advances ideas, kids

By T. Foster Jones

THE CHALLENGES OF BEING successful in today's world cannot be underestimated. That's the underlying message of national charitable foundation Youth in Motion. It's also the basis of the organization's efforts to help Canada's youth meet and surmount those challenges.

"Options and choices in today's world of work are overwhelming," says Costco member Akela Peoples, one of Youth in Motion's co-founders. "Within the school system, it's a real challenge to educate about career paths. We felt there was a real need to gain awareness."

"We believe a national program that fosters, celebrates, profiles and awards multiple paths of success is essential to building Canada's future," says Costco member Russ White, Youth in Motion's other founder.

With offices in Toronto and Calgary, Youth in Motion (YIM) wants "to develop and implement dynamic career programs for youth through mentoring programs and career learning days," according to their Web site ([www.youth-in-motion.ca](http://www.youth-in-motion.ca)). To achieve this, the organization produces substantial educational resources and provides scholarships and awards for youth.

Since its founding in 1998 the organization has orchestrated more than 90 major career conferences and events, including Career Learning Days; Opportunities Unlimited, one of a variety of successful mentoring programs targeting women; and other programs for top achievers in Canada, such as Top 20 Under 20 (see "Under" Achievers). More than 40,000 youths have received, first-hand, the benefits of these programs.

### Innovate or die

While what YIM has achieved is impressive, what is perhaps just as much or more so, is the manner in which they have achieved this. They certainly walk the walk and talk the talk, in terms of demonstrating how to succeed by being resourceful and innovative and actively creating opportunities.

An incredibly lean (some might say skeletal) organization, with just six full-time employees in one office and three in the other, YIM relies almost exclusively on the enormous efforts of its volunteers—thousands of professionals in all fields who have been attracted and maintained over the past eight years to serve as support and mentors. YIM also worked at bringing in strong and impressive partners, such as ING, BellCanada and The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario, for funding, in-kind donations of materials and office space, as well as internships and employment opportunities.

"We're competing for dollars with organizations that are much older," says Peoples, a former educator. Recently named one of the Top 100 Most Powerful Women in Canada by the Women's Executive Network, in 2002 she became the youngest ever recipient of the YWCA's Women of Distinction Award for Entrepreneurship. "From the onset we realized that we had to be very innovative and creative, so we run YIM like an entrepreneurial business. We're always focused on program improvement. We're always evolving."

"When you're running a small business, you're focused on value for dollar and not wasting resources—there's no room for complacency," she tells *The Connection*. "The nature of our funding model is always to increase the amount of funding we receive; we have to be entrepreneurial."

### Flexibility is key to success

That nimbleness has paid off, in terms of what YIM has been able to offer.

Educators in Motion looks beyond college and university at non-traditional paths such as trades, non-profits and small business, and makes educators aware of these opportunities.

Parents in Motion uses workshops and seminars to help adults learn about what opportunities their children have.

New Horizons is a mentorship program for



LISA HOEKSTRA



KHANH TRAN

**Perpetual motion machine:** Co-founded by Akela Peoples (centre photo) and Russ White (bottom), Youth in Motion is an organizational juggernaut, bringing motivation and awareness to thousands of Canadian teens, and rewarding the top young achievers in the country with their Top 20 Under 20 program (top photo).

young professional women who have come from other countries, assisting them in assimilating and adjusting to their new home.

In addition to the Top 20 program, YIM assists those on the other end as well. "These are kids who have two strikes against them," says White, who bypassed retirement after 33 years in the educational system to begin Youth in Motion. "By providing one little

step, we can help youth with employment barriers get work experience with community-minded businesses."

"Our mentoring programs have a higher than 80 per cent success rate, in terms of continuing education and job placement," adds Peoples.

YIM's co-founders say that what they do can help to bridge what they feel is a huge gap

between business and education.

"I don't think our schools and businesses are enabled to work together," says Peoples. "I think there is a real opportunity that the school is missing out on."

"It's that conundrum of needing experience to get a job and needing a job to get experience," says White. "We can help solve the conundrum." ☐

## "Under" achievers

Top 20 Under 20™ rewards teens who have made their mark

WHAT HAD YOU accomplished by the time you were 17 or 18 years old? School? Part-time job? I was doing my best to simply stay out of trouble.

The fact is, most of us take a little while to get warmed up to the idea of knowing what we want out of life and what we hope to accomplish.

There are those, however, who not only know what they want to do, but find the means to make it happen, before they've busted out of their tender teens. Someone like Shamin Mohamed Jr., who established an AIDS organization in Toronto when he was 16 years old. Or Ashly Larson, who at 17 became a spokesperson for farm families whose lives had been affected by mad cow disease.

"It was more than just about losing money," says Larson, now 20, who comes from a small family farm in Erickson, Manitoba, and whose poem about the issues surrounding the shutdown of Canadian beef exports brought her national attention. "There was a ripple effect that was being ignored by the media. Families were experiencing divorce, suicide, debt, loss of college educations. It affected me personally."

After getting over the initial shock of being thrust onto the national stage, Larson realized that she had an opportunity to accomplish what many adults



could not. "It made me realize that being a youth is an advantage," she says. "Being young offered the media a different way to approach the subject."

Mohamed's experience as the coordinator for famine relief fundraising led to his creation of the Children's AIDS Health Program (<http://LetsStopAIDS.org>), a registered charity to engage fellow teens in helping kids with AIDS around the world.

"All it takes is one action to make a dream a reality," says Mohamed, who will be travelling to South Africa in July as part of an AIDS education trip. "We don't have to wait until we're really old to make a difference."

Recognizing and rewarding these achievers is just as important to Youth in Motion as helping those students who are still looking for ways to reach their goals. This was the impetus behind Top 20 Under 20 ([www.top20under20.ca](http://www.top20under20.ca)), Canada's first national award and mentoring program. Now in its third year, Top 20, co-sponsored by ING and the ING Foundation, is a blueprint for creating a national network of mentors and tomorrow's leaders by fostering and communicating the successes of a diverse range of youths to the broader community, says the program's manager, Larry Mah.

"We understand the challenges of being a young person in today's world,"

**Class of 2005: Last year's Top 20 award recipients plan on being the next generation's leaders.**



says Mah. "Top 20 Under 20 celebrates and honours Canadians who have not only tackled the day-to-day challenges, but demonstrated a significant level of innovation, leadership and achievement before they've reached the age of 20."

Each of the 20 annual winners receives up to \$2,000 toward an educational experience of their choosing, a four-day leadership summit and an all-expenses-paid trip to Toronto for the Top 20 Under 20 ceremony. They are also paired for a year with mentors who are successful business and community leaders and given a one-year registration to Manpower's Global Learning Center.

"It's more than a mentor for a year," says Mohamed. "It feels like he'll be my mentor for life."

"My mentor was like family," says Larson, who has used her experience to start her own bursary (scholarship) program for farmers experiencing financial crisis. "She, and this program, changed my life." —TFJ