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Guelph students honoured on national 20 Under 20 list

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Having a son or daughter included on a list of Canada's top 20 high-achieving youth is enough to make any parent feel proud.

For Moustapha Oke, it's a feeling he got to experience twice.

Guelph student Sofia Oke is the second person in her family to make Youth in Motion's national Top 20 Under 20 list, an honour reserved for young Canadians who have demonstrated significant innovation, leadership and achievement. Sofia's brother Isdin received the honour last year.

"We just try to teach our children to be honest, work hard, respect people, and give back to the community," Moustapha Oke said. "We know that the community is what builds you and it's always good to give back. I think both of our children do that."

Sofia Oke, a 17-year-old student at Centennial Collegiate Vocational Institute High School, is a talented athlete and active volunteer. She worked as a receptionist with Habitat for Humanity and now volunteers with both the Red Cross and Canadian Blood Services.

Last year, she and a classmate won awards at both a regional and national science fair competition for their work on reducing the side effects of chemotherapy.

"I know the competition is very tough," Moustapha Oke said. "We are really happy for her, that she managed to make it that far."

Sofia Oke is joined on this year's list by fellow Guelph resident Abid Virani.

The 19-year-old University of Guelph student co-founded Student Reach International two years ago to encourage Canadian students to contribute to the global community. Next year, the group will help bring 12 high school students to Lesotho and film a documentary about their experiences in the country.

Virani hopes the film will be seen in high schools across Canada, and will inspire more students to become active in global issues.

"It's easy to be upset with the world in the current state it's in, but sitting around and being upset doesn't get you anywhere," Virani said. "I do this because I want to change things."

Virani is also working on a book that documents his transition from a person who "simply didn't like the world to someone who now has a lot of faith in humanity," which he hopes will reach younger students.

Top 20 Under 20 is a national youth awards program presented by Youth in Motion and aims to honour and celebrate the contributions of Canadian youth to their communities.

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