

Winter 2022

The York University Magazine

Colleen Russell-Rawlins
on reshaping education
at Canada's
largest school board



Renewed Optimism



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The York University Magazine

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

THE PRESIDENT



RHONDA L. LENTON
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

AS WE APPROACH THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY of the beginning of the pandemic, it is difficult not to be seized by the extent to which the events of the past two years have affected virtually every aspect of our lives. In the lead-up to March 2020, the word “disruption” was a platitude of startups and tech companies eager to overturn traditional practices. But the pandemic has gone one step further, disrupting the disrupters, upending our conventional modes of living and working, and accelerating progress almost universally.

In the higher education sector, the pandemic has propelled us into a new era of pedagogical innovation and fast-forwarded the adoption of remote teaching and learning models. But many questions about the future of higher education remain, including the fundamental question of the role of universities in the 21st century.

As a modern university, York continues to act as an anchor institution – a hub for surrounding communities, an incubator of ideas and innovation, and a space where university and city, academia and industry, people and culture can come together to drive positive change locally and globally.

And so we are thrilled to have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to envision, shape and develop a truly community-engaged university campus through the implementation of *Living Well Together: Keele Campus Vision and Strategy*. Launched in December 2021, the strategy serves to embed our core principles of social and environmental responsibility – and our ongoing commitment to Indigenous reconciliation – within our plans to reimagine more than 77 hectares of land on our Keele Campus, beginning with the reinvigoration of the Harry W. Arthurs Common and setting out four new neighbourhoods within the campus: a commercial centre, a high-tech district, a primarily residential district, and a mixed-use residential, commercial and athletic neighbourhood.

Drawing on the strengths of the six priority areas identified in the *University Academic Plan 2020–2025: Building a Better Future*, and underscored by the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, this innovative plan recognizes the immense social value that can be achieved when a university is well-integrated – creating a vibrant, safe and highly functional community-centred campus that benefits students, faculty, staff, our neighbours and our many partners.

The pandemic has reminded us that we must continue to challenge the traditional notion of what a university can offer, and *Living Well Together: Keele Campus Vision and Strategy* does just that.

Universities educate for individual and collective capacity, expand knowledge and address society’s most pressing social, economic and environmental challenges. We can play this role in a way that is insular and self-limiting or in a way that is inclusive and expansive, the better to maximize complementary societal benefit.

With our new *Keele Campus Vision and Strategy*, we are choosing the latter approach – one that builds on the lessons we have learned from the disruption of the past two years while keeping its sights set firmly on the future.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

EDITOR’S NOTES



Real Life Action Heroes

BY TAKING ACTION, people can make a difference. They can implement positive change. That’s the accidental theme of the Winter 2022 issue of *The York University Magazine*. I say “accidental” because there wasn’t a fixed idea in place when planning the story lineup. The goal, as always, was simply to showcase excellence at York University and in the broader York community, namely its alumni.

But a funny thing happened on the way to deadline.

Tales of creative resilience in difficult times kept cropping up. It emerged as a unifying idea, connecting such seemingly disparate stories as the preservation of the Greek immigrant experience in Canada and the relocation of an entire girls’ soccer team out of Afghanistan to escape the Taliban’s censorship of female sport.

Our cover story on Colleen Russell-Rawlins, the first-ever Black female director of education in the history of the Toronto District School Board, fell naturally in step.

Tasked with steering the TDSB through the pandemic, Russell-Rawlins is also increasing diversity, inclusion and transparency across the school board, which is one of the largest in North America. How does she cope with the challenge? By learning from and teaching others. That’s a good strategy.

In the more than two years since COVID-19 disrupted life as we once knew it, co-operation has emerged as one of the best

crisis management tools. What affects one person affects another, and so we need to be more aware of each other and help each other through a period of upheaval. Great progress has already been made. Today there are vaccines where before there were none. Not that getting one has been easy, as shown by our stories on using mathematical modelling and social media to secure doses. Where access was a problem, the solution was people determined to conscientiously intervene.

Now that we know how quickly we can make change once we put our minds to it, our hope is to see some of that inventiveness move in the direction of the environment. Climate change and the need for more sustainable consumer behaviours and industry practices is another topic we explore in this issue. In each instance, you’ll find someone taking action to right the future. It is the York way. ●

— Deirdre Kelly

The York University Magazine



THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

Volume 7, Number 2

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40069546

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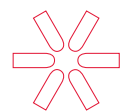
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THE YORK UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE is printed and mailed to alumni and friends of the University once a year, in the fall. The summer and winter issues are available online only, at yorku.ca/magazine. Ideas and opinions expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect the ideas or opinions of the University or the editors. To get in touch, email yomag@yorku.ca

ON THE COVER



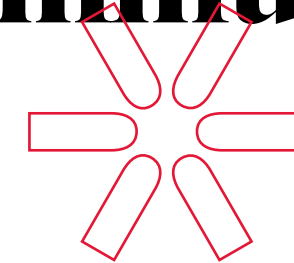
Colleen Russell-Rawlins
Photography by
Mike Ford





Suzan Farhang Sardroodi

The Mathematics of Immunity



Applying modelling research to pandemic problems

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

VACCINES ARE HERE and already in the arms of a great many Canadians. But accessibility still cannot be taken for granted. The ongoing demand for vaccines, including booster shots, has health officials worried that there might not be enough doses to go around.

Supply chain disruptions, exacerbated by the pandemic, continue to hamper vaccine delivery systems worldwide. It's a pressing problem for which mathematician Suzan Farhang Sardroodi has found a workable solution.

Using mathematical modelling to investigate the dynamics of an immune response, she identifies a strategy for circumventing logistical constraints while safeguarding vaccines at a time of shortages.

"By halving or even quartering a second booster dose and extending the time between shots from the typically prescribed 16 weeks to as long as 18 or 20 weeks, vaccines that are in short supply can become available to anyone who wants them," says Farhang Sardroodi, a senior postdoctoral

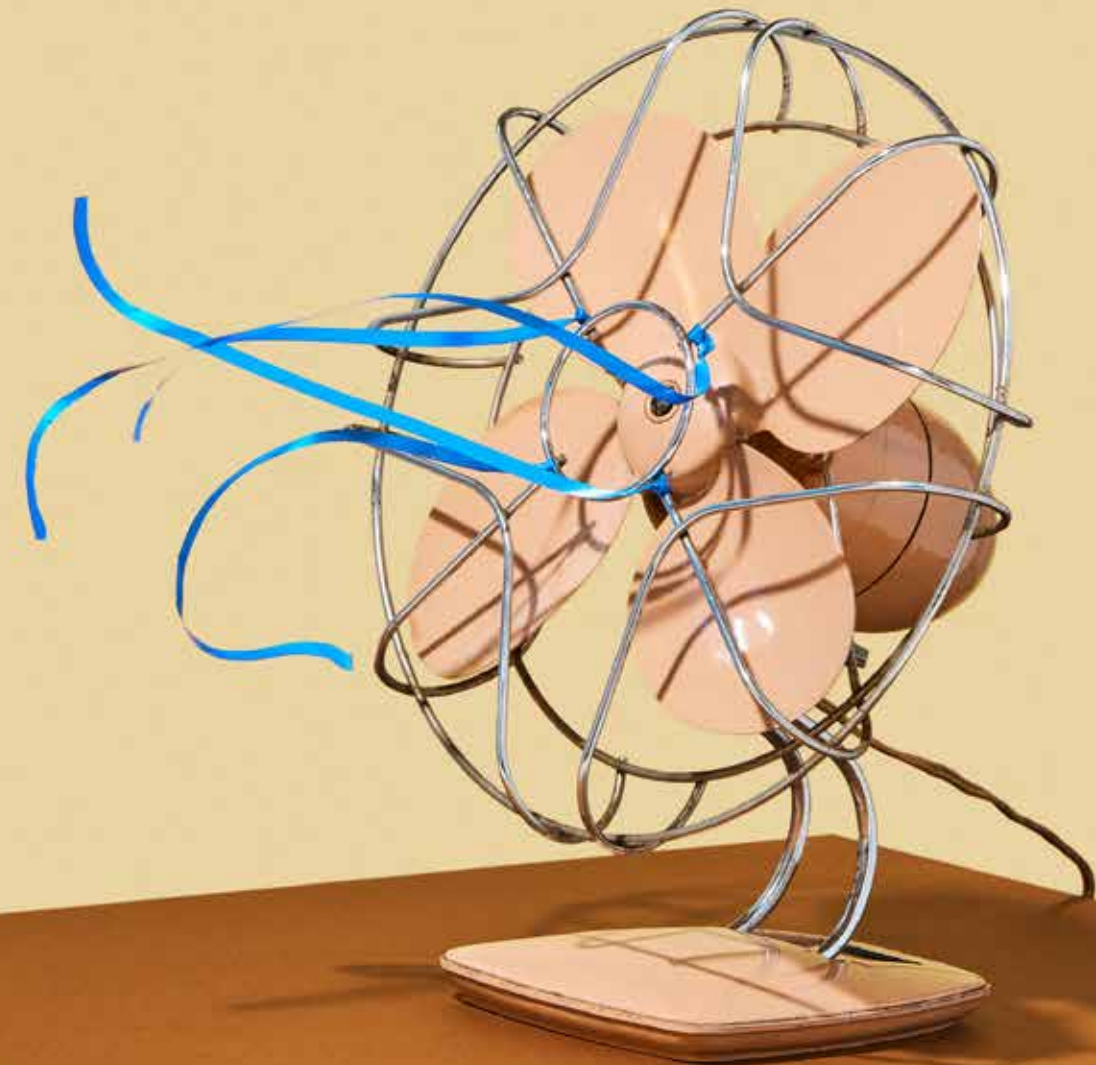
fellow in the Modelling Infection and Immunity Lab at York University. "The shortened time period, combined with a smaller dose, is statistically proven to be just as effective in protecting people against infection."

Marking the Iranian-born researcher's first foray into infectious diseases (her previous investigations have centred on oncology), the three-month study is the focus of a paper recently published in the monthly international peer-reviewed journal *Vaccines*. The findings uncover a way to circumvent logistical constraints while keeping people safe in the pandemic. It's math applied to a real-life problem, and for Farhang Sardroodi, who joined the University last fall, that's what makes it exciting.

"Often students ask me how math can have meaning and now I can show them this, a mathematical model that has been able to simulate an immune response in the human body. It's an encouraging development," she says, "because it shows how math can truly make a difference." ●
– Deirdre Kelly

Is what we are breathing healthy?

Something in the Air



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

WE SPEND ABOUT 90 per cent of our lives indoors, mostly in our homes. And that, says Trevor VandenBoer, is why we need to learn more about the quality of the air we breathe while at home.

A scientist who previously focused on the quality of the air outside (a current project involves quantifying contaminants affecting whales), VandenBoer is now adding indoor air to his agenda, thanks to a US\$275,000 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's Chemistry of Indoor Environments program and his membership in a collaboration called the New Home Air Quality Study.

"The Sloan Foundation identified indoor air quality as a topic that wasn't being covered in terms of its high potential social impact," says VandenBoer, assistant professor of analytical environmental chemistry in York's Department of Chemistry. "It's a strange phenomenon to observe and get funding for because it sits at the intersection of human health and physical science."

But, conversely, that intersection is why indoor air quality is important.

"Think about our lifestyles in Canada, with our harsh winters," he adds. "We're indoors a lot. We want to make sure that the air we're breathing inside is good for our long-term health and well-being."

While much work has been done to measure outdoor air quality with initiatives like the Air Quality Health Index, "there's a lot left to learn about indoor air," VandenBoer says. The focus now is on determining the fundamentals of what goes on indoors and how to quantify that chemical activity.

The chemistry of an indoor space comprises molecules that are too small to see with the naked eye but can have a serious effect on health, given that we take an average 25,000 breaths a day. Where do those molecules come from? The list is long – everything from deodorants to paints to vinyl flooring to gas stoves. Even cats give off ammonia. And then there are the viruses humans spread indoors, like the one that has snarled global society for almost two years now.

VandenBoer says early research on indoor air quality focused on work settings such as offices and classrooms. "If, for example, the ventilation in a classroom is not good or if the outdoor air quality being brought indoors is poor, you can wind up with a decrease in cognitive performance."

Scientists, including those at York, are now building from that kind of knowledge to "understand if the basics of indoor

air quality are the same as what we typically consider for outdoors. Or are they different? We've realized there's a lot to learn."

VandenBoer's research through the Sloan grant is investigating ways to measure the presence of reactive nitrogen species in homes. These include gases like nitrogen dioxide and ammonia. Overexposure to both can potentially pose serious risk to health.

The analysis he and his York team are doing will contribute to the New Home Air Quality Study, which includes researchers from Health Canada, the University of Toronto, the National Research Council of Canada, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and Environment and Climate Change Canada.

"Health Canada has the mandate to provide guidance to people who build homes and make construction materials on what can and cannot be emitted from those materials for health. I'm happy to be part of this group and look forward to contributing to what we can learn."

And he has practical advice that will be of use to people who live in new or older homes: think about how you prepare your food. "Cooking," he says, "is one of the most intense sources of pollutants indoors. It emits a lot of compounds we should avoid."

His recommendation? If you're using a gas stove, be careful. The combustion gives off nitrogen dioxide. Exposure can cause or exacerbate respiratory illnesses. And with gas or electric stoves, get a good range hood installed. In addition to eliminating odours and smoke from cooking, the range hood will expel the pollutants out of your home.

Beyond the range hood, all ventilation is essential for expelling pollutants from a building and bringing in fresh air. As VandenBoer notes, "We want our homes to be airtight so they're energy efficient. But the energy that goes into ventilating, heating and cooling these spaces is enormous, and that has a huge impact on climate change."

That's another reason he feels the upcoming research will be important.

"We're trying to find the sweet spot between those two," he says. "That's going to be something specialists like me, as well as building engineers and operators, are going to spend a lot of time investigating over the coming years." ●

– Paul Fraumeni

GENDER AT WORK

Empowering female labourers in the garment industry



Kelly Pike

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSH HOTZ

AS THE FASHION INDUSTRY shifted to offshore labour beginning in the 1960s, women in developing countries around the world entered the workforce as garment workers. They soon made up the vast majority of the workforce in garment factories – over 75 per cent today.

But while employment has produced tangible benefits for these women, working in the garment industry – where low pay and poor working conditions are commonplace – is especially difficult for female workers, who experience discrimination and sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse (at both work and home), lower wages, few opportunities for advancement, and the negative effects on their physical and emotional health of having to balance wage-earner and caretaker responsibilities.

Over the past decade, renewed attention to exploitation in the global garment industry has spurred several initiatives aimed at improving working conditions. Better Work – a partnership between the UN's International Labour Organization and the International Finance Corporation – is one prominent example. Launched in 2007, the program now operates in 12 countries and 1,700 factories worldwide.

Kelly Pike, an assistant professor of industrial relations at York University's School of Human Resource Management, says that improving gender equality has always been a part of Better Work's mandate. Building on her extensive research into Better Work's impact on labour standards compliance, Pike teamed up with Princeton University researcher Beth English to investigate how Better Work facilitates female empowerment in the garment industry. They summarized their findings in a paper published in the journal *Gender, Work & Organization* in 2021.

Their study examined how employment in the garment industry translates into changes to household-level gender dynamics within four countries that have adopted the Better Work program (Lesotho, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh), as compared to one country (Kenya) where Better Work doesn't currently operate.

The research focused on two important indicators of women's empowerment: agency and resources. In patriarchal societies,

social and economic structures constrain the capacity of women to exert agency in their lives. Empowerment is about building that capacity and expanding their ability to control "tangible" (financial and material) and "intangible" (skills, knowledge etc.) resources.

Pike and English found that women's access to regular employment, together with Better Work, has increased their financial stability and decision-making power over personal and household resources. Their ability to earn wages, coupled with Better Work training on budgeting and conflict resolution, has reduced household financial stresses while also diffusing family conflicts. In addition, the training has also enhanced women's self-respect and sense of agency over their economic destinies.

Pike emphasizes that there are significant limits to this progress. The reality is that women's empowerment through garment jobs will remain constrained in the absence of broader changes to address structural inequalities and gendered power dynamics.

But she also recognizes the importance of incremental changes that improve women's "non-transformative" agency, defined as the ability to make change within an existing structure. "At the end of the day, I think it's about making what seem like relatively minor changes at a household level and moving the needle towards improvement," she says.

Overall, Pike says, the Better Work program has had a real impact on improving conditions for garment factory workers and has led to important progress in our capacity to understand and address sexual harassment and violence against women. "It's making strides in a very challenging context," she says. "At the very least, it's helping to bring awareness, eliminate worse forms of exploitation and establish minimum standards. In some cases, it is significantly improving workers' overall well-being, both in the factories and at home."

But significant challenges remain. Participation in Better Work is voluntary in many of the countries where the program operates and progress can be rolled back in the absence of its ongoing presence, limiting its reach and impact. "We need to look at what it would take for it to be more sustainable and more embedded in national institutions and international agreements," she says. ●

– Ariel Visconti



Untold

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

Chris Dassios



Stories

The Hellenic Heritage Foundation documents the Greek immigrant experience

Athanasios (Sakis) Gekas

**When I started studying history, I didn't see the stories
of my grandparents or parents reflected
in the academic literature.**

I was so disheartened that I told myself that I would change this

CHRIS DASSIOS (LLB '84) started his first job at age 11, hawking lemonade coupons for Fran's restaurant, where his Greek immigrant father worked as a short order cook. It was a weekend position, located outdoors at the intersection of College and Yonge in downtown Toronto, and no matter how inclement the weather, Dassios stuck to it. "It's where I first learned about the value of work," he says.

For many descendants of Greek immigrants, it's a familiar story, and one to which they can relate. Nearly everyone has their own version of the newcomer narrative in which hardship (combined with diligence and devotion to the deep national history of Greece, the foundational culture of Western civilization) are common themes.

It's a living history, something that the archives of the Greek Canadian History Project at York University have been painstakingly preserving since their founding a decade ago. The collection of primary source materials – newspapers, photographs, yearbooks, videotapes, baptismal announcements, even a restaurant flyer or two – has served as an important resource for scholars and researchers ever since Toronto historian Christopher Grafos (MA '09, PhD '17) launched the project in 2012 with his then-academic mentor, York professor Athanasios (Sakis) Gekas, a world authority on Greek communities in Canada.

"Why I started the project," says Grafos, himself the son of Greek immigrants, "is that when I started studying history, I didn't see the stories of my grandparents or parents reflected in the academic literature. I was so disheartened that I told myself that I would change this. I'd collect the objects that give shape to those stories in nuanced ways."

A new \$1.4 million contribution from the Hellenic Heritage Foundation will now take his initiative to the next level,

allowing for an expansion and digitization of the archives, in addition to increased public access.

The gift, announced in September, jump-starts a five-year fundraising campaign to pay for a specialized librarian and project manager, among other enhancements. New features include a public search portal where users can access oral histories derived from interviews and an interactive map tracking Greek businesses in Toronto from the 1920s to today.

"The Hellenic Heritage Foundation donation is a major step in the creation of a permanent digital and physical home for the records necessary to study, research, teach and learn about the history of Greeks in Canada," says Gekas, a native of Corfu who holds the Hellenic Heritage Foundation Chair in Modern Greek History at York. "It will enable us to add resources that will expand the archives and increase our capacity to engage with our community's past and present."

In recognition, the University recently changed the project's name to The Hellenic Heritage Foundation Greek Canadian Archives. As before, the collection will be housed at York University Libraries' Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections, but with an enlarged framework for the study of the Greek community in the GTA and beyond.

"The archives will be public and available for people to study," stated Hellenic Heritage Foundation president Tony Lourakis at the gift's September announcement. "They'll be able to learn about Greek Canadian history in a way that they might not experience from other public historical records. And in turn, we can engage with the public in a more familiar and intimate way than we might have otherwise."

According to the 2016 census, there are an estimated 271,000 Canadians of Greek origin living in communities across the country. The majority dwell in major urban centres where, historically, Greek immigrants have commanded

**There is an inherent bias in archives,
in that they tend to tell the stories
of those who come from prominent backgrounds.
But history happens every day**

whole neighbourhoods – among them Toronto's Greektown, which stretches for blocks along Danforth Avenue – while contributing to the economic and cultural development of their adopted country. Well-known Greek Canadians include soprano Teresa Stratas, Coffee Time founder Tom Michalopoulos, real estate developer Andreas Apostolopoulos, luxury bridal designer Rita Vinieris, and Mike Lazaridis, creator of BlackBerry, among others. Dassios can also be added to this list of high achievers.

Like many Greeks in Canada, his parents left their homeland in the decades following the Second World War, when civil strife followed by a military junta compelled multitudes from across Greece to seek stability, security and a better life elsewhere. Both Dassios's mother and father had only a grade-school education, but they understood the importance of working from the ground up when seeking to advance themselves in a new country, teaching by example this lesson to their children, a son as well as a daughter.

Dassios paid heed, going on to graduate from Osgoode Law School at York University, an education he paid for from his earnings at Fran's, where he continued to work until the end of high school. Today, he is general counsel to the Power Workers Union, by far the country's largest and most powerful energy sector labour organization. It's only the second job he's ever had since earning just a few dollars an hour to hand out scraps of paper to passersby on the streets of Toronto as a skinny-legged immigrant's son.

Those coupons tell a story – or would, had Dassios held onto them. But he tossed whatever had remained in his possession long ago, assuming that the ephemera of newcomer life were not worth keeping.

"I think it speaks to what happens to historical materials as they relate to people who don't believe their legacy ought to be preserved in an archive," says Grafos, today the project's

director. "There is an inherent bias in archives, in that they tend to tell the stories of those who come from prominent backgrounds. But history happens every day, and we are in threat of losing that history when we don't preserve the lemonade coupons and other materials that bring that history to life."

Thanks to what Grafos and Gekas have achieved together over the past decade, Hellenic studies are now thriving at York, contributing to the University's global reputation for research innovation.

In October, Gekas delivered a paper and podcast that drew on the York archives at Yale University's Greek Revolution and the Greek Diaspora in North America virtual conference. The talk, tied to the bicentennial of the Greek struggle for independence from Ottoman rule, analyzed how Greeks in major Canadian cities like Toronto and Montreal have tended to organize themselves around a common language and shared sense of national pride.

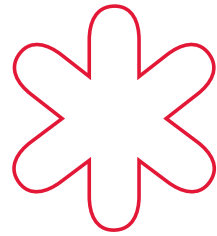
Building on that legacy is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Exchange Scholarship, which assists York students who want to do a portion of their studies in Greece. For these academic exchanges, York has partnered with universities in Thessaloniki and Athens, where, in 2014, to commemorate the Greece-Canada connection, Grafos gave a series of lectures based on the Toronto archival collection.

For Dassios, these initiatives are all a continuation of the immigrant's journey.

"Integration," he says, "begins with people coming over here and working and earning a living. But it becomes a permanent part of the society and its history when it gets put into something like this – a knowledge base, a storage-type hold. It's the final consolidation, I believe, of a people in a new land." ●

*Colleen Russell-Rawlins
on reshaping education
at Canada's largest school board*

Renewed Optimism



BY SAMANTHA EDWARDS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

AFTER A YEAR-LONG SEARCH, the Toronto District School Board has a new leader: Colleen Russell-Rawlins, the first-ever Black female director of education in the history of the TDSB.

Russell-Rawlins is charged with steering the school board as it works to improve diversity and transparency across hundreds of schools. It's a daunting challenge, but one that Russell-Rawlins is uniquely qualified to handle. She knows the TDSB inside and out.

Growing up in Scarborough, she first attended George P. Mackie Junior Public and graduated from Albert Campbell Collegiate. As part of her concurrent bachelor of education at York University, she completed placements in TDSB schools in North York, Scarborough and Etobicoke. Most of her teaching career was spent in North York elementary schools, not too far from York University.

For nearly three decades, Russell-Rawlins worked her way through the TDSB, first as an elementary school teacher, then as vice-principal and principal, eventually making her way to superintendent and associate director of education. Then, in August 2021, she became the director of education, becoming the first Black woman to hold the position.



I would hope that we're on the path where you don't have to know how to "fit in to school," but rather school fits into the child's personality and builds on each student's interests and academic potential

"We were proud and excited to welcome Colleen back to the Toronto District School Board in August," says TDSB Chair Alexander Brown. "She has brought a renewed sense of optimism to education and to our system as a whole, especially as we continue to navigate the pandemic. Every day, we see Colleen's commitment to student learning, achievement and success in action."

Russell-Rawlins is now at the helm of one of North America's largest school boards – 247,000 students and 38,200 staff members across more than 600 schools – an undertaking comparable to running a mid-sized Canadian city. The director's job entails working with staff and the board of trustees to ensure that the TDSB's programs and policies are effectively implemented.

But Russell-Rawlins has also been tasked with two pressing challenges. The first is overseeing the TDSB through the pandemic as it navigates virtual learning, school closures and reopenings, vaccine mandates and ever-evolving public health measures. The second is the longer-term goal of increasing diversity, inclusion and transparency across the board.

"When I entered teaching, I never thought about roles outside the classroom," says Russell-Rawlins. "In my first year, my mentor said to me, 'You know, you could be the director of education one day,' and I said, 'I'm not even sure what that person does.' I think people have always seen something in me that I didn't necessarily pay attention to myself."

Now, as director, her mission is to ensure that every student's potential is seen, too.

A **S A BLACK STUDENT** in a new suburb in the north end of Scarborough, Russell-Rawlins was aware that she stood out among her classmates.

"In most of my schools, I was one of a few racialized stu-

dents, so I experienced the sort of isolation and exclusion that comes with having an identity that isn't shared by the majority of the students," says Russell-Rawlins.

While painful, those experiences were an important part of her education. "In order to create sustainable, responsive and equitable system change, you need to learn what it feels like to experience some of those things, and maybe in not a positive way," says Cynthia Grundmann, senior policy advisor and manager at the TDSB's Early Years program. "Without that experience, I really don't think [she] could be as effective in [her] leadership role."

During those difficult years, Russell-Rawlins was supported by her single mother – who instilled in her a strong work ethic – and buoyed by a large extended family dedicated to ensuring she excelled in school.

"My mother was, shall I say, an active participant in my education. She had expectations for how well I would do on tests and worked with me to develop my skills. I was very fortunate in that way, although I didn't always feel fortunate at the time," she laughs.

Russell-Rawlins realizes she was lucky to have a mother so deeply invested in her education, but is also keenly aware of the universality of wanting your child to succeed.

"I don't believe there's any parent [or] caregiver out there who doesn't want their child to do well in school. The discrepancy often is how students are accepted in school and their familiarity with what school requires of them," says Russell-Rawlins. "I would hope that we're on the path where you don't have to know how to 'fit in to school,' but rather school fits into the child's personality and builds on each student's interests and academic potential."

In addition to her family, Russell-Rawlins also had teachers who encouraged her to pursue her interests, whether it was playing volleyball, indulging a love of books or helping out in the library and kindergarten classrooms.

We have a tremendous amount of work to do to ensure that the sifting and sorting of students based on perceptions of their ability – based on bias and discrimination – gets interrupted and stopped

In high school, she thrived in English, chemistry and biology, and wanted a career in child psychology and speech language pathology. In a co-op class, she had a placement in an elementary school, which opened her eyes to the different roles and positions within education.

But the idea of actually going into teaching didn't occur to her until she was sitting in a York University lecture hall. A friend was applying for the Concurrent Education program and suggested that Russell-Rawlins tag along; back then, applicants had to write the entrance essay in person in one of the lecture theatres. "The [application] question still stays with me: 'When within your schooling experience have you had the opportunity to work with others to achieve a positive outcome and learn tremendously in the process?' That really centred me on why I wanted to make a difference for kids – and here I am."

Even though she was a commuter, Russell-Rawlins formed deep connections with her classmates and course directors, which she credits to the small size and professional nature of the program. At York, she learned the importance of effective pedagogy and an educator's obligation to their students, and was taught to love research and constantly improve her practice.

During her teaching placements, Russell-Rawlins saw first-hand the range of TDSB schools. She taught at a school in a recently build suburb of Scarborough, at a North York school that had a higher population of racialized students and served families facing financial insecurity, and at a mostly white school located in a wealthy Etobicoke neighbourhood.

"I was able to see the different ways in which educators engaged with parents," says Russell-Rawlins. "That's why I feel confident saying I've never met a person who doesn't care deeply about their child's education. As educators, we need to be able to provide different resources and supports to students."

T **HROUGHOUT HER TEACHING CAREER** in TDSB's elementary schools, Russell-Rawlins was passionate about early literacy and mathematics, the foundations that give students the ability to explore a variety of career options. As her career progressed, the early development of literacy and numeracy remained a core mandate.

Her talent for impacting students' lives hasn't gone unnoticed. "She has a natural ability to connect with students," says Brown, TDSB's Chair, "and it is clear that their voices resonate with her as she helps move the system forward and make changes that support all students."

For one, Russell-Rawlins has been a long-time advocate for destreaming, and was a part of the TDSB's destreaming plan, which started in 2014.

Streaming, in which high school students are forced to choose between two different academic tracks, has disproportionately affected Black and low-income students. Research has shown that students from low-income families and Indigenous students are more likely to be enrolled in the applied streams and less likely to earn a high school diploma than their peers.

"We know that streaming starts early. Office referrals for behaviour and low levels of literacy all predict what students will choose and how successful they will be in high school," says Russell-Rawlins.

In November 2021, the Ontario government announced that it would be ending streaming for all grade 9 courses in the 2022 school year.

"While this structural change that the government has put in place is important, we have a tremendous amount of work to do to ensure that the sifting and sorting of students based on perceptions of their ability – based on bias and discrimination – gets interrupted and stopped," Russell-Rawlins says.

In February 2021, the TDSB released the *Human Rights Annual Report 2018–2020*, a first-of-its-kind evaluation within the school board and the province. “The data clearly indicates that the Board continues to have a serious racism problem,” the report states.

“We have more evidence than ever that students who self-identify as Black, Indigenous and Indigenous Spirituality-practising, and gender non-conforming are much less inclined to feel that school rules are applied to them fairly,” the report continues. Students with disabilities, Black students, Latin American students and LGBTQI+ students also reported feeling less like they belonged in school.

According to Annie Kidder, executive director of People for Education and a long-time education policy expert, Russell-Rawlins is just the person to oversee some much-needed change. “I think that hiring Colleen Russell-Rawlins is a perfect next step for the Toronto District School Board. Her passion for equity, her determination to address systemic racism in education, and her deep knowledge and intellect are exactly what the TDSB needs right now. And it’s not just good for Toronto. Systems across the country are learning from the TDSB’s great research and commitment to change,” Kidder says.

Russell-Rawlins points to the TDSB’s Urban Indigenous Education Centre, which infuses Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum as a way to close the opportunity gap that Indigenous students often face. “I want us to think about how we create the conditions in classrooms where students can talk about who they are and connect it to what they’re learning,” she explains. “[The Centre] is producing resources for use in classrooms so that we’re actually teaching the truth about Canadian history and Indigenous peoples in Canada.”

The school board is also helping teachers create environments where students can “talk about their family’s lived experience and connect it to their learning in meaningful ways.”

Still, the report found that staff members who identify as disabled, Black, Latin American or Muslim are less inclined to feel that “all backgrounds are treated fairly in our workplace.”

That’s an issue Russell-Rawlins says the school board is also attempting to address. “We have to do work in ensuring that there’s employment equity, and that we are able to attract candidates who hold different identities to jobs that they are interested in and well-qualified for,” she says. But for these kinds of changes to happen, transparency is a priority across the board.

“In order to create environments that welcome all students, we have to do a better job of understanding where we are

right now,” says Russell-Rawlins. “Parents are desperately asking for that. Like, let’s be truthful about what’s happening in schools. Where do we see discrimination? Whether that’s in the over-suspension of Black boys or what gets said among students at recess or in the hallways.”

DEEPER UNDERSTANDING of the student experience is only the first step toward permanent transformation – but it’s an important one.

“Colleen is a changemaker because she centres students and community,” says Karen Murray, TDSB’s centrally assigned principal for Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression. “And by centring them, she honours those voices in the decision-making process. The work is grounded in her belief in equity, in her understanding that student voices are critical – not just to hear them but to really encourage and build and create a foundation for them. Because the change is coming from those we serve.”

The TDSB is currently in the process of developing a self-assessment guide that would be completed by students, staff and families to form a baseline. Russell-Rawlins says the questions could include “Do the resources used in school and in classrooms represent the diversity of the city?” and “Do they tell multiple narratives about student experiences?”

“Until you actually name and identify where you are in the process,” she says, “your efforts won’t be focused and tangible and have an impact on students.”

The TDSB is about to launch its Student Equity Collective, which will bring students from grades 7 to 12 together to help the school board understand the current equity issues facing students and how it can create a better learning environment. The school board is also focused on its pandemic recovery plan, which includes supporting students’ and staff’s mental health.

Russell-Rawlins has only been director for seven months, but she’s laying the foundation to effect lasting change in the TDSB.

“It’s an honour that I’m grateful for each and every day ... and I’m proud to challenge the limited definition of leadership,” says Russell-Rawlins. “I think because I attended TDSB schools and love the city of Toronto, my goal is to improve education with our staff, our students and our families – and I feel that not just professionally, but personally too.” ●

With additional reporting from Deirdre Kelly





KICKING INTO HIGH GEAR

How Farkhunda Muhtaj scored an evacuation of Afghanistan's women athletes

BY SHIREEN AHMED
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

ANY GOOD SOCCER PLAYER knows that knowledge and action go hand in hand. Any great coach knows that the greatest skills to manifest on the pitch are fostered off of it. When excellent playing and solid coaching combine to help a community in crisis, it is difficult to imagine that sport was the catalyst. But in the case of 24-year-old former York Lions soccer star Farkhunda Muhtaj (BSc '19, BEd '21), it is a reality that was brought forth on the world stage faster than a penalty shootout in overtime.

"Far" – as she is often called by her coaches, teammates and friends – is a graduate of York's reputed kinesiology program and Faculty of Education. While she remains a part of York's women's soccer program as an assistant coach under head coach Carmine Isacco, Muhtaj's work as a global citizen and refugee activist came to light after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. As a player and leader on Afghanistan's women's national soccer team, the attacking midfielder knew first-hand about the effects of this type of regime change.

During the 20 years after the Taliban lost power in December 2001, women's sports in Afghanistan were growing and flourishing. This meant national team camps in soccer and cricket and a burgeoning culture of women's sport within the country. There were programs for mountain climbing, running, cycling and even skateboarding. But this all came to a crashing halt this past summer when Kabul was retaken by the Taliban, ousting the previous democratically elected government. After seizing power on August 15, the Taliban gave evacuees until August 30 to flee the country.

This is where Muhtaj's experience with the furious pace of soccer came into play.

She went to work building care packages for the Afghan refugees that would arrive in Canada. She started a humanitarian campaign to support Afghans surviving the crisis; the GoFundMe has raised over \$2,000 so far. Muhtaj also reached out to administrative personnel at York and its Athletic Department, as well as her York University team, who supported and encouraged her efforts. "She really pulled all of soccer in Canada into it," Isacco says, smiling.

The Afghanistan women's soccer team is made up of gifted athletes and incredible leaders. Muhtaj's teammates from the Afghanistan women's national team sprang into action in August and began coordinating evacuation missions. Members of the senior women's national team, along with some family members, were quickly evacuated to Australia and are currently in the resettlement process.

The junior team had to wait longer but had a force behind them; that force was Farkhunda. She organized with former White House staffer Robert McCreary and other U.S. government officials, as well as representatives from the Portuguese government, to provide emotional support and translation services to the group over WhatsApp. She was a trusted figure with the group, and during a time of intense crisis and emotional stress, her presence and reassurance undoubtedly led the way. "I was working 24/7," Muhtaj says.

On September 27, 2021, after the team landed in Portugal, Muhtaj flew to Lisbon and had an emotional reunion with them. She is still there. Her work is far from done.

I LEARNED ABOUT THE SOCIAL SIDE OF SPORTS AND HOW TO USE SPORTS TO INTEGRATE. THIS EDUCATION TRANSFORMED THE WAY I THINK

According to Isacco, who also coached her at Vaughan Azzurri in Ontario's League1, her confidence and tunnel vision in leadership means that she doesn't settle for subpar results. Isacco remarks that her leadership and vision are punctuated by her resilience and commitment to what she is focused on. "Far is all about doing something about it, not just talking about it," Isacco says. "It's not over until every goal and every ounce of her is exhausted, or everything is fulfilled."

Muhtaj is not only training three times a week with the group, whose members range from 14 to 20 years old, she is essentially helping to build a new Afghan diasporic community in Portugal as well. "There are gaps," Muhtaj explains over a Zoom call, "because there is no Afghan diaspora."

Muhtaj came to Canada with her parents at the age of two. As a professional educator of immigrant experience herself, Muhtaj is familiar with the ways that sports can be used to integrate into wider society. "[Soccer] is a mechanism to achieve this," Muhtaj says. "The education I received at York allowed me to look at the world with a different paradigm."

This knowledge is a tool for Muhtaj and the 220 people she is championing in Portugal, helping to connect them with both the existing Muslim community and wider society. Along with formal invitations, there are meetings and sessions where the group is encouraged to integrate into society while preserving their cultural identity and faith.

Language and confidence are two of the skills that help Muhtaj to connect, but soccer is another mode of communication. She is looking to establish relationships with municipal soccer programs in Portugal so that if and when the families resettle into permanent communities (Muhtaj and 200 of the evacuees are currently in a hostel), their love for soccer will not be compromised. By her own admission, her Portuguese needs work, but that will not stop her. What began as a four-day trip has become a new life journey for Muhtaj. "I have changed my ticket over five times," she laughs. But building a championship team, such as the one she was part of at York, takes time.

Building a specialized curriculum to help Afghan girls and their families will not be a quick process either. This requires academic benchmarking and, at present, Muhtaj thinks she may stay a year. "I quit my job as a secondary school teacher and took a leap of faith," she explains. With support from the Aga Khan Foundation and housing provided by the Portuguese government, she is ensuring that this group of young soccer players has a sense of stability, growth and hope. Creating connections with universities and other institutions is necessary for the new Afghan community in Portugal to succeed. "One nation, together," Muhtaj insists.

While she was certainly a leader on the field, it is her work off the pitch that she finds most rewarding. And she credits her time at York University for providing a foundation of understanding in the intersections of this work. "I learned about the social side of sports and how to use sports to integrate. This education transformed the way I think."

She has been invited to speak at various soccer clubs, including a recent event at the famed Barcelona Football Club. She spoke to players at La Masia – Barcelona's storied youth academy – and met players from the professional women's side.

She misses her York Lions soccer family and readily confirms that she will rejoin them upon her return to Canada. Muhtaj maintains that the York soccer community has taught her about working hard and accomplishing something that many felt was impossible. But Coach Isacco feels differently about that. "I have learned more from Far than she ever learned from me."

He insists that her determination, her concrete mentality, is the best teaching for anyone, soccer player or not.

Muhtaj started out as a soccer player but is making a difference as a humanitarian and sports activist. Her worlds of education, sports development and personal connection are colliding as a perfect example of what a brilliant and impactful educator can be. ●



Textile diversion in a post-pandemic world

Zero-Waste Fashion

BY JOHN LORINC
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

OVER 16 MONTHS of pandemic restrictions, Amit Singh (MBA Schulich '21), a full-time student who specializes in sustainability, discovered precisely how COVID-19 tore into the world of fashion and clothing. With stores shut and social gatherings severely limited, there was little motive to replenish his wardrobe, says Singh, a consultant with York Sustainable Enterprise Consultants (YSEC). "I have reduced my shopping by a considerable extent." Now, he adds, "before I buy anything, I ask, 'Do I really need this?'"

YSEC marketing strategy and sustainability consultant Suvidha Senson (MBA Schulich '21), who works as a marketing manager for QEA Tech, adds that this global crisis has increased awareness about the next one. "Sitting at home has given a lot of people time to think about things we were neglecting," she says.

Among them: all the clothing and textiles that accumulate in dressers and closets, much of it out of style and no longer in use. Senson and Singh want to see new approaches to an old problem: destigmatizing used and second-hand clothing, upcycling old fabrics and heirlooms and pushing clothing brands to create corporate sustainability campaigns that go beyond greenwashing and create meaningful change in their customers' consumption habits.

Amit Singh





When people donate, they want to know that there's some social good

Then there's the downstream end of our society's addiction to new clothing. About 85 per cent of discarded textiles in Canada end up in landfill, according to Kelly Drennan, executive director of Fashion Takes Action (FTA), a non-profit. In Metro Vancouver, residents pitched about 20 million kilograms in 2018, a stat that prompted the city to launch a public education campaign encouraging individuals to "think thrice about your clothes." In Toronto, a 2015 survey estimated that an average household in the city tosses out about 29 kilograms of textiles per year.

In larger cities, including Toronto, some of all those used duds are collected – either via pickups or bins – and resold by charities as a social enterprise revenue-generator. A portion of that material finds its way to the developing world. However, as Reuters recently reported, the \$4 billion a year global market for recycled clothing has seen prices for recycled textiles fall because of reduced demand and increased donation activity during the pandemic.

It's a growing international concern. At last November's COP26 summit in Glasgow, the UN Environment Program (UNEP) made textile recycling and diversion a priority, renewing the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action

and its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. Currently, UNEP estimates that the fashion industry is responsible for between two and eight per cent of global carbon emissions – and expects to fall far short of its 2030 emissions reduction benchmark.

OF COURSE, the challenge of diverting textiles long predates the current crisis and has faced other impediments, among them media coverage of dubious recycling deposit bins falsely claiming to be run by charities. Five years ago, Simon Langer (BA '03), Diabetes Canada's national manager of government and strategic partnerships, proposed to the City of Markham that it expand its use of municipal branding on DC's clothing bins as a way of signalling to consumers that the receptacles were authentic. Around the same time, Langer met York environmental studies professor Calvin Lakhan (MES '10) – co-investigator for the Wiki-Waste project – at a conference, and the two began developing a strategy to collect data on textiles, including those turning up in the DC bins. "We felt this was really critical, because

municipalities weren't dealing with the ongoing issues," says Langer, who is currently working on his master's in environmental studies at York.

The Markham project has been extremely successful, with nine million kilos diverted since the bin branding program began. "It's quite remarkable," he says. "It was proof of concept." In the intervening years, in fact, DC has partnered with over 220 municipalities and hundreds of other public agencies across Canada. The organization manages 5,000 bins and has collected about 23 million kilos, representing donations from about a million households, according to Lakhan. But despite these successes, the scale of the waste textile problem is formidable. As Langer points out, about 1.4 billion kilos of used clothing ends up in Canadian landfills.

Preliminary findings from the York/DC National Textile Study indicate that branded bins divert twice as much material as non-branded bins – a sign that this partnership does in fact counter consumer mistrust. The data, according to Lakhan, will provide more municipalities with insights about how best to situate collection bins. His research team is also overlaying demographic data, such as household

To be frank, I'm not sure how it's going to end up for the apparel industry in the long run

Simon Langer

income, to better understand clothing consumption patterns in different neighbourhoods. A City of Toronto staff report, for example, found that residents of apartment buildings tend to throw away more clothing than the occupants of single-family homes. Says Langer, "These types of learnings are helping us determine the optimal placement of bins in conveniently accessible areas like community centres and arenas to increase participation and diversion."

Singh and Senson add that it's critically important for Canadians to connect all the dots, both up and down the food chain. Jeans, a very ordinary type of garment, require huge amounts of water to produce. At the same time, consumers should remember that many people, from designers to factory workers, depend on global clothing supply chains for their livelihoods.

Similarly, with synthetic fabrics, production involves the use of fossil fuels, while new studies show that there's a relationship between the buildup of microplastics in the world's oceans and the use of materials like polyester, which shed microfibres when washed, according to a 2018 study by the U.K.-based Institute of Mechanical Engineers.

Drennan agrees that making it easier for consumers to drop off used clothing is important, but points to a range of other measures that should involve new types of regulation. About six years ago, using a collective impact investment grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, FTA brought together a coalition of stakeholders – municipalities, charities, academics, NGOs etc. – to establish the Ontario Textile Diversion Collaborative. The project commissioned some dumpster-dive research, which yielded some important insights.

One involved stuffed items. Drennan says the research showed that many such articles bear a tag saying that they're stuffed with "new material only," as per federal rules. She argues that cleaned and shredded recycled textiles should be allowed. Another idea: duty credits for retailers that import clothing

that ends up surplus and unsold. "It's completely backwards," says Drennan.

A third: more transparency from brands like H&M, the Swedish fashion giant that has had a much-hyped policy of taking back used items from customers. "What they do with the material is a bit unclear."

Senson isn't sold on this approach, and says there's little incentive for a consumer to bring back a single item to a given retailer unless, of course, they're planning to buy something new while they're there, which may be the point anyway. Singh adds that convenience is more important – the organizations that deal with used clothing need to make it as easy as possible for residents to turn it in.

How about a more formalized municipal recycling/producer stewardship program that collects waste clothing from homes, just like all the other blue bin content? "That's a heavy question," Langer says. Municipalities aren't set up to collect textiles because they'd be wrecked if tossed in with other materials earmarked for diversion. What's more, charities like Diabetes Canada and the Salvation Army depend on the revenues to fund their programs. As he notes, "When people donate, they want to know that there's some social good. They want to know that they are contributing to a legitimate charitable organization, because otherwise, as Calvin Lakhan has discovered through his research, they just throw their old clothes away."

So as the world emerges from pandemic isolation, the diverting question about textiles is whether the clothing industry will see a wave of revenge buying, as Singh puts it, or, rather, a textile version of the shift away from meat in increasingly climate-conscious consumers. "To be frank," Senson says, "I'm not sure how it's going to end up for the apparel industry in the long run." What's most important, however, is that apparel doesn't end up in the garbage. ●



Alumni



York alum Jonathan Clodman and the app that helped millions secure a vaccine

Big Shot

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

LAST APRIL, when locating a COVID-19 vaccine became the quest of all quests, Jonathan Clodman (BA '19, BEd '19, MEd '20) rolled up his sleeves to find a job not just for himself but for others as well.

Then working as a long-term occasional teacher at three Toronto schools, he dedicated himself after hours to the cause of mass inoculation after joining Vaccine Hunters Canada, a Twitter account and web page that rose out of the chaos surrounding the first wave of vaccine rollouts.

His involvement came via his childhood friend Joshua Kalpin, a software developer who had been helping Vaccine Hunters Canada founding director Andrew Young launch the site last March. When their volunteer-run effort unexpectedly took off, spurred by public demand for up-to-the-minute vaccine info, they suddenly needed more people to lend a hand.

Clodman's name came up early on, and Young says he immediately warmed to the idea of bringing him aboard, believing his teacher training at York University would be an asset. He was right.

As one of Vaccine Hunters Canada's four original co-directors, Clodman used his classroom skills to decode often confusing vaccine intel and deliver dispatches to @VaxHuntersCan's daily surge of followers. He also brought in additional volunteers (including some fellow York grads through his involvement with the York University Alumni Board), training them in how to respond to questions received through email and Twitter direct messages.

"We had questions from people looking to receive vaccines, as well as questions from vaccine administrators, including pharmacists and hospital clinic administrators," explains Clodman, 26. "We also received tips from people who had heard something second-hand, along with updates from vaccine administrators – of both the 'We have a few shots available' and the 'Send the mob right now!' varieties. We also fielded questions about eligibility from people who were eligible but didn't know it, and others who actually weren't."

Answers to these questions and more led Clodman to create communications materials like responding guides, a frequently used teaching tool that helped to cement Vaccine

Hunters Canada's national reputation as a reliable source of vaccine information.

"It was like a rocket ship," he states. "At the time, news was flying fast, and not always through the official channels. It was difficult to understand all that was going on, and that's where I could help. As a teacher who works with children, I know how to make sense of a complicated situation."

Teaching is in his blood. Clodman's mother is another York-trained teacher, and his sister is presently at the University, also pursuing a bachelor of education. His dad is a social worker at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health who took courses at the Keele campus after getting a post-secondary degree elsewhere. "We're a family of teachers," says Clodman of his York-loyal kin. "We all want to help others."

In May, when the government announced that it would start vaccinating young people between the ages of 12 and 17, he helped again, moving away from distilling and disseminating information to working directly with school boards, trustees and other educators, including those at York, to support the development of vaccine strategies for staff and students.

For Clodman, this was the most exciting part of his volunteer experience because it meant "working with communications people at the school boards, and learning about policy-building and how to bring people together to help and support others."

The network grew, quickly spreading coast to coast as volunteers in other provinces set up their own links to the central Vaccine Hunters Canada database. People who came looking for vaccines for themselves or their loved ones began retweeting valuable information and volunteering for the organization in turn, helping legions to navigate the murky world of pop-up clinics and unpredictable vaccine supplies.

"We estimate that we've helped millions of Canadians," Andrew Young says, "and that we had over 427,000 followers across our social media platforms at our peak."

Even the City of Toronto jumped in, forging a partnership with Vaccine Hunters Canada to help citizens "identify available next-day appointments at City-run clinics," as Mayor John Tory (LLB '78) announced on Twitter last April. Today, Toronto reports a higher than 85 per cent double-dose vaccination rate. Other major Canadian cities, with

**That's the teacher thing to do.
The difference you can make
in other people's lives
is exponential**

few exceptions, are close behind, thanks in no small part to the viral website.

“During a bleak period, people came together strictly to help each other, no other motive,” Clodman says. “The people who wanted to help had themselves been helped. They became helpers for other people, driving momentum. It was, for me, a three-month intensive process – April to June – that felt like a lifetime. A lot of growth came out of it for everyone involved.”

In Clodman's case, the experience gave rise to a full-time teaching job at a Toronto middle school he commenced in September, his first permanent position after two years of occasional teaching. While he can't say for certain that his volunteerism boosted his career, Clodman acknowledges that the experience introduced him to other professionals in the field who shared their expertise with him, potentially making him a better candidate.

He has since stepped away from Vaccine Hunters Canada to concentrate on his teaching. The organization itself is now dormant, having ceased day-to-day operations last September in the wake of the news that Canada is one of the world's best-performing countries for coronavirus vaccinations.

Work continues behind the scenes, however, assisted by a team of committed volunteers overseeing everything from pharmacy liaison to social media and software projects. New to the website is a DIY feature enabling members of the public to locate mobile clinics and bookings. In development is a Vaccine Hunters Canada template to be shared with other countries at their request. Knowledge has empowered. But the news around the need for and administration of vaccine boosters would suggest that we're not out of the woods yet.

If or when vaccine availability and access again become confounded, you can bet an educator will be there behind the scenes, looking for ways to help. “That's the teacher thing to do,” Clodman affirms. “The difference you can make in other people's lives is exponential.” ●

NUISANCE BEAR, a 14-minute documentary that took Jack Weisman (BFA '15) and Gabriela Osio Vanden (BFA '17) five years to make, is on a tear following its world premiere at the 2021 Toronto International Film Festival this past fall.

The film – which examines the strange (if not strained) relationship between polar bears and the people who live right up next to them in Churchill, Man. – has been picked up by The New Yorker Documentary, an independent short films distributor with a track record of sending documentaries to the Academy Awards. The acquisition also paved the way for subsequent screenings at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam this past November, as well as Montana's Big Sky Documentary Film Festival in February. The South by Southwest Festival in Austin, Texas, and the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival (both following in March 2022) are up next.

The Toronto-based filmmakers, a real-life couple who met at York as undergraduates, are now working on an expanded version of their short but hard-hitting film, which focuses a lens on the often vexing proximity of humans and endangered wildlife in a place that bills itself as the polar bear capital of the world.

Annually, more than 10,000 tourists squeeze into Churchill (population 900) to ogle the creamy white carnivores that tramp disinterestedly around them in search of food. Environmental shifts are creating food shortages in the wild, often forcing the bears to scavenge in the garbage dumps and recycling depots of the town located 1,000 kilometres north of Winnipeg. The so-called nuisance bears pose a problem, even in a place where encounters of the tourist kind are actively encouraged. Churchill isn't just a destination for nature-lovers; people actually live there. Traps the size of army tanks are meant to keep the shaggy intruders at bay. There are also tranquilizer guns. And guards diverting the bears with the roar of their all-terrain vehicles – oh my.

These rather alarming scenes, the likes of which are not typically seen in animal docs, have become a pernicious reality in a world where eco-tourism and climate change combine to increase the volatility of the natural landscape. *Nuisance Bear* effectively spotlights the negative synergy without commentary or swells of dramatic music to influence an emotional response. “This is not *Planet Earth*,” says Weisman. “It doesn't tell you what to think.” ● – Deirdre Kelly



Polar Opposites

Jack Weisman
and Gabriela Osio Vanden's
documentary illustrates
environmental conundrums

Classes

**WANT TO BE
IN CLASSES?**

Email us at
magnotes@yorku.ca

1974

STARKMAN, ALVIN

(BA LA&PS, MA Social Anthropology '78, JD '84)
Alvin practised law for 17 years before retiring to Oaxaca, Mexico. In 2004, he took an interest in mezcal, a distilled alcoholic beverage made from agave. He currently works part-time in the countryside teaching the production process by visiting small family-owned and -operated distilleries throughout the state's central valleys.

1983

ELLERTON, ANGELIQUE

(BA Economics, LLB Osgoode '86, JD Osgoode '86, LLM Osgoode '03)
Angelique is now retired, following a rewarding legal career in both Toronto and Calgary. She currently resides in a golf course community and is learning modern standard Mandarin Chinese.

1987

QURESHI, KHURRAM

(BAS Administration)
Khurram has over 25 years of experience in accounting and corporate finance. Currently a partner at CQK Chartered Accountants LLP, he sits on the board of directors of several publicly listed companies and charitable organizations. Khurram met his wife Urmila Misir-Qureshi at York University in 1984, and they are parents to daughters Sacha and Saira.

1990

DEVUONO, MARCO

(BAS Administrative Studies)
Marco was recently named president and CEO of Villa Charities, having joined the Toronto organization as chief financial officer in 2017. He has more than 20 years of senior-level finance and management experience with non-profit, private and TSE-listed companies in the fields of distribution, health care, and academic, financial and IT services. As CFO of Villa Charities, he was responsible for significant achievements, including repurposing underused space in the Columbus Centre, restructuring operations during the COVID-19 period and building high-performing finance and property management teams.

MARSDEN, SCOTT K.

(MFA Visual Arts)
Scott replaces director Lorna Johnson at the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery. He formerly served as the executive director at the Haida Gwaii Museum in British Columbia, the first curator at The Reach Gallery Museum, and gallery director and curator at the Yukon Arts Centre in Whitehorse. He has experience in volunteer service, professional memberships and service to federal agencies.

1993

McKENZIE-KERR, ROBERT

(BA Hons, Public Policy & Administration)
In December 2021, Robert accepted a one-year assignment as a senior policy and legislation advisor for HQ

Insolvency, Canada Revenue Agency. Previously, he was a senior program advisor to CRA's national insolvency program.

1994

KEILEY, JILLIAN M.

(BFA Theatre, DLitt AMPD '16)
Jillian recently completed her 10-year tenure as artistic director at the National Arts Centre. In 1995, one year after graduating from York, she founded the Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland, and in 2016, she received an honorary doctorate of letters from York.

1996

DI IORIO, CARLO

(BA Psychology)
In 2021, Carlo published his first illustrated children's book, *Happy Mother's Day: mamma MIA!* It is available online at various outlets, including Amazon and Walmart. He is presently planning more illustrated poems for children, including titles with Father's Day, Remembrance Day, anti-bullying and say-no-to-drugs themes.

LA, ERWIN

(BA History, LLM '18, LLM '19)
In December 2016, Erwin completed his novel, *Weyand and the Vietnam War*, about General Frederick Carlton Weyand, who served as the last senior commander-in-chief of the American Armed Forces in Vietnam.

LEVENSON, KAREN

(MFA Film & Video)
Karen has worked in the animal and environmental protection movement for the past 20 years, in Canada and the U.S. Her book, *Confessions of an Animal Rights Terrorist*, was released by Lantern Publishing & Media in 2021. She ran for the Animal Protection Party of Canada in the recent federal election.

1997

DUGAS, SANDRA (BOUCHARD)

(BA Administrative Studies)
Sandra is the founding partner and marketing and creative director at ZOO Media Group, a marketing and web development agency launched in 2005 in London, Ont. Since graduating from York, she has developed her skills and talents working with industry leaders like 3M, Imperial Oil and the Walt Disney Company.

1998

BATHIJA, HANS GIRDHARI

(BA Political Science Glendon)
Hans founded strategy and risk consulting firm BathijaTan in 1997. He is the Chair of St. John Ambulance's Toronto Branch, and was recently co-Chair of Toronto Police Service 14 Division's Community Police Liaison Committee. He has advised York University on the development of the institutional Framework to Address Anti-Black Racism. He is a board director of the NATO Association of Canada and former board director of the Royal Canadian Military Institute.

1999

LEBOW, JORDAN

(BA Sociology)
Jordan currently works as a certified tennis instructor, and recently began teaching children on the autism spectrum through Proset Autism's inclusive tennis program, focusing on improving students' balance, gross motor skills and social interaction with others.

2001

GIBSON, DUANE "D.O."

(BA English)
Duane is a Toronto rap artist that has been profiled on CBC, *CityNews* and *Global* and in the *Toronto Star*, and has guest co-hosted *Entertainment Tonight Canada Live*. In 2003, he set a Guinness World Record when he freestyled for nearly nine hours. In February 2021, he capped the 90-show virtual Black Canadian 365 tour; more recently, he released his book, *On This Grind*, which details life lessons learned from the music business.

2007

SHAW, CLIFFORD J.

(LLB)
Clifford's first book, *Aspects of Banking and Financial Services Law*, was published by LexisNexis Canada, where it is available via the organization's online bookstore. He says he wrote it "to inspire more lawyers to do legal writing for publication and professional and personal enjoyment."

2010

GUBERT, JESSICA

(BFA Theatre)
Jessica specialized in playwriting and new play dramaturgy while at York. Following graduation, she completed a two-year post-grad program in fashion business at George Brown College, later taking a job in the fashion wholesale industry while volunteering at an apparel and footwear trade show. Today, she's a senior account executive for Mavi Jeans, where she runs the Turkish company's satellite office in Toronto. She resides in the city's Downsview Park area with her fiancé and mini goldendoodle puppy, Oscar.

2011

LUBRIN, CANISIA M.

(BA Professional Writing)
In 2021, Canisia won the prestigious Windham-Campbell Prize from Yale University, worth \$165,000. The same year, she took home Canada's \$65,000 Griffin Poetry Prize as well. Raised in Saint Lucia, she currently teaches writing at OCAD University, as well as poetry at the University of Toronto.

2012

GARE, TEMO PRIMROSE

(BA Culture & Expression)
Temo is a journalist currently working as a television host and executive producer with Fibe TV1. She recently executive produced and hosted a long-form journalism television series entitled *Our Stories*, which is currently streaming on Bell Media's Fibe TV1.

2015

GRANOVA, VICTORIA

(BBA Schulich)
Victoria was recently named to the 2021 Top 20 Women in Cybersecurity in Canada by *IT World Canada*. She founded CyberToronto, a community-focused annual cybersecurity conference in the Greater Toronto Area that offers educational and training opportunities for information security professionals.

2016

NIGHTINGALE

(BA Sociology)
Nightingale is the founder of Quarantine Qapsule (QQ), a digital archive of the Asian-Canadian experience of COVID-19 in Toronto. An artist, she is currently co-directing the *Vice* docu-series *Breaking Ground*, highlighting the narratives of Asian-Canadian youth and their mental health and self-care journeys during the pandemic.

2017

REMENNICK, TALI

(BBA Administration)
Tali started her career as a management consulting analyst at Accenture Canada and, since delving into the world of data science, is now a data science consultant, expanding the field of A.I. in Canada through private sector adoption and performing research on A.I.'s impact on Canada's economic and social landscape. Her goal is to progress the A.I. ecosystem in Canada.

IN MEMORIAM

ARMOUR, EVELEEN M.

(MES '94)
After pursuing landscape architecture at the University of Guelph, Eveleen then received her master's degree in environmental design from York in 1994. She was a passionate explorer, travelling from Russia to Easter Island, from the south of France to the Canadian Arctic, and many countries and continents in between. She died peacefully at her home in Toronto on August 31, 2021.

GOOD, ELIZABETH R.

(BA Psychology '90)
Elizabeth graduated from women's studies and psychology in 1983, then moved on to become the assistant to the Dean of Graduate Studies at York, retiring in 2001. Donations in Elizabeth's name may be made to the Canadian Cancer Society and Alzheimer's Society. A devoted mother and grandmother, she died on August 21, 2021.

MacKENZIE, KEVIN J.

(MA Psychology '03, PhD Psychology '09)
Kevin received his PhD in psychology from the Centre for Vision Research at York. Kevin's career continued in the technology industry, most recently at Facebook Reality Labs as the lead research scientist of the Applied Perception Sciences team, focusing on vision research involving augmented reality and virtual reality. He passed away on August 25, 2021, in Sammamish, Wash., at 45 years old, and is survived by his wife and children.



Flashback

Have a great
photo from
your days at
York?

Email us at magnotes@yorku.ca

IN THE LATE 1960S, those of us with college teaching certificates and classroom experience learned that all future teachers in Canada were required to have a university degree. That's when I decided to apply to York University. I was Patricia Gorton then, with two young children, a husband and a home to care for while continuing to teach grade school during the day. Suffice to say, it took a long time for me to finish my first degree. But York was accommodating. I took evening classes and, later, summer classes, when my boys were old enough to go to camp in Algonquin Park. I began studies at York University in 1970 and ended almost a decade later with a BA in Psychology. I returned to York again in 2000 to begin studies in fine arts. A highlight was the photography course, an elective that I took with Professor Jack Dale in 1978. At the time, my husband considered putting a printing press in the basement of our home. It inspired my then-15-year-old son to learn about photography as well. I asked Professor Dale if Chris could sit in our classes and permission was granted. These are some of the photos my son took of me at York at the time. I'm glad that special period of my life was documented. ●

— Patricia Duke (BA '79, BFA '05)

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