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She's 15, from the Bay, and one of Canada's top 20

By Kate Adams
BayToday.ca
Thursday, June 05, 2008



North Bay's Jerri Clout can add one more achievement to her already impressive resume as the 15-year-old West Ferris Student has been named one of Canada's top 20 people under the age of 20.

Youth in Motion (YIM) is a national not-for-profit group that works to develop the employability and life skills that youth need for success in life and work and each year YIM recognises youth who are





impacting the country in a positive way and leading the way for future generations.

YIM is dedicated to providing the tools and

blueprints that youth will need to make positive, meaningful and healthy life and career choices in order to engage youth to realise their full potential and contribute positively to their families, communities and country.

“I would say that we saw in every Canadian, in every living human, there is a potential but most of us never ever reach that potential, we don't know what our potential is,” explains YIM co-founder Russ White about how the organisation came to be.

“And for us as educators both Akela (Peoples co-founder) and myself, I think we believed that with the skills that we have (we could) energise, generate a passion in kids and perhaps expose them to people out there that have already achieved or about to drive in certain areas that they are interested in so that they too can achieve.”

During a gala event at the Royal York in Toronto Wednesday, Youth in Motion hosted this year's Top 20 Under 20 awards which recognised youth leaders from across the nation for their advancements in the areas of technology, science, health and volunteerism.

This year's award recipients receive a \$2,000 bursary, a week-long conference in Toronto that includes career coaching, etiquette classes, as well as a meeting with Governor-General Michaëlle Jean. The youth will also be paired with Order of Canada recipients who will mentor the protégés for the next year

“This week has been phenomenal in providing us with opportunities not only useful in what specifically we are doing with our charities or with our specific projects that got us here, but we can relate all these things to just about every aspect of our lives. And we're making friends, learning form a very diverse group, but at the same time we are all likeminded and relate to each other,” says Clout on her win.

“It’s actually amazing because every single day I think of something new that I can do some way I can incorporate something else into the project the ways to bring what I am learning back to the community and continue what I am doing and especially with this mentorship with the Order of Canada.”

YIM Co-founders said with over 40,000 applications downloaded for this year’s selection process and 300 making the grade, the filtering down process proved to be a difficult one. The Top 20 were judged by a panel of community leaders from a variety of disciplines from across Canada, who weighed the skills and accomplishments of the nominees, that included their abilities to take initiative, communicate and be creative. It came down to 42 finalists and North Bay’s 15-year-old dynamo sailed through the gruelling procedure with ease and grace.

“I first met Jerri over the radio when she was 13-years-old in September and I heard this incredible voice speaking so eloquently and profoundly about AIDS and HIV awareness and I thought who is this kid, and at the end on CBC Radio they said it was a grade 9 student from West Ferris Secondary School and I thought oh my goodness I have to meet this kid ... well sure enough at a robotics meeting maybe two weeks later I did get to meet her and I haven’t looked back since,” explains Chippewa Teacher and Robotics Mentor Nancy Dewar-Stenning on why she helped and supported Clout’s application.

“What an amazing young woman, and when it (the Top 20 award) came to my attention I was so honoured to write that letter for Jerri Clout so honoured, what an amazing young woman and I knew if we could get her to the interview stage she would fly with this and she would be in for this huge award. North Bay needs to be proud of her and the Near North Board is proud of her and also the robotics team.”

Clout, the second youngest award winner, clearly stood head and shoulders above other youth because of her dedication to helping children learn more about HIV/AIDS as Youth Ambassador for the Patrick4Life Foundation and for forming the Youth4Youth Committee, which encourages teenagers to become involved in HIV/AIDS issues.

“For sure from day one Jerri is so successful on

the topic of HIV and AIDS with the media and saying everything the way it needed to be said because it is such a fragile topic and such a scary one and she is courageous,” says Christine Fortin, Patrick4Life Founder.

Surrounded by a very proud circle of family, friends, mentors and school board employees, Clout beamed as she read a personal letter sent by Prime Minister Stephen Harper during an interview segment on the awards stage.

“It’s amazing for North Bay, West Ferris and the community to have Jerri included as one of the top 20 in Canada the amazing things that these students are doing and to have Jerri included is just simply amazing for all of us in North Bay,” says West Ferris Principal, Tim Collins.

“It certainly is amazing, Jerri Clout represents all the students of the Near North Board really well,” agrees Heli Vail, Near North District School Board Director of Education.

“But Jerri Clout is a very special young lady who really is contributing not just to the City of North Bay through her involvement with Partici-Patrick but through all the things that she is doing and that is going to spread right across Canada now with her involvement. It is a very prestigious award and we’re very proud of her.”

Clout knew that she had been selected for the award for the past three weeks but a media blackout prevented her from publicly sharing the news and perhaps is why the words mature and leader kept surfacing when folks talked about the 15-year-old and what she has accomplished in a very short time.

“She’s definitely one of the leaders at the school with all that she has done with her fundraising initiatives as well as robotics etcetera,” states Collins.

“Her impact on students in the school is well known, the kids respect what she has done. We’ll have an amazing presentation next week and include her in it just to recognise all of her accomplishments.”

“She is such a natural leader on her own merit and we know she is going to come back to North Bay and help us build a strong Youth4Youth team with

more leadership,” adds Fortin.

“Jerri is a leader, she’s a natural leader but also leaders need lots of training and lots of grooming and she is so mentorable and her leadership skills grow every opportunity and even at the end of these few days she’s had with the Top 20 you can see there has been even more growth,” agrees Dewar-Stenning.

“There’s so much potential there and we’re going to see her just continue to flourish ... and just watch for Jerri because she’s going places.”

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