

# **YOUTH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CANADA**

Factors influencing the creation of youth-initiated social ventures

*An ADMN 598 Management Report*

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for being generous with their time and for their honesty when sharing their experiences.*

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## Executive Summary

Canada has a vital and powerful presence of young social entrepreneurs: young individuals who have an ability to translate their passions and desires for social change into tangible action through the creation of new social ventures. Coast-to-coast and throughout Canada, youth have been spearheading social ventures to address problems in their local communities, internationally, with the environment among other social causes. Young social entrepreneurs can add tremendous value to society and following current trends, their presence will only increase with time.

*This report seeks to identify the factors influencing the creation of youth-initiated social ventures in Canada, from the perspective of the young social entrepreneur.*

The identified lack of information, literature and academic interest in the field of youth social entrepreneurship, despite its spiraling uptake in Canadian society, provides an excellent opportunity for this research. This report explores the factors that influence and inhibit young individuals from starting social ventures. This research is important for both youth in the social space and for the support networks and social infrastructure present that support youth social entrepreneurship.

A grounded theory research approach was employed through the use of exploratory in-depth interviews and focus groups. A diverse sample of 38 young social entrepreneurs was purposefully selected for the one-on-one interviews. Diversity was defined in terms of geographic location and size of the social ventures; years in existence; mission of the social ventures; and individual make-up of the young social entrepreneurs themselves. All participants initiated social ventures in Canada that have been in existence for at least one year. Interviews were conducted either in-person or over the telephone. In addition to the one-on-one interviews, two focus groups took place in Ontario to provide more depth into the research findings.

Among the participants, eight main categories emerged. These overarching categories include the background of the young social entrepreneur; the source of idea of the social venture itself; networks; funding; youth-specific factors; collaboration; the importance of luck and timing; and finally the issue of socio-economic background. It is important to note that each of these categories is closely interlinked and not mutually exclusive.

The breadth and depth of academic training prior to initiating their social ventures was quite diverse among the participants, however most individuals made no reference to their academic training as an influential factor in the creation of their social ventures. Although many benefited from experiential learning and training from nonacademic sources such as participation in conferences and leadership programs, more important was the individuals' abilities to teach themselves and acquire the skills and training necessary to run their social ventures.

Passion and a sincere desire to deliver on their social missions were imperative. The inspirations behind that passion were quite varied; regardless they all came to learn about an unmet need and decided to commit themselves towards fulfilling that need.

All participants made reference to building a network. More important than a large network however is the value found within their networks, specifically to the social venture or young social entrepreneur. When immediately starting, value was often derived from the young social entrepreneurs' pre-existing network, and their social capital grew organically thereafter. In addition to manpower and funding support needed for the social ventures to deliver on their mandates, the young social entrepreneurs' personal networks were valuable for emotional and personal support.

Most young social entrepreneurs had no funding strategy when first starting. Where there was a need for funds, the initial set of funding came from monetary donations, grants, in-kind donations and earned income revenue.

Age-specific factors of being a youth social entrepreneur including the benefits of being young, as well as the barriers and limitations associated with age are explored. The 'youth label' was used to the advantage of some groups, whereas others steered clear from it and the association with preconceived notions that society is pre-disposed to attach to young people.

Collaboration, in the sense of partnering with established organizations at the time of start-up, was a strategy employed by some of the young social entrepreneurs. Although there are many benefits to working under an established organization, some of the participants felt strongly about paving their own path due to the autonomy and experiences gained that way.

The issues of luck and timing are quite intangible and were difficult to answer definitively in the case of the young social entrepreneurs and their abilities to start social ventures when they did. In most cases, the external environment and people's reactions were beyond the control of the young social entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, the young social entrepreneurs were able to create, identify and capture opportunities, and made those opportunities of value to the social ventures.

Finally, the issue of socio-economic class of the young social entrepreneurs was briefly examined. Since data were not collected from all participants, this issue cannot be generalized among the sample; however through cross-analysis it was evident for some of the young social entrepreneurs that privilege was an influential factor when starting their social ventures.

This report explores a relatively unexplored topic of youth social entrepreneurship in Canada. This research and subsequent studies will be beneficial to further strengthen the youth social entrepreneurial movement. This study provides valuable primary data and insights for the next generation of social entrepreneurs, in addition to informing the structural supports and social infrastructure in which youth find themselves.

Since this report focuses uniquely on the start-up phase, there is great opportunity to explore this topic on many facets. In its broadest sense, this report calls for further research within the area of youth social entrepreneurship to explore the growth and sustainability of youth-initiated social ventures, as well as the social impact of such endeavours.

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# 1. Introduction

The culture of youth in Canada is dynamic and vibrant. Youth are seen as competent community builders and as valuable resources (Hancock, 1994; Finn, 1998; Khosroshashi & Corriero, 2006). As Hancock stated “active participation of youth is essential to reenergizing and sustaining the civic spirit of communities. Through skill development in the areas of collaboration and leadership, and the application of these capacities to meaningful roles in community, youth can play a fundamental role in addressing the social issues that are destined to impact their lives and those of future generations.” (1994, p. 142). Although there are youth who have always been highly engaged in their *local* communities, the current Millennial Generation is being defined among any other generation as the most active and engaged in addressing the *world’s* issues. “There is clear evidence of the determination of today’s youth for self improvement and their commitment to improving the social, political and economic fabric of society through individual and group action” (United Nations, 2007, p.xv). Based on the most recent Statistics Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, youth in Canada are some of the most engaged citizens in the country (Hall, Lasby, Gumulka & Tryon, 2006). The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (2008) defines youth engagement as “meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity with a focus outside of him or herself.”

A lot of buzz is being generated by mainstream media on the work of young social entrepreneurs in Canada. There are a plethora of articles and stories written on social ventures that were initiated by young people or more broadly articles introducing the concept of social entrepreneurship with youth in outlets such as The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, National Post, various regional newspapers, and Magazines such as Maclean’s, Canadian Business and Canadian Living to name a few<sup>1</sup>.

## *Topic of Research*

Recognizing that youth engagement and participation is important and vital to the wellbeing of Canada, this report examines a specific subset within this broad area: namely youth social entrepreneurs in the nonprofit sector. This report seeks to identify the factors influencing the creation of youth-initiated social ventures in Canada, from the perspective of the young social entrepreneur. The focus solely on the nonprofit sector must be noted specifically. It is acknowledged that a strong literature and academic interest exists in relation to youth-initiated entrepreneurs and their *business* ventures. For the purposes of this report, however, the emphasis on the nonprofit sector makes this research unique and highly specialized. While some brief reference is made in this report to the literature on youth entrepreneurs in the business sector, it is argued that the nonprofit sector activities and focus of youth *social* entrepreneurs represent a distinct category of activity that must be separately analyzed and investigated.

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<sup>1</sup> Biz school grads on a different in *Edmonton Journal*, October 14, 2003; *YOUTH POWER* in *Maclean's*, August 16, 2004; Make money or save the world? Entrepreneurs help turn good intentions into constructive change in *Toronto Star*, August 9, 2007; Social entrepreneurs make their mark; Young people who aim to use business to change the world new heroes of the age in *Edmonton Journal*, January 29, 2008; M.B.A.s who want to save the world in *Maclean's*, Sept. 2008; Do-gooders can earn a good living; Social entrepreneurs say road to success is full of speed bumps in *National Post*, July 7, 2009; Outstanding Canadian women who inspire in *Canadian Living*, July, 2010.

## **Purpose**

The purposes of this report emerged from a problem associated with an identified lack of information and cooperation in the field of youth engagement despite its spiraling uptake in Canadian society. As Khosroshashi et al (2006, p.28) indicates: “Youth participation and engagement in Canada is growing as a movement, however it suffers from fragmentation and the lack of channels for knowledge sharing and collaboration”. This report captures the knowledge of young social entrepreneurs in Canada with the goal of better understanding this under-researched field and creating groundwork for future research in this area. Further, by understanding the phenomenon of youth social entrepreneurship through the journeys of youth social entrepreneurs themselves, this study provides valuable primary data and insights for the next generation of social entrepreneurs.

This report explores the factors that influence and inhibit young individuals from starting social ventures. This research is important for both youth in the social space and for the support networks and social infrastructure present that support youth social entrepreneurship. It highlights factors currently pertinent to such youth and the *existing* networks and infrastructure associated with their entrepreneurship energies and is suggestive of *new* forces that might be relevant to identifying the causes of youth entrepreneurs in the nonprofit sector.

## **Definitions**

The following section provides definitions for the key terms that are used throughout this report. Definitions are necessary, as most of these terms have been loosely defined in the literature and can have different interpretations and meanings in different contexts.

### *Social Entrepreneur*

Literature on social entrepreneurship has concluded that research in the field is highly fragmented and that there is no standardized or widely accepted definition for the term social entrepreneur (Dees, 2001). Mair & Marti (2004) and Weerawardena & Mort (2006) have summarized nearly two dozen different social entrepreneurship constructs and definitions of a social entrepreneur. This report does not debate the concepts, but rather adopts the definition from Thompson et al. that states social entrepreneurs are “people who realize where there is an opportunity to satisfy some unmet need that the state welfare system will not or cannot meet, and who gather together the necessary resources (generally people, often volunteers, money and premises) and use these to ‘*make a difference*’” (2000, p.348). The remainder of this report uses the term, young social entrepreneur to describe the demographic of individuals in the nonprofit sector analyzed in this study.

The closest definition of a young social entrepreneur in the literature is of a youth-led innovator who is defined as someone who is “instigating potential solutions to a problem, often one that they themselves have been at least partly responsible for identifying or defining. The young people take responsibility for coming up with the solution and also implementing it” (Sebba et al., 2009, p.14).

### *Youth*

Khosroshashi et al. 2006, p.50) highlight that “The definition of youth varies depending on subject matter, context, the organization and/or objective of classification”. Youth can be

identified by a particular stage in life or social state such as being in a transitional stage from dependent to independent or at a “biological life stage” (Sebba et al., 2009, p.15; Khosroshahi et al., 2006). The United Nations defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 (United Nations, 2010). The Government of Canada defines young Canadians as individuals aged 15 to 30 (Youth Canada, 2009). For the purposes of this report and data collection, youth is defined as individuals between the ages of 16 to 26. However since a clear definition of youth has not been made in the literature, literature drawing from youth between the ages of 15 and 35 is used.

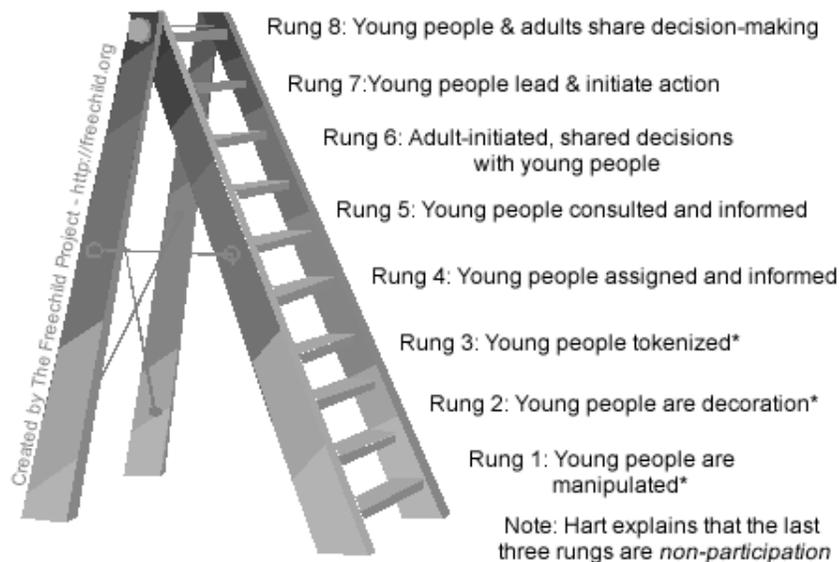
### *Social Venture*

Social venture is the term created for this report, used to describe the projects with a social mission that the young social entrepreneurs initiated. These ventures include community organizations, social action organizations, charitable organizations, nonprofit organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and community projects.

### *Youth-initiated Social Venture*

Hart’s Ladder of Young People’s Participation (Figure 1) is used as a model to specifically define youth-initiated social ventures and the focus of this study.

## Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

*Rung 7: Young people-initiated and directed. This step is when young people initiate and direct a project or program. Adults are involved only in a supportive role.*

*Rung 8: Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults. This happens when projects or programs are initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.*

*Figure 1. Hart’s Ladder of Young People Participation (The FreeChild Project, 2008)*

The Ladder of Participation was designed as a typology for examining children's participation in projects. This model was created primarily for program administrators to think about the young people's rights to choose their level of participation, based on their abilities. Participation or lack of participation was placed on an eight step continuum (Hart, 1992). This report looks at youth that chose to participate in community activities that fit into the categories defined by steps 7 and 8 in the figure below. The first three steps were not used, as they were defined as non-engagement. Steps 4, 5, and 6 engage youth, however the youth are not in the driver's seat, and thus are not considered to be applicable for this study.

### **Client**

Nukoko, a Canadian nonprofit organization has requested a report outlining the factors influencing the start-up of youth-initiated social ventures. Nukoko's mandate is to work with youth-led organizations to further their partner organization's social goals of community development. Recently, Nukoko has been active in connecting youth-led organizations together, recognizing the value of information sharing on a parallel level. Nukoko wishes to create and publish a resource guide for youth who wish to start community projects.

This 598 report will be used to inform the resource guide to be developed in the future by Nukoko. Neither the resource guide, nor this report are meant to be prescriptive. Through tracking the journeys of individuals who have been through the process of creating a social venture, the future guide will highlight common elements associated with social venture start-up. Since the resource guide is intended towards individuals wishing to start initiatives, it was requested that interviews be conducted and information be analyzed from the perspective of the founders of initiatives. In the interest of scope, Nukoko requested that the study examine only the start-up phase of youth-initiated social ventures. A cross-Canada scan was requested, because it is intended that the Nukoko guide be read by individuals from across the country and it would be discouraging if all information came from one region. Based on the findings of this report, Nukoko will decide if there is value in pursuing further research to complete the desired resource guide.

### **Scope of Study**

It is important to state the scope and some limitations of this study from the outset. The report is not intended to provide a comprehensive review of the topic by detailing in depth the various specific issues identified. Further, the scope of the report is uniquely from the perspective of young founders, in determining the critical factors at play in the creation of their social ventures. Although most of the social ventures start with a supporting team of volunteers which were integral in the start-up phase, the perspectives or roles of the volunteers are not examined. The report does not attempt to explore organizational design and specific management issues associated with managing a social venture, such as volunteer recruitment, motivation and retention, budgeting, fundraising tactics, marketing and promotions. Furthermore, the report focuses on the topic of youth-led social ventures in Canada only in the start-up phase, with no specifics to management and growth. This research is intended as being a first-step in a more comprehensive analysis to be conducted in the future and leaves multiple doors open for further research and analysis.

The scope of this study is limited to the present day. It will be difficult to place the findings of this report in a different timeframe. Reason being, both factors unique to the individual young social entrepreneur, as well as the external environment in which they operate in are included in the findings. Although it is possible for individual-specific traits to apply in a different timeframes, environmental factors evolve and thus further studies will need to examine them when exploring youth social entrepreneurship.

The generalization of the findings in this report, namely the influencing factors in the creation of youth-initiated social ventures, is limited to the population from which the sample was drawn. The factors influencing youth social entrepreneurship are not essential for a young individual to start a social venture. Conclusions are intended to suggest factors are most likely correlated with youth social entrepreneurship. The findings do not apply on a mutually exclusive basis to all of the participants, and thus cannot be interpreted as a prescription for what is needed to be a youth social entrepreneur in every individual case. Instead, the findings and conclusions of this report are intended to represent something of a preliminary 'guide' or set of general principles. They were developed specifically for the client's consideration in envisioning its desired potential future resource guide for young entrepreneurs.

### *Structure of the Report*

This report begins with a literature review to highlight the themes of exploration specifically for youth social entrepreneurship. Following the literature review is the methodology section, which thoroughly explains the primary sources of data collection and analysis: 38 in-depth interviews with young social entrepreneurs in Canada and two focus groups. The summary and analysis of findings section outlines and analyses the findings from the interviews. Finally the concluding section provides suggested future research questions to build on this report.

## **Literature Review**

To understand the factors influencing the initiation of social ventures by youth, a literature review was conducted to identify areas of exploration already identified by theorists and practitioners in the field. After a thorough database search and with the assistance of a university librarian, no peer-reviewed literature appeared for youth social entrepreneurship, as per the parameters of the definitions stated above.

Although youth participation and engagement is a widely researched field, the relevant literature that did surface was on youth-led social movements, youth-led activism and the impacts of their participation, rather than the actual creation of a social venture by a young adult.

Academic, but not peer-reviewed scholarly materials, such as reports, working drafts and dissertations, did appear after an extensive search and reaching out to individuals involved in the social space, which was drawn from this research. Grey literature in the form of published reports from institutions in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom was also used, however very few looked in the issues specifically of youth social entrepreneurship. The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) which is an independent United Kingdom-based organization with a mission to make the UK more innovative published a report on youth-led innovation with valuable insights into this field, however it focused on all types of innovation including those with a social, economic, cultural, technological or political

influence and the findings did not make distinctions specifically to the creation of a social organization (Sebba et al., 2009).

A thorough scan of the literature thus indicates that youth social entrepreneurship is an under-researched field. Due to the nonexistent academic and peer-reviewed literature in the area of youth social entrepreneurship, this study provides an excellent opportunity to provide initial research which can then be used as a base for further investigations and studies.

#### *Traditional Entrepreneurship and Youth Entrepreneurship*

There is some consensus in the literature that social entrepreneurs and traditional business, for-profit entrepreneurs exhibit similar traits and behaviours (Drucker, 1989; Leadbeater, 1997; Thompson et al., 2000; Johnson, 2003). While conducting database searches on youth social entrepreneurship many hits came up for traditional youth entrepreneurship instead, with socially entrepreneurial endeavours. This indicates that both the fields of youth entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship have not been well-defined and that literature may cross over into traditional youth entrepreneurship. Further, literature about the Fourth Sector, or ventures that 'bleed' traditional sectoral boundaries is appearing, however due to the lack of uniform definitions, it is being classified in various different categories. Youth entrepreneurship literature is examined to understand the process of starting economic ventures by young people to draw areas of observation around the start-up of an initiative by a young person in general.

There are however a few fundamental differences between social entrepreneurs and for-profit business entrepreneurs. Dees and Economy (2001) state social entrepreneurs "set out with an explicit social mission in mind. Their main objective is to make the world a better place. This vision affects how they measure their successes and how they structure their enterprises...they do not receive the same market feedback that business entrepreneurs get... [and therefore] face different challenges in attracting resources and in justifying their existence" (p.4). Traditional for-profit businesses are rewarded if they create value for their customers. Dees and Economy (2001) argue that social value is not rewarded the same way. These ideas were echoed in the literature by many researchers (Drucker, 1989; Leadbeater, 1997; Johnson, 2000; Thompson et al., 2000; Hibbert et al., 2001; Thompson, 2002).

#### *Neighbouring Sources*

Due to the fundamental differences between for-profit entrepreneurs and nonprofit social entrepreneurs, and to more effectively define and identify the themes that will be explored during data collection for this study, literature from neighbouring areas to the topic, were explored. These included, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation, Nonprofit Management, and Leadership. The following section provides justifications for why these sources of literature were relevant.

The terms social innovation and social entrepreneurship are used quite interchangeably and although some argue that social innovation is different than social entrepreneurship (Phills et al., 2008; Sebba et al., 2009), for simplicity, this report draws on sources from both social innovation and social entrepreneurship and refers to them synonymously. Social innovation tends to have many definitions in the literature. Phills et al. provide an all encompassing definitions of "a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing

solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals” (2008, p.34). Muligan et al. more simply state social innovation as “the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) that meet social needs” (2007, p.9). These two definitions are consistent with the definition of a social entrepreneur listed above.

While social entrepreneurship and social innovation examine the process of creating a new solution or organization to meet a social need, literature in nonprofit management focuses on the management of such entities. Due to the scarce amount of resources on social entrepreneurship, nonprofit management literature was also examined, because experiences are still common and applicable in this context. Acknowledging that “leadership and entrepreneurship are not synonymous terms,” but that there are many shared characteristics (Thompson et al., 2000, p.332), makes it important to study the leadership literature to understand different factors associated with a youth social entrepreneur.

### ***Common Themes***

After a literature search in the areas of Youth Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation, Nonprofit Management, and Leadership the following section presents themes and suggested areas of exploration for the initiation of social ventures by young social entrepreneurs.

### **Stages of Development of a Project**

According to a *Framework for Youth Entrepreneurship Success* (Rabbior et al., 1997), there are four stages commonly found in the development of a young entrepreneur and their project: formative, developmental, start-up and growth. The formative stage is where ‘the seed’ is planted, and it seeks to understand why individuals act and the contributing factors that motivate this said action. The developmental stage is “the willingness and ability of a person to acquire information, knowledge, and experience from the world around him/her that is relevant to his/her entrepreneurial success” (Rabbior et al., 1997, p.4). During the start-up stage, the entrepreneur gathers and builds the tactical skills necessary for starting up the venture, such as developing a plan and launching the business. Finally, once the business has been started-up, the growth stage builds the business into a space of growth and transition. Using Rabbior’s framework, the remainder of this report explores the ‘start-up phase’ as an accumulation of the formative, developmental, and start-up steps noted above.

It is acknowledged that growing an organization is different than creating one (Rabbior et al., 1997), the scope of this research is limited uniquely to the start-up phase and thus growth will not be examined.

### **Identification of a Need and Articulation of Vision**

Some of the specific traits found in entrepreneurs, both social and for-profit include their ability to identify an unmet need and communicate their vision (Thompson et al., 2000). “The starting point for innovation is an awareness of a need that is not being met and some idea of how it could be met...instead ideas start off as possibilities that are only incompletely understood by their inventors. They evolve by becoming more explicit and more formalised, as best practice is worked out, and as organisations develop experience about how to make them work” (Muligan et

al., 2007, p.25). Along with identifying a need, social entrepreneurs as well as for-profit entrepreneurs have a desire to create something new (Thompson et al., 2000).

Block and Rosenberg define founders of nonprofit organizations as leaders, with specific reference to “their capacity to translate visionary ideas into organizational realities for the good of a community” (2002, p.353). Youth social entrepreneurs are leaders, as they are individuals who are capable of doing the same; the only distinction is their age. There is a plethora of literature that describes leadership; however this report steers clear of identifying the common traits associated with leadership. Although some elements involved in turning an idea into a tangible project require teamwork and engaging individuals, this study’s focus is from the perspective of the initiator. Further research drawing from leadership-specific literature will need to be conducted by future research to enhance the work of youth social entrepreneurship.

An individual’s ability to communicate their vision can be directly linked to their personal leadership skills. Inspiration is a trait found amongst many leaders, including founders of nonprofit organizations (Nanus & Dobbs, 1999; Secretan, 2004; Patton, Westley & Zimmerman, 2007). A study on some of the world’s most well known leaders found a few common trends in the individuals; namely the initiator’s clarity of their cause, which can be interpreted as the vision, align their lives with that calling, their abilities to serve and work with others and “the gift for being inspired themselves” (Secretan, 2004, xxvi). In essence, the ability of a founder to recruit and retain staff and volunteers is in part due to their ability to inspire others (Thompson et al, 2000).

#### *Take-away for this report*

For-profit and social entrepreneurs are able to identify an unmet need, create a vision and ‘go after’ it. In doing so, their ability to inspire others and be inspired themselves is important. Although it will be difficult to determine if the young social entrepreneurs sampled as part of this study were ‘inspirational,’ as the study only examined them from their perspective, it will be interesting to understand the sources of their inspiration, and their driving forces. Similar to the formative stage in entrepreneurship development, this study seeks to understand ‘the seed,’ namely the source of the ideas, which eventually evolved into their social ventures.

#### **Networks and Social Capital**

Social network theory dates back from the 1900s and many researchers have modified and adapted the theory in various different contexts (see Scott, 1987 for a historical evolution). A social network, specifically an individual (egotistical) social network is a map showing the types of relationships that connect individuals together and the implications of these relationships (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Social networks operate on different levels and play an important role in how organizations are formed and run (Lin, 1999). Granovetter (1973) argued the ‘strength of weak ties’ by saying there is a greater value for an individual to have a loosely-knit network with many people over a closely-knit network with few people. He goes on to argue that individuals have both closely-knit networks as well as “a connection of acquaintances, few of whom know one another” (p.202) and that those acquaintances can serve as bridges to a completely new series of networks of closely-knit people. In short, individuals who are only confined to a closely knit network are less like to be exposed to different ideas and innovate.

Networks are important in innovation and entrepreneurial activities, both among adults and young people (Sebba et al., 2009). In the context of social ventures, building a network of contacts and developing relationships is necessary to “bring trust, visibility, credibility and co-operation” to an organization and ultimately the individual behind it (Thompson et al., 2000, p.321). Entrepreneurship literature also states the importance of the founder’s personal networks when starting a new firm. New firms do not have credibility in of themselves, and if the founder has no previous experience in the industry, reaching out to their networks is known to ‘bridge the credibility gap.’ Getting an important stakeholder on board can build credibility for the new firm or the founder, which is beneficial in attracting more support and reaching out into newer networks (Birley & Norburn, 1985; Ostgaard & Birley, 1996; Svensson & Nordfors, 2006).

Social capital is “a product of social networks and the resources available through such networks, as well as the extent to which the people in such networks are willing to share their resources with one another. Hence, a denser social network does not automatically translate into higher social capital. This means that social capital is determined by both structural factors (location of individuals in a society, which determines the resources available to them) and cultural factors (the strength of community-orientation among individuals in a network, influencing their willingness to share their resources with others in the community)” (Kazemipour, 2004, p.7). The same elements found in social capital; namely the network size, the strength of those relationships and the resources held by the individuals in the networks is echoed by other scholars as well (Flap, 1991; Portes, 1998). When building social capital, researchers have concluded two focal points: how individuals invest in social relations and how individuals capture the embedded resources in the relations to generate a return (Lin, 1999, p.32). A measure of social capital is through the embedded resources within the network. Such resources of value can include human and financial resources, among other resources. The extent to which an individual has direct or indirect ties (or access) to valued resources is a method by which social capital is analyzed (Lin, 1999).

Entrepreneurship literature also makes reference to social network theory, highlighting that the entrepreneur’s personal network has the resources which “may provide direct solutions to operational problems while others increase the firm's legitimacy in the market-place and indirectly provide access to resources needed for the pursuit of economic goals" (Johannisson, 1990, p.3).

#### *Take-away for this report*

Networks are important for anyone wishing to create a new entity. Networks come from varied sources, however the value from a network is the social capital found within them. This study examines to what extent networks are important for young social entrepreneurs, and more importantly where the individuals in their networks originated from and how they became ‘social capital.’

#### **Funding**

Whether a social venture is dependent on charity and requires donations or grant money, or a social venture wishes to ‘raise’ the necessary funds, financials remain an integral issue for many social and community based projects (Froelich, 1998; O’Neill, 1998; Hall et al., 2004; Foster, Kim and Christiansen, 2009). When launching his or her idea, the founder must first determine

the financial resources which are necessary for the operation to run successfully, identify the sources, and wherein they can be obtained (Collins, 2005). It is especially important for the founders to be creative and resourceful in generating finances in the early development stages of any social innovation (Mumford, 2002). There are a plethora of sources available online that address practical information concerning fundraising. For example, a Google search on *'fundraising ideas for non-profit organizations'* conducted in February 2010 emerged with over 900,000 hits; among the search were tools, tips, handbooks and guides for nonprofit organizations to build a funding base. Literature consistently emphasizes the amount of resources that are expended in raising funds in order to carry out mission-based activities (Froelich, 1998; Hall et al., 2004; Foster et al., 2009).

Youth entrepreneurship literature was not scanned for funding, because as noted above, funding models are different for profit-based organizations (Johnson, 2000; Thompson et al., 2000; Dees et al., 2001). Although historically, nonprofit management literature has been primarily dominant over two funding models: philanthropic donations and grants and government based fundraising, a wave of literature on earned income strategies has emerged in the last decade. Often, the former two funding models presented above come with strings attached and funding gets allocated to specific projects. An ongoing challenge presented in the literature is funding for overhead and operational costs for nonprofit organizations (Froelich, 1998; Foster & Bradach, 2005; Foster et al., 2009).

Earned income refers to “revenue generated by the commercial exchange of a product or service between a buyer and seller” (Anderson, Dees & Emerson, 2002, p.192). In such cases, the seller is the social venture. Buyers can include the beneficiaries of the mission-based services of the social venture or they can have no connection, as earned income takes the form of a stand-alone side business. Earned income allows the nonprofit organizations the flexibility to use the funding as they wish. Further, in the literature earned income is said to have more predictability and ensures for more sustainable funding (Froelich, 1998).

Foster et al. (2005) however critique the overwhelming emphasis on nonprofit organizations adopting earned income strategies. They critique the existing literature and studies on earned income successes arguing that the samples are biased towards successful initiatives and are not truly representative and in fact under-represent the failed attempts at earned-income. They also found that many of the nonprofit organizations' earned-income activities were often unrelated and did not contribute to the organization's core mission or adversely affected their mission. Although most of the earned-income ventures profiled produced revenue, very few of them were profitable. After taking into account the organizational resources devoted to the earned income activities, it should be noted that this counts as time taken away from the pursuit of the individual's social mission.

Zimmerman and Dart echo these sentiments explaining that “for some charitable organizations, commercial activity may be fundamentally improper because it would distract from the mission or refocus energies away from the collective good and services with long-run impact. For others, it may be precisely the lever that triggers useful organization-wide innovation and creativity” (Zimmerman and Dart, 1998, p.13). This implies that nonprofit organizations need to be mindful

when considering which funding models they employ and the importance that the funding ultimately benefits the organization's efforts in achieving their social missions.

Academic literature however has not looked into the prevalence and accessibility of these funding models specifically to youth or to newer social ventures. Most of the literature is dominated by the use of these models with pre-existing organizations.

#### *Take away for this report*

Raising funds is an important element in many nonprofit organizations. Sources of funding are quite varied and each comes with its own limitations and challenges. This study does not explore the specific challenges associated with raising funds, as it is very much contextual for each organization and beyond the scope of this report. The report does however explore the initial sources of funds used by the young social entrepreneurs to get their social ventures off the ground.

#### **Education**

Traditional youth entrepreneurship literature makes reference to the importance of entrepreneurship education in grade school and high school. There is consensus that the education needs to educate youth in a supportive environment that entrepreneurship can be a viable career option. Authors argue that the external environment of an individual plays a large role in creating the foundation for that individual to be an entrepreneur and education is a method of preparing an individual to consider going down that route (Kourilsky, 1995; Sobel & King, 1995; Kerka, 2005). As Krueger and Brazeal (1994) said "opportunities are seized by those who are prepared to seize them," (p. 92) and education is a way of preparing individuals to see those opportunities.

The literature also encourages the use of entrepreneurship preparation programs that are outside of an academic training. These types of trainings provide hands-on experience, access to mentors, resources and teaching of business skills. Youth enterprise agencies, such as the Canadian Youth Business Foundation, formal programs such as Junior Achievement and community-based entrepreneurship programs such as Be Your Own Boss can serve this role. Educational preparation is also important for youth to teach them the basics of running a business to avoid early failure (Lindner & Cox, 1998; Kerka, 2005).

Current literature on social innovation, social entrepreneurship, nonprofit management and leadership makes very little reference to education and formal training as a factor influencing an individual to become an innovator or creator of an organization. Nonprofit management education literature focuses more on the make-up of the curriculums. Literature has debated over what types of courses should be offered, which faculties nonprofit management courses and degrees are best suited to be placed in and the value and extent to which hands-on experiential learning experiences should be placed in an academic curriculum (O'Neill, 1998; Ashcraft, 2001; Dolch, Ernst, McClusky, Mirabella & Sadow; 2007). Based on the focus of these academic programs, they appear suitable for anyone in the nonprofit sector; however the literature makes no distinction between the skills needed for a founder, versus those of other staff and managers in the nonprofit sector.

Literature has documented the emergence and growth of nonprofit management education programs (O'Neill, 1998). We are, however, starting to see faculties and full-degree programs specifically oriented towards social entrepreneurship across North America and the United Kingdom, such as the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the Said School of Business at Oxford, the School for Social Entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom, Kaos Pilot School for Social Innovation, Interaction Design and Social Entrepreneurship at the Austin Centre for Design. No literature has evaluated the success of these programs and outcomes for such curricula in the creation of social entrepreneurs.

### *Take away for this report*

In for-profit youth entrepreneurship, education can be beneficial in educating youth regarding advantages and realities of pursuing an entrepreneurial career path. Training can also be important to gain the skills necessary to run a business. The linkage between education and practice is not so clear in the nonprofit sector. Research in this area explores the level of academic training received by the young social entrepreneurs and the extent to which it was important in the creation of their social ventures.

### **Being Young**

There have been many superlatives in the literature describing the qualities of youth as “resourcefulness, initiative, drive, imagination, enthusiasm, zest, dash, ambition, energy, boldness, audacity, courage” (Schnurr & Newing, 1997, p.2). “Youth have a natural disposition for innovation and change” (OECD, 2001, p.9). Yet despite these positive traits that would be extremely beneficial in the creation of a new endeavour, youth face challenges when deciding to go down the traditional entrepreneurial route. Some of these challenges include limited experience (both in life and professionally) and limited networks and contacts (White & Kenyon, 2001).

A barrier to youth-led social innovation is the negative connotations and attitudes society has towards youth. Because young people are “perceived as too inexperienced to be taken seriously,” they experience difficulty in getting support, both financial and otherwise (Sebba et al., 2009). This thought resonates with young entrepreneurs, as a large impediment for young people to start a business at a young age is their lack of experience. There are some people that believe that experience in established organizations is necessary in order for an individual to truly understand business operations and launch a successful business (Lieber, 1998).

Lewis (2003) identifies the need for youth entrepreneurship specific theoretical models. He says that most youth entrepreneurship literature uses models from traditional entrepreneurship and that there is no empirical knowledge specific to the issues faced by youth entrepreneurs. A literature review conducted by Conner and Strobel concluded that youth leadership is a “fuzzy concept in the literature” (2007, p.277) and that there is no one definition that can be used to encompass the term, beyond common skills such as communication and interpersonal skills. From a theoretical perspective, there is consensus in the academic community that youth leadership is distinct and should be treated differently than traditional ‘adult’ leadership (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Roach et al., 1999).

### *Take away for this report*

Society gives youth many positive attributes that are beneficial for innovation; however young people's lack of experience or perceived lack of experience can serve as a barrier for young people creating new entities. This research study explores some of the youth-specific factors to better understand the realities among youth social entrepreneurs, whom can also be called young leaders.

### **The Individual – the innovator/social entrepreneur/founder**

Social entrepreneurship “focuses on the personal qualities of people who start new organizations, and it celebrates traits like boldness, accountability, resourcefulness, ambition, persistence, and unreasonableness” (Phills et al., 2008, p.37). “Social innovation is not just a matter of chance or serendipity or the brilliance of a handful of individuals. Instead, there are clear patterns in successful innovation, and understanding these patterns can help today’s innovators deploy their energies more effectively” (Muligan et al., 2007, p.11). Bornstein’s definition of a social entrepreneur, which was derived from studying the works of various social entrepreneurs demonstrates their qualities of persistence: “people with new ideas to address major problems who are relentless in the pursuit of their visions, people who simply do not take “no” for an answer, who will not give up until they have spread their ideas as far as they possibly can” (Bornstein, 2005, p.1). A social innovator must also be persuasive (Mumford, 2002). These extracts from the literature indicate some of the personal characteristics found among social entrepreneurs. Once the young entrepreneur has a project in mind and has decided to go after it, the following strategic skills have been identified in the literature to be useful to young entrepreneurs wishing to develop and execute their businesses.: goal orientation, creativity, ability to recognize opportunities in various contexts, risk tolerance, capacity to plan, communication, marketing, interpersonal skills, basic management, basic quantitative, time management and finally team-building and leadership (Rabbior et al., 1997; Thompson et al., 2000). Confidence is also a key ingredient in getting an entrepreneurial venture off the ground (Lieber, 1998).

In addition to the skills, traits and characteristics internal to the individual, equally important are the environmental factors such as the young entrepreneur’s support network. Using Rabbior et al.’s framework for entrepreneurial success, the level of encouragement received within the environments in which an individual lives, works and plays is an influencing factor in the ‘formative stage’ where the young entrepreneur develops the desires or attitudes to be an entrepreneur. Additionally, almost every piece of literature on youth entrepreneurship makes reference to the importance of family support or parental role modeling as a determining factor in youth entrepreneurship (Walter, 1972; White & Kenyon; Kourilsky, 1995; Rabbior et al., 1997). They argue that without those environmental factors, such as role models in their immediate network, it is less likely that a young entrepreneur will either develop or act on their entrepreneurial ambitions. To provide an alternative solution to youth who may not have entrepreneur role models in their life, especially those from marginalized communities, Kourilsky (1995) argues that entrepreneurship education at an early age is beneficial in exposing individuals to entrepreneurship as a viable career option and in essence helps to plant the ‘seed.’

In addition to role models, mentors play an equally important role for young people wishing to start a business. Mentorship is “informal advice and guidance from someone who has good business experience and, in some cases, business networks that may assist a young person with little

experience and few contacts...individuals who are prepared to coach and support young women and men, rather than lecture or give unnecessary advice” (White et al., 2001, p.27).

### *Take away for this report*

Leaders, entrepreneurs and social innovators have been described as being extraordinary individuals, who possess the necessary skills to turn their ideas into reality. Literature has also acknowledged the importance of the individual’s external environment in cultivating those skills and providing the foundation necessary for them to develop their ideas. As there is very little that has been studied about young social innovators or young social entrepreneurs, this report provides an excellent opportunity to further investigate the patterns, factors and traits that are commonly found among young social entrepreneurs.

### **Summary**

Overall, the review of the literature conducted for this report suggests the following:

The precise topic of factors influencing youth-initiated social ventures under study for this report is not directly addressed in the literature. This is despite literature on youth entrepreneurship and adult entrepreneurship in the private sector which must be distinguished from the topic at hand due to the nonprofit nature of social ventures under study. The nonprofit sector can be said to be unique and distinguishable from the for-profit business sector entrepreneurship model, based on funding, incentives and mission of the organization.

Given the lack of literature directly addressing youth social entrepreneurship, a number of neighbouring topics were reviewed. These neighbouring topics were identified as being youth for-profit entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and social innovation, nonprofit management and leadership theory.

The key messages to note from these topics are the importance of vision and inspiration behind a venture, the necessity of funding and the variety of funding models available, the importance of education and training for young entrepreneurs, youth specific challenges and finally the internal and external factors specific to the individual founder.

The key issues that are not addressed in the literature are the importance of all these messages to youth social entrepreneurs. It is unknown if these models are applicable to nonprofit young social entrepreneurs and if there are challenges unique to this demographic. The following methodology section elaborates on the research approach used to collect data on young social entrepreneurs in Canada, determining the importance of these factors specific to young social entrepreneurs.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology chapter details the qualitative research approach (section I) adopted for this report including the primary research method of grounded theory. This is followed by a section outlining the specific research instruments used in the research, notably (section II) a literature scan, as well as in-depth interviews and focus groups as a method of data collection. Section III addresses issues of validity and section IV examines the strengths and limitations of the chosen research approaches. Finally, this chapter concludes with section V explaining why this research provides a rigorous and defensible piece of analysis.

### **I. General Research Approach**

This report adopts a qualitative research approach that is based generally on grounded theory and which features multiple methods. A qualitative approach was preferred because of the lack of information on the topic currently in the literature and the ability of qualitative methods to provide a rich set of data from which further information and research projects can be drawn in the future. Quantitative methodologies, when compared to qualitative methodologies, arguably would not have provided the depth necessary to answer the research question.

As mentioned earlier, a thorough search was conducted on various databases, journals and peer-reviewed literature (please refer to Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of search terms and sources), all showing no results for youth-initiated social ventures. As such, the topic appears something of a research greenfield site. Accordingly, it was decided that a grounded theory approach to the qualitative data should be pursued in order to highlight the factors influencing the start-up of youth-initiated social ventures in Canada. A grounded-theory methodology was used to explore this topic, whereby the research process began with no defined initial theoretical framework. This research was based on the same principles and basic approach as grounded theory, where there is no hypothesis to begin with and conclusions were developed based on the findings drawn directly from the research participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

A variety of different research strategies were employed to determine the factors influencing youth social entrepreneurship. A literature scan was used to gather common topics within youth social entrepreneurship that were then further explored through data collection (see Chapter 1 above). The primary approach for data collection was through one-on-one exploratory interviews and focus groups. Based on the resources and time-frame available for this study, these two types of data-collection techniques were best able to provide the depth necessary for analysis. Substantial effort was given to identifying the sample of research participants, which is further elaborated below. While it is hoped the data collected through this research may form part of future case study analyses, this report relies uniquely on interviewing methodologies as the scope and timeframe for the research for this report precluded such case study analysis also being used as a complementary research method.

While the literature scan was used to determine the topics of investigation, there was no hypothesis within each topic to determine the key themes when initiating a social venture. Although traditional grounded theory states that the primary goal is to develop a theory (Glaser

& Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997), this research did not develop a theoretical framework. Instead, it highlighted the key themes that surfaced, which serves as initial ground work to potential theoretical findings that can be further tested in future research. The research question asked for the identification of the factors influencing youth social entrepreneurship in the start-up phase of a venture. Developing a theoretical framework for the-initiation of a youth social venture was beyond the scope of this study.

### *Ethics*

In order to conduct primary qualitative research, approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board was required. All necessary steps of data collection and disposal were employed in compliance with the stated application.

Ongoing consent was obtained from all participants, as it is anticipated that this research be reproduced in many different forms by the client in the near future. The anonymity of the research participants was not preserved, as it leaves an open door for the client to follow-up with the participants directly if they would like to use this research and analysis in the Nukoko resource guide. Appropriate confidentiality and privacy issues were addressed accordingly as part of the ethics application process. A copy of the participant consent form outlining these issues is provided in Appendix E.

## **II. Research Instruments**

### **i. Literature Scan**

The literature states that true grounded theory methodology begins interviews with no prior reading of the literature – so that codes can be formed completely objectively, based on what was said in the interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, it is also said that the interviewer will begin the research with “some questions or areas for observation” (Thomas & James, 2006, p.6). The literature scan outlined in Chapter One was used to generate the ‘areas for observation’ or topics for data collection in the interviews. Further, the generation of topics was able to bring focus to the data collection process, which was necessary due to the limitations of the amount of time that could be spent with each participant. Youth social entrepreneurship encompasses many facets, therefore common types of information needed to be generated so they could be evaluated side-by-side. However it is important to note, that within the topics there were no pre-conceived hypotheses and the content generated by the participants formed the basis for generating the codes and sub-themes and the subsequent analysis.

### **ii. Qualitative Interviewing**

The primary source of gathering data on young social entrepreneurs in Canada was through qualitative interviewing. “Qualitative interviewing is based in conversation, with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering... The purpose of most qualitative interviewing is to derive interpretations, not facts or laws, from respondent talk” (Warren, 2002, p.83). In the context of this research topic, it was imperative for participants to “describe their experiences in their own terms” which was further facilitated by qualitative interviewing (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.17).

The interviews were conducted in an exploratory manner, taking into consideration “the inquisitive processes of examining and investigating” (Stebbins, 2001, p.2). Since the goal was to gather information from the perspectives of the participants, it is suggested that there be “a low degree of structure imposed on the interviewer, a preponderance of open questions, a focus on specific situations and action sequences in the world of the interviewee rather than abstractions and general opinions” (King, 1994, p.15 cited in Meyer, 2001, p. 338). Therefore, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured and open-ended fashion. An interview schedule with suggested open-ended questions organized by themes of exploration was used. Keeping with the spirit of semi-structured interviews, the ordering of the themes of exploration was modified based on the direction of the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Saunders et al., 2003). This schedule was also used as a guide to provide some structure in the case that participants derailed on tangents, however still allowed for flexibility for the participants to feel as though it was a conversation. The questions came from the themes that emerged in the literature review. Please refer to Appendix B for the interview schedule and list of questions.

### **Sampling**

Exploratory interviews often employ nonrandom sampling techniques (Johnson and Weller, 2002). Samplings in qualitative studies look for information richness (Meyer, 2001). Participants were selected based on their expertise and contributions to the area of youth social entrepreneurship, namely they were all young social entrepreneurs. A full list of participants and their affiliation to the topic of research is included in the following section.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) state that interviewees should satisfy three requirements:

- They should be knowledgeable about the experience being studied;
- They should be willing to talk;
- Represent a range of points of view” (p.66).

The population under consideration was individuals who started a social venture when they were a youth. Youth in this context was defined as individual between the ages of 16-26 years old. Purposive sampling was used to identify the research participants because a grounded theory approach was used and the participants had experiences in relation to the research question (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Saunders et al., 2003). A heterogeneous sampling strategy was employed, as the goal of this research was to identify key themes and it was possible to document data uniqueness. The criteria for participants included:

- Initiated a social venture (as per the definition in the introduction);
- Be between the ages of 16 and 26 at the time of founding their social venture; and
- The social venture must have been in existence with ongoing activities and/or operations for at least one year.

### **Special Considerations in the Sample**

Diversity was important in this sample. Through the researcher’s experience in the field, it was evident that youth-initiated social ventures take form in many different shapes and sizes, and this research needed to examine a variety of social ventures to capture a more accurate picture of youth-initiated social ventures in Canada. This diversity included the scope and size of the social

ventures, the geographic size and location of the social ventures at the time of inception, and the make-up of the young social entrepreneurs.

*Size and scope of the social venture*

For the social ventures, effort was made to have a variety of social missions grouped into the following categories: environmental, local community development, international development, human and animal rights. The breakdown of missions is displayed in Figure 2. The types of work carried out include advocacy, activism, capacity building, and front-line service delivery. It should be noted that 24 percent of the social ventures captured in this report started with nationwide scope at the time of inception.

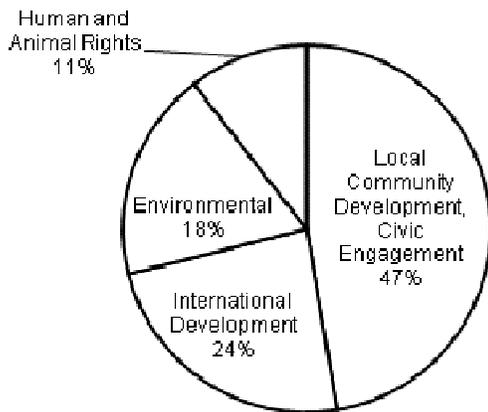


Figure 2. Missions of the social ventures

*Date of inception*

The dates in which the young social entrepreneurs started their social ventures are quite varied, as it would be important to understand if certain challenges were different 15 years ago when compared to the present day when starting a social venture. Figure 3 breaks down the range of the dates of inception of the social ventures.

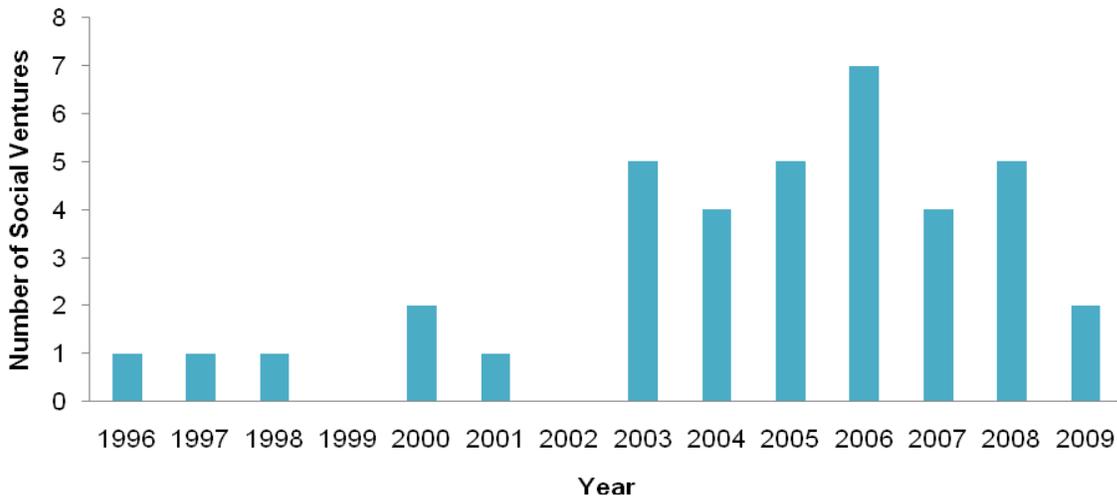


Figure 3. Social ventures' year of inception

### *Geographic size and location*

The geographic locations of the social ventures when they first got up off the ground were also carefully selected, including location in the country and size of the city. Effort was made to have participants from a variety of provinces across the country. The population sizes of cities included in this study is from less than 1,000 inhabitants to more than 3 million people. Table 1 and Table 2 highlight the geographic breakdown of the cities where the social ventures were initiated.

Table 1

#### *Break-down of Social ventures City Size*

Population	Number
> 15,000	2
15,000 - 100,000	6
100,000 - 1,000,000	8
< 1,000,000	22

*Note:* City size at the time of social venture's inception

Table 2

#### *Geographic Location of Social Ventures*

Region	Number
Atlantic Canada	2
Eastern Canada	26
Western Canada	10
Northern Canada	0

*Note:* Location at the time of social venture's inception

Although young social entrepreneurs in Northern Canada were contacted, due to scheduling problems, it was not possible to interview them as part of this study. So although they are not included in this study, it is important to note that young social entrepreneurs exist in Northern Canada and that future research should investigate if there are factors unique to this demographic. Although there is only one participant from a First Nation's reserve in northern Ontario, scheduling conflicts prohibited other young social entrepreneurs of aboriginal descent and those with social ventures on native communities to participate in this study. An ideal sample would have included more social ventures from smaller and more rural communities, however it was difficult to obtain access to this demographic given the limited time and resources to reach out and schedule interviews.

### *Make-up of the young social entrepreneur*

In respect to the young social entrepreneurs themselves, the stage of life they were in when they started their social ventures was considered. The 16-26 age category is quite large, therefore effort was made to ensure participants were well represented within this age bloc. Participants

that were older did have different levels of education and work experience prior to starting social ventures than the younger ones. Figure 4 details the age breakdown of the participants at the time of inception of their social venture.

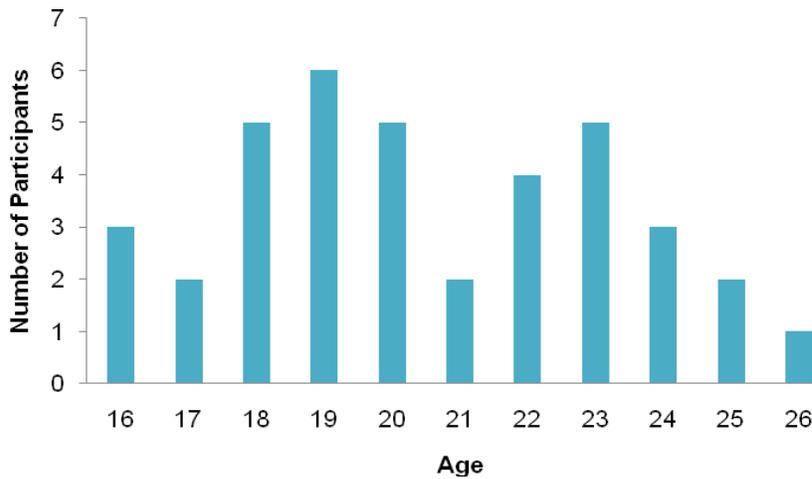


Figure 4. Age of participants at time of inception of their social venture

Whether or not participants started their social ventures alone was also considered. Although most of the social ventures started with a team of volunteers, this report focuses specifically on individuals that initiated the ideas and spearheaded the social ventures. 21 participants conceived their ideas and started their social ventures solo, whereas 17 participants started their social ventures with a co-founder or as a founding team with no one leader. Six participants embedded their social ventures under the umbrella of an existing structure or organization at the time of inception.

No explicit consideration was given to gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background at the time of selecting the participants, however these issues are examined further in the analysis. It should be noted that 37 percent of the participants were visible minorities. Figure 5 shows the gender breakdown of the participants, highlighting if their co-founders were from a different gender.

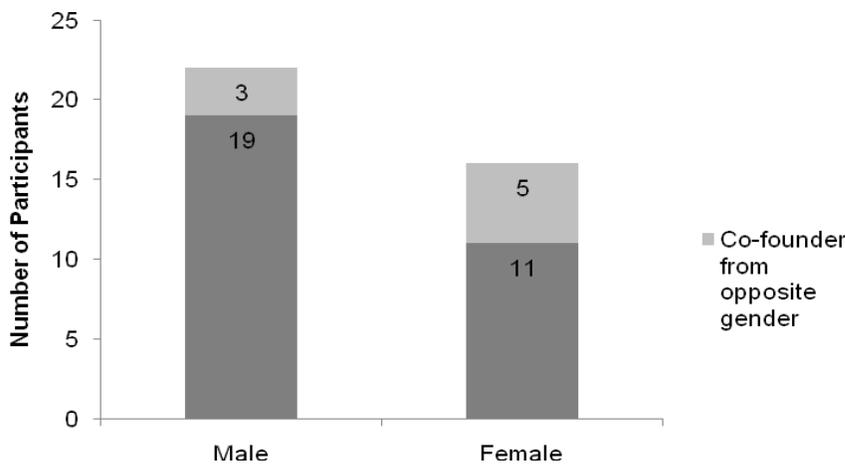


Figure 5. Gender breakdown of participants

In total there were 22 male participants and 16 female participants. The figure also indicates that eight social ventures were co-founded with founders of opposite genders and that 30 participants either had no co-founders or their co-founders were of the same gender.

### **Identifying the Participants**

The sample was initially going to comprise 15 to 20 participants, however once the special considerations were outlined and interviews had already begun, it became apparent that the sample needed to be larger to accommodate the diversity of youth social entrepreneurship in Canada. A final compromise of 40 participants was struck for this study to balance time and resource constraints limiting the interview research process.

### *Recruiting the Participants*

Since the researcher is a young social entrepreneur and is highly involved in the field, she was able to identify participants who met the criteria and different sample considerations noted above. Through participation in conferences and outreach activities, the researcher had a pre-existing national network of young social entrepreneurs or was in direct contact with highly engaged individuals who did know of other young social entrepreneurs. In order to reach out to potential research participants who were outside of the researcher's immediate network, a sponsorship strategy was also used. Sponsorship is when the researcher is 'vouched' for by a credible individual (Adler and Adler, 2002). Appendix D is the letter that was sent directly to the researcher's immediate network seeking referrals of young social entrepreneurs in other networks to participate in the study.

A snowball technique was used in addition to sponsorship. Snowballing is "where individuals who are interviewed name other individuals for interviewing" (Johnson and Weller, 2002, p.496). Snowballing and sponsorship ensured a rich sample of participants. Not all young social entrepreneurs suggested were part of the sample however. Some individuals were interviewed, however did not meet the core criteria for participation and their data was not considered. The researcher's judgment was used as a filter to decide who would ultimately be participants for the purposes of the study. Some individuals were not invited to participate, as someone in the sample had already been interviewed with a similar type of social venture. Acknowledging that everyone has a unique journey and that something can be learned from everyone, a sample size of 40 with many special considerations forced the use of a filter.

### **Data Collection and Recording**

In total, 40 one-on-one interviews were conducted with 38 interviewees meeting the core criteria outlined above. Therefore this study contains 38 interview participants, and data from the other two participants were disregarded.

### *Location*

Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and over the telephone, as it was not possible to physically see all participants who were spread across the entire country. Where it was logistically and pragmatically feasible, in-person interviews were conducted. A total of 15 in-person interviews were conducted at either the participant's office, their personal residence or at a coffee shop. The remaining phone interviews took place over the phone, or with the assistance

of Skype, an online communication technology. Issues around consistency among interviews are addressed below.

### *Recording*

All interviews were tape recorded and notes were taken during the interviews. Recording allowed the researcher to focus on active listening and asking intelligent follow-up questions as the need arose, rather than focusing on note-taking. Recording the interviews also assisted with the study's validity. The interviews were transcribed and coded from the tapes by the researcher for consistency (Saunders et al., 2003). Transcription from the audio recordings took place shortly after each interview. The interviews were not all transcribed verbatim, as it would have been extremely time intensive and the researcher did not have access to resources for transcriptions.

### **Data Analysis**

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed questions and answers to be centered on common categories and topics. The hand-written interview notes were read to identify categories and also to amend subsequent interview questions. Answers and explanations from the interviewees were summarized and noted under the category or overarching topic in which they fit. Important statements and messages were recorded verbatim, which were used for direct quotations later in the findings section. Importance was determined using the researcher's judgment, which allowed the researcher to code throughout the process. Rubin & Rubin (1995) state that in some instances it is adequate to document key points from interview tapes versus a full verbatim transcript. The detailed transcribed notes were then read to discover which themes emerged and the data was systematically coded into the themes. Axial coding takes place after open coding when common categories and subcategories have been identified. It is the process of looking for relationships between categories (Saunders et al., 2003). Axial coding was used in this process as some subthemes also emerged out of the themes. Microsoft Excel was used as a tool to manipulate the data to display the content of each of the interviews organized by themes.

### **iii. Focus Groups**

Focus groups were used to validate the findings from the one-on-one exploratory interviews and also to provide an additional layer of depth and insights to the research data and analysis (Saunders et al., 2003). A goal of group interviews or focus groups is to "let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of a problem emerges from a group discussion." (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.140). Although there was no guarantee before conducting the focus groups that it would yield such results, it was anticipated that focus groups would provide additional rigour to the research process through triangulation and depth.

Two focus groups were conducted with a co-facilitator, Eleonore Fournier-Tombs, after the completion of the one-on-one interviews. The co-facilitator is a graduate student at the University of London conducting research on a complementary topic of youth engagement in Canada. Contact was made between the researcher and Eleonore because of the similarity of their studies, and it was decided that collaboration when conducting the focus groups would be beneficial to this study. A select sample of themes that arose from the one-on-one interviews was presented to the focus groups in the form of open-ended questions. Based on the common themes

that arose from the interviews, the questions were framed in a way to gain further insights as to why those were issues. The discussion was unstructured, where the facilitators intervened only to ensure that everyone had opportunities to participate and to make clarifications when necessary. Out of the focus groups emerged complementary, but new, insights on the issues that were already being explored during the one-on-one interviews and this additional research strategy was very fruitful to this study. A list of the questions asked in the focus groups is included in Appendix C.

### **Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for the focus groups. Seven of the participants were young social entrepreneurs from the one-on-one interviews the remaining focus group participants were invited personally by the co-facilitators based on their backgrounds and areas of expertise in relation to the research question (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Saunders et al., 2003). Effort was made to ensure diversity of the participants, which ultimately led to a meaningful discussion and added an extra layer of depth to the existing analysis from the one-on-one interviews. Among both focus groups there were a total of 15 participants. The participants were social youth entrepreneurs themselves, worked in the area of youth engagement, organized programs and trainings that encourage young people to start their own community projects, and have had experience in funding and providing grants to youth-led programs.

Participant selection and attendance was limited by the geographic constraints of the cities in which the focus groups took place.

A full list of focus group participants and recruitment materials is in Appendix D.

### **Data Collection and Recording**

#### *Location*

The focus groups took place in Ottawa and Toronto, Ontario due to the feasibility for the researcher in hosting focus groups in these two cities and limited resources in securing focus group research opportunities in other additional cities. Effort was made to ensure the focus groups took place in a central and accessible location in the late-afternoon of a weeknight to accommodate work and personal schedules, thus ensuring maximum participation. The first focus group was held in Ottawa, Ontario on June 2, 2010 at the University of Ottawa and the second took place in Toronto, Ontario on June 7, 2010 at the MaRS Building.

#### *Recording*

Focus groups were not tape recorded. In contrast to the one-on-one interviews, issues and themes were discussed in a very broad manner, with no specific details or experiences cited. Therefore it was deemed that handwritten notes would suffice. Detailed notes were handwritten during the focus groups. Immediately after the focus groups, the notes were typed up and completed from memory. The typed up notes were then compared after each interview by both co-facilitators, ensuring completeness.

### **Data Analysis**

The purposes of the focus groups were to provide an extra layer of depth to the overall analysis from phase one of data analysis in addition for triangulation purposes which are discussed in the

following section. The questions asked at the focus groups were determined by the common themes that emerged from one-on-one interviews. The first focus group was used to inform the second focus group. One of the questions was changed for the second focus group, as the answers from the first focus group complemented the data already collected in phase one and it was deemed no additional value would be gained by asking that question again. Data gathered from the focus groups were included directly in the findings and used to enhance the analysis.

### **III. Validity and Biases**

#### **Consistency**

Based on an analysis of various literatures examining the differences of in-person versus telephone interviewing, Shuy (2002) examines the advantages and disadvantages of both types of interviewing methodologies. Understanding these discrepancies allowed the researcher to be more consistent when collecting and interpreting the information. Shuy states that in-person interviews more closely simulate everyday conversation, when compared to telephone interviews, and are more likely to be “mutually interactive” (2002, p.542). Telephone interviews in contrast are more likely to have an asymmetric feeling, because there are greater chances that power be undistributed equally. To avoid an asymmetrical relationship, in-person and more importantly over the telephone, the researcher made a conscious effort to make the conversation feel as natural as possible. A friendly introduction stating the context of the research was presented, standardized questions and uniformity were avoided when addressing each topic – all of which further facilitated a less rigid conversation.

Shuy also argues that in-person interviews can lead to “more thoughtful responses” (2002, p.453). In contrast to face-to-face interaction, the lack of visual signs by the researcher for the respondent to elaborate or clarify with telephone interviews may lead to incomplete information collected. To avoid this, telephone conversations made an attempt to take a slower pace, and for this study, the researcher was fully engaged in the conversation, perceptive to cues and communicated with summaries, clarification and effective follow-up questions. In this situation, the researcher’s familiarity served as an asset, as most follow-up questions came with ease and flowed well with the interview.

To further simulate the normalness of the interviews, so that they appeared more like a conversation rather than a rigid interview, the face-to-face interviews were tape-recorded so the researcher could maintain eye contact and engage with the participants in an interactive and more meaningful manner.

#### **Credibility of Researcher and Research to Participants**

“When relying on interviews as the primary data collection method, the issue of building trust between the researcher and the interviewees becomes very important” (Meyer, 2001). Trust was already established with participants who were directly within the researcher’s network, as a personal or professional relationship pre-existed before the research. Sponsorship was also a method used to gain trust with individuals outside of the researcher’s immediate network. Further, the Invitation to Participate (found in Appendix D) explained the importance of such research and its integrity and that also created a level of trust with the researcher and interviewer.

### **Researcher Bias**

The issue of potential bias must be addressed. The researcher is herself a youth social entrepreneur who initiated a social venture three ago. From a potential bias perspective, there was a risk that the author's personal experiences would influence the outcome of the findings. Conversely, the benefit of having direct exposure and experience with the demands and issues confronting the start-up of youth-initiated social ventures was invaluable for providing a relevant filter to the material being received directly from interview participants. Further, the researcher's knowledge in the area of research assisted in the establishment of credibility which can assist interviewees to provide more depth (Saunders et al, 2003). Thus, a tradeoff in methodology was struck. In order to provide balance to the potential for bias, methods of triangulation were undertaken for the research. The analysis is subject to the disciplines of objective and scientific research required of academic processes, and the rigorous methodology outlined below elaborates on the measures that have been taken to ensure the potential for bias is not reflected in the report, nor does it compromise the integrity of the research findings.

Johnson and Weller (2002) state that if researchers have prior knowledge on the topic that they will investigate, then they are likely to "overlook details" which are second nature to them (p.496). They go on to further stating the risks of a well-informed researcher of giving off the impression of already knowing the answers to the questions that they will ask, thus causing the participants to feel interrogated or tested. Understanding that a goal of qualitative interviewing and the success of this research was to "derive interpretations, not facts or laws" (Warren, 2002, p.83), conscience effort was made on the part of the researcher not to give off the impression of testing, but rather a sincere willingness to learn.

The focus groups were used as triangulation to validate the findings presented. Triangulation is employed to reduce misinterpretations and clarify meanings through the use of multiple perceptions (Stake, 2005). Among the participants were interviewees as well as other young social entrepreneurs who were not part of the study. Further, focus groups are often used for triangulation and in combination with other research techniques (Fontana and Frey, 2005).

### **Interviewee Bias**

Since one-on-one interviews were only conducted from the perspective of the founder of a social venture, and not other individuals involved during the start-up phase, there was a threat that the interviewee provided a "'partial' picture of the situation that casts himself or herself in a 'socially desirable' role" (Saunders et al., 2003). Prior to beginning each interview, the researcher spoke about the goal of this research and that in order to ensure the integrity of the findings that it be important that the participants be as open and honest as possible. The researcher reassured the participants that all quotations or direct references to the participants themselves or their social ventures would be verified and vetted by them before they were written in the report or that any sensitive information would be included anonymously, thus adding an extra layer of trust between the researcher and the participants. It was anticipated that this increased level of trust translated into more openness and honesty during the interview process. The researcher's pre-existing knowledge and experience in the area of youth social entrepreneurship was used as a filter or to probe effective follow-up questions to deal with obvious biases or misrepresentation of facts as they occurred. Triangulation and group interviews were used to validate the findings to overcome this potential issue in data quality.

## **IV. Strengths and Limitations of Chosen Methodology**

### **Strengths**

Since research seeks to understand the start-up phase of youth-initiated social ventures, understanding this process from the participant's perspective was integral to the quality of this research and was easily collected through qualitative sources. Qualitative research was also beneficial when discovering new areas of research, and since there is very little literature on this topic, exploration was necessary.

Of most qualitative methodologies, grounded theory appeared to be appropriate for its rigour and in the context of this type of research as well. Grounded theory is said to be “the most widely used qualitative interpretive framework in the social sciences today” (Denzin, 1994, p.508 quoted from Thomas & James, 2006, p.768). Charmaz states that “a grounded theory interview can be viewed as an unfolding story. It is emergent although studied and shaped. It is open-ended but framed and focused. It is intense in content yet informal in execution – conversational in style but not casual in meaning” (2002, p.690). This study conducted interviews in such a manner.

In addition, multiple research methods were used in this study, allowing the research to triangulate and improving the rigour of the findings.

### **Limitations**

Since a snowballing technique was used to gather participants, it is possible that the findings were skewed as participants may be more likely to refer individuals that think similarly to them (Saunders et al., 2003). Acknowledging this limitation, the researcher used at most only one recommendation from each participant.

The interviewer and interviewee biases noted above were limitations to this study. The researcher was fully aware of these biases and ensured that all necessary steps were taken to preserve the integrity of the study.

Data from focus groups may have been skewed as the “emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression or groupthink” (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p.705). To address this issue, two focus groups took place with different participants and the use of two co-facilitators minimized one participant dominating the entire discussion. In-fact, there were a few debates that arose and instances where participants disagreed from one another during the focus groups. And although the discussions were different, for one of the questions asked, both focus groups came to very similar conclusions.

Strict generalizability was not possible, as a representative sample was not used (a limitation of qualitative research) (Saunders et al., 2003). Moreover, the results gathered from focus groups cannot be generalized across the entire population at stake (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Since representation or presenting solutions was not the goal, but rather to present different factors associated with how to start-up a youth-based social venture, strict generalizability was not important in this research.

## V. Confidence in Methodology

A combination of exploratory interviewing and focus groups based on concepts of grounded theory and a literature scan was used to explore and better understand the initiation of youth-run social ventures. Results are more likely to be ‘fresh and interesting’ when there is flexibility in the research design (Rubin et al., 1995), such as the one that was used in this study.

Qualitative interviewing as the primary instrument for data collection was chosen over survey or questionnaire due to the importance of establishing personal contact. Survey research ‘standardizes questions and responses so that there is little room for individual voice (p.32) and can omit the ‘detail and richness of individual behaviour’ (Rubin et al., 1995, p.34). Since participants were often reflecting on their past events or emotions experienced during the start-up phase of their social ventures, an oral interview was better able to facilitate reflection over writing, which would have been found in surveys. Additionally, when questions are complex or open-ended, interviewing is more advantageous when compared to other approaches (Saunders et al., 2003). Observation was not possible either, as most participants were asked to reflect on the past and also due to the nature of this cross-section study which focused uniquely on the start-up phase.

This research did not ask for conclusions, but rather key themes that emerged, therefore issues of generalizability were not applicable in this situation. Given the strengths and mechanisms used to address limitations that were noted above, the researcher is confident in the rigour of the chosen research methodologies for this study.

## Participants

It is understood that leadership is unique, and that “leaders come in many forms, with many styles and diverse qualities. There are quiet leaders and leaders one can hear in the next country. Some find strength in eloquence, some in judgment, some in courage” (Gardner, 1990, 5). Accordingly, a large effort was made to identify a diverse sample of youth social entrepreneurs as part of this study.

The following is a list of all of the participants with whom in-depth interviews were conducted. Included is the name of their social venture along with its year and location of inception and a brief description of the activities and or mission of the social ventures during their start-up phase. It should be noted that the locations, scope and missions of most of these social ventures have since changed.

### **Jamie Arron**

*Mavericks of Social Change (MSC)*

Inception: 2007 - Halifax, Nova Scotia

MSC works with students (ages 10-19) to encourage leadership skills, community exploration and civic engagement, self motivation, creativity, and personal resilience. MSC’s first project placed high school co-op students with meaningful placements in the community.

**Samira Ahmed**

*For Youth by Youth News (FYBY News)*

Inception: 2007 - Ottawa, Ontario

Operating under the umbrella of Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa, FYBY News started with a team of 25 volunteers to provide youth in the city of Ottawa access to information and news that was relevant to them using online multimedia tools.

**Ryan Aldred**

*Canadian International Learning Foundation (CanILF)*

Inception: 2006 - Ottawa, Ontario

CanILF started as a one-time project to fund a school in Kandahar, Afghanistan and has since grown into a charity providing scholarships, educational equipment and training overseas to partner schools in areas affected by war, illness and poverty.

**Keleigh Annau**

*Lights Out Canada*

Inception: 2005 - Parksville, British Columbia

Lights Out was founded by Keleigh at the age of 16 as a national event during which schools turned out their lights and followed lesson plans provided on climate change and how youth can effect positive change.

**Dev Aujla**

*Dream Now*

Inception: 2003 - Toronto, Ontario

Dream Now started as a peer-to-peer mentorship program, which evolved into an organization that provided conference follow-up support to other nonprofit organizations.

**Kehinde Bah**

*The Remix Project*

Inception: 2006 - Toronto, Ontario

The Remix Project was co-founded with two other young males is a 6 month incubator program in Toronto helping youth launch an entrepreneurial career in the urban arts.

**Megan Beaudoin**

*iUnique Initiative*

Inception: 2008 - Halifax, Nova Scotia

iUnique was founded by Megan with the goal of creating a space where her peers can open up and talk. Their first projects included “wii are unique lunches” which were lunch-time activities at a learning centre integrating high school students with kids with learning and physical disabilities. First major event was the organization of iUnique Day which gathered students in their auditorium to have a safe space for sharing their stories; where they could choose to express the challenges they were facing in their life.

**Graeme Berglund**

*The Cheaper Show*

Inception: 2001 - Vancouver, British Columbia

The Cheaper Show was co-founded by three working artists as an alternative platform to make art accessible to 'everyday' viewers and provide a platform for local artists to showcase their work in a fun and relaxed environment.

**David Berkal**

*Operation Groundswell*

Inception: 2006 - Toronto, Ontario

Operation Groundswell was co-founded with another individual to facilitate meaningful overseas volunteer placements for students at a reasonable cost.

**Amelia Clarke**

*Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC)*

Inception: 1996 - Ottawa, Ontario

After witnessing the collapse of failed attempts at creating a nation-wide youth environmental group, and seeing the need for such a group, Amelia chose to embed SYC in the Sierra Club of Canada when she founded Canada's largest and longest standing national youth environmental group. SYC engages Canadian youth in pressing environmental and sustainability issues.

**Jennifer Corriero**

*TakingITGlobal (TIG)*

Inception: 2000 - Toronto, Ontario

TIG was co-founded with another youth as an online platform that connects young people internationally to find information, access information, get involved and take action in their local and global communities.

**Caustan De Riggs**

*International Conference on Green Entrepreneurship (ICGE)*

Inception: 2007 - Waterloo, Ontario

ICGE merges environmental sustainability, economic development and innovation for achieving sustainable development in the Caribbean region. First conference was held in Grenada, through the collaboration of the academic community, student leaders, industry experts, and government.

**Iona Dougherty**

*Apathy is Boring (A is B)*

Inception: 2004 - Montreal, Québec

Founded by three youth, A is B's first project was a national campaign to get youth to vote during the federal election. Wanting to combine art with social change, A is B innovated by getting artists onboard with their campaigns.

**Dave Farthing**

*YOU CAN*

Inception: 1997 - Ottawa, Ontario

Initiated as a national organization to empower and train young people to deal with conflict resolution among their peers. First set of activities included hosting training and youth facilitation sessions in schools and at conferences.

**Alysia Garmulewicz**

*Changing Climates Educational Society*

Inception: 2004 - Vancouver, British Columbia

Changing Climates Educational Society's first project was the organizing of a national youth conference to provide participants with the skills, motivation and ideas to be engaged with climate change.

**Wojciech Gryc**

*Five Minutes to Midnight*

Inception: 2003 - Thornhill, Ontario

From a blog, Five Minutes to Midnight quickly evolved into a monthly online magazine to discuss issues of human rights.

**Taylor Gunn and Lindsay Mazzucco**

*Student Vote*

Inception: 2003 - Toronto, Ontario

Inspired out of the obvious need to get younger Canadians engaged in the electoral process, Student Vote had over 335,000 kids participate in student vote ballots in their elementary and high schools across Ontario.

**Kunal Gupta**

*Impact Entrepreneurship Group (Impact)*

Inception: 2004 - Waterloo, Ontario

Impact was co-founded with six University of Waterloo students wanting to get their peers engaged in entrepreneurship. Their first project was a conference.

**Martin Hui**

*Richmond Youth Foundation*

Inception: 2006 - Richmond, British Columbia

Under the umbrella of the Richmond Foundation, the Richmond Youth Foundation operates autonomously to work specifically to build capacities among youth and provides an avenue to apply for grants in an accessible manner. First year activities included fundraising for the endowment fund and hosting a conference for youth in the Lower Mainland.

**Chris Kang**

*Students without Borders (SWB)*

Inception: 2003 - Montreal, Canada

Founded with two other adults, the goal of SWB was to provide more meaningful and hands-on learning experiences for young people. Organized trips overseas with local partner organizations, but has since evolved into an organization supporting youth-led initiatives in various capacities.

**Nejeed Kassam**

*End Poverty Now (EPN)*

Inception: 2006 - Montreal, Québec

As a follow-up to the Make Poverty History Campaign, EPN started as a nonprofit organization to engage Canadians in issues around poverty in the developing world through projects and educational research.

**Jessica Lax**

*The Otesha Project (Otesha)*

Inception: 2003 - Ottawa, Ontario

Co-founded with another young female, Otesha's first activity was a cross-Canada bike tour with stops in multiple cities along the way engaging over 12,000 young Canadians that local and global change can be led through individual and collective choices.

**Damien Lee**

*Anishinabek Gitchi Gami Environmental Programs (AGG)*

Inception: 2005 - Fort William First Nation, Ontario

Six years after the idea of creating an NGO and a mission to acquire the necessary skills, Damien initiated Ontario's first environmental NGO within a First nation's community to address the issues of environmental racism among other activities.

**Claudia Li**

*Shark Truth*

Inception: Winter 2009 - Vancouver, British Columbia

Started as an idea, Shark Truth engages in advocacy to curb consumer consumption of an endangered animal.

**Mike Maurice**

*Sustainable Waterloo*

Inception: 2008 - Waterloo, Ontario

Co-founded with a classmate after a research project, Sustainable Waterloo works with local businesses to voluntarily reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to getting signatories, first major activity was hosting an educational forum on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Candice McBeath**

### *Ubuntu*

Inception: 2006 - North Bay, Ontario

After having spent considerable amount of time in Africa and being exposed to issues of poverty first-hand, Candice co-founded Ubuntu with three other adults to create projects one at a time and work with local communities in Africa to implement them.

## **Greg Overholt**

### *Students Offering Support (SOS)*

Inception: 2005 - Waterloo, Ontario

SOS started at Wilfred Laurier University with students teaching tutorials in math and computer science to other students as a fundraising mechanism to fund education projects in Latin America.

## **Ben Peterson**

### *Journalists for Human Rights (jhr)*

Inception: 2005 - Toronto, Ontario

jhr was co-founded with another youth at the time with the vision that the media can be used as a tool to educate locals about human rights abuses to stop the cycle. jhr trained journalists to report on human rights abuses in Ghana as their first project.

## **Rosie Pidcock**

### *Chasing Sustainability*

Inception: 2008 - Vancouver, British Columbia

Operating under the Commerce Undergraduate Society, Chasing Sustainability started with a speaker session on business and sustainability geared at business undergraduate students. They also worked with the University's administration to alter the curriculum to add courses on sustainability.

## **Amanda Reaume**

### *Antigone Foundation*

Inception: 2006 - Vancouver, British Columbia

Antigone was initiated with a co-founder as a university based publication to encourage young women to get involved in politics in Canada.

## **George Roter**

### *Engineers without Borders (EWB)*

Inception: 2000 - Toronto, Ontario

Co-founded with a fellow engineering graduate, EWB started with ideas of how engineering students can help build capacity in the technical sectors of developing communities, among other activities. EWB engages students in Canada about global issues and facilitates overseas volunteer placements.

**Saeed Selvam**

*Change 12*

Inception: 2006 - Toronto, Ontario

Change12 works towards motivating individuals who are not socially involved, by giving young people a voice on social issues. First set of projects were carried out in communities in Toronto.

**Chris Siu**

*UBC Agapé Street Missions (Agapé)*

Inception: 2006 - Vancouver, British Columbia

Agapé initially went to the West End and downtown core of Vancouver to give homeless sandwiches, but soon took a break from campus activities and recruiting new students to re-evaluate the purpose of the work they were carrying out. A year later they engaged with other students to visit the homeless population and build relations with them.

**Besma Soltan**

*SPEAKout*

Inception: Summer 2009 - South-Eastern Ontario

Co-founded with a group of youth after an unsuccessful attempt of getting a radio show off the ground, a spoken word competition was organized as a means for individuals to express themselves and discuss social issues.

**Norma-Jean Thompson**

*Young Women in Business (YWiB)*

Inception: 2007 - Vancouver, British Columbia

YWiB is a network of female business students and recent graduates. The Beyond Pink conference was organized to launch the network and was its first major event.

**Assaf Weisz**

*Young Social Entrepreneurs of Canada (YSEC)*

Inception: 2008 - Toronto, Ontario

Co-founded with 5 other youth, YSEC provides a network and training for young social entrepreneurs and aims to promote social entrepreneurship as a viable career choice.

**Annabel Wong**

*Africa Canada Accountability Coalition (ACAC)*

Inception: 2008 - Vancouver, British Columbia

Co-founded with three other students, ACAC conducts and connects sound research with their advocacy efforts to inform Canadians at all levels the importance of accountable and responsible relationships between The Great Lakes region of Africa and Canada.

**Andrea Zammit**

*Grassroots Youth Collaborative (GYC)*

Inception: 2004 - Toronto, Ontario

Andrea was a founding member of the GYC, a youth-led collaborative bringing youth organizers from across the City of Toronto together within to share resources, form a support network and carry out advocacy work on behalf of other youth organizers in the city of Toronto.

### 3. Summary and Analysis of Findings

From the interviews and focus groups conducted, eight overarching categories emerged: the background of the young social entrepreneur (I), the idea of the social venture itself (II), networks (III), funding (IV), the youth-specific factors (V), collaboration (VI), the importance of luck and timing (VII) and finally the issue of socio-economic background (VIII). Under each category emerged a series of sub-themes which is detailed in each section. It is important to note that each of these categories is closely interlinked and not mutually exclusive. Nor do they link in a linear fashion.

Different factors leading to youth engagement in social entrepreneurship are presented throughout this section. This study intends to present the different factors that are involved in the creation of youth-initiated social ventures in an acutely exploratory manner. The factors contributing to the emergence of social entrepreneurs were not compared against each other, as there was no standardized measure in determining success or if one social venture was better than another. Each social venture was not evaluated for its social impact, its ability to deliver on its mission, or the effectiveness of its programs. Future research should consider the actual impact and success of youth-initiated social ventures.

#### I. Background

The participants were all at different stages of their development and came from a variety of backgrounds (with respect to education and relevant experiences) prior to starting their social ventures. This section highlights the different types of academic education and training received by the study participants and the importance and influence of such training for youth when initiating their social ventures.

##### Academic Education

The spectrum of formal education and schooling received prior to starting their social ventures is quite vast. It spans from a Grade ten education to the completion of a post-graduate degree. Most participants were undergraduate students or had just completed their undergraduate degrees at the time of starting their venture. Based on this data, no links were made between the level of formal education with the size, scope or mission of the social ventures or personal characteristics of the young social entrepreneurs.

Some individuals acknowledged the importance of their education in the process of helping them initiate their social ventures. Certain individuals who took post-secondary courses in the social sciences cited the value of their education in framing the ideologies and rationales behind their social movements and ventures. For example, the social venture *Africa Canada Accountability Coalition (ACAC)* was born out of an academic research project. The team came together to work on a group assignment on the Democratic Republic of Congo and as a result were then inspired to create an organization to address the issues they had studied as part of this project. This is also exemplified by the founders of *Engineers without Borders (EWB)*. After receiving their engineering degrees, the graduates were inspired to use their engineering skills in a more meaningful way, by working towards solutions that would alleviate poverty.

For those participants who had started a project in an area wherein they had minimal training or theoretical grounding, self-teaching was the commonality. They conducted research and consulted with people in the space who were knowledgeable about their areas of interest, while others recruited a team of volunteers with the skills and knowledge that they were lacking. When asked about the importance of their academic training, among the entire sample, most participants made no mention of the correlation between their educational training and the construction of their social ventures.

A major challenge in the start-up phase noted by some participants was not having the basic business management skills and understanding of budgeting, cash flow management, and managing people when starting their projects. It was a difficult challenge to overcome. For example when Ilona Dougherty, founder of *Apathy is Boring* was asked how she overcame this significant challenge, she responded simply by saying it was result of “trial and error.”

Amongst the participants less than 15% completed or were in the process of completing business degrees. When asked to correlate the importance of their business training to their social pursuits, participants cited the overall effectiveness of acquiring skills such as organization development, the creation of business plans and marketing principles. However Jennifer Corriero acknowledged the importance of adding interdisciplinary courses, as she cited that “taking an exclusively focused business degree was too narrow for my interests so having an interdisciplinary approach allowed me to gain a well-rounded perspective which was just as important.” Two participants who were students at the University of British Columbia’s Sauder School of Business at the outset of their projects noted the importance of the “environment [and] not the classes” (Norma-Jean Thompson). Student Rosie Pidcock explained that “the environment at Sauder is entrepreneurial and encouraging of students creating their own initiatives.” The support received from academic institutions will be further explored in Section III: Networks.

## **Training and Experiences**

### *Leadership training programs and Conferences*

Leadership development programs aimed to support youth in strengthening leadership skills such as Shad Valley, Junior Team Canada and Next Up, to cite a few examples, in addition to various types of conferences were all mentioned as important training by the young social entrepreneurs who referenced their participation in these activities. The value attributed to some of these programs included skills acquisition such as leadership, confidence building, networking, facilitation, project management, in addition to broadening of their personal network; all of which were useful when starting their social ventures.

When Wojciech Gryc attended Shad Valley, he was given the confidence and encouragement to develop his hobby of an online blog reporting on issues of human rights into an actual organization with ongoing publications. His venture began with the creation of a business plan which was followed by the acquisition of external funding – something, he believes he may not have considered if his Residence Advisor at Shad Valley did not encourage him to do so.

Similarly, Claudia Li participated in the Next Up program after her idea for *Shark Truth* was born. She expressed that participating in this program was particularly valuable once she had a

tangible idea in her head, as she was able to focus all of the seminars and trainings directly on building up *Shark Truth*. These thoughts were echoed by participants in one of the focus groups who spoke about the value of programs and conferences as a vision refocus and a means to leverage experiences in a very tangible way; when there is already an idea on the table.

On the other hand, some participants noted their participation in such programs as the igniter to starting a social venture. Keleigh Annau attended an environmental conference at the age of sixteen and was so inspired by her surroundings that she decided immediately thereafter that she wanted to embark on a national activism initiative in order to address the issues of Climate Change. Coming from a small city on Vancouver Island, Keleigh explains that she “didn’t come from a background that would give [me] the experience in the field that I was looking to go into.”

#### *Previous Leadership/Development Experiences*

It is equally important to highlight the extent to which most participants were involved in extra-curricular or other community and leadership-building activities prior to starting their social ventures. A majority of the participants noted that they were involved in activities such as student government, organizers of on-campus and community activities and events, leaders of various activism groups, and sat on youth advisory boards of established nonprofit organizations. All of these experiences were cited as having a direct relationship to helping build confidence and gain the skills needed when starting their projects such as communication, time management, project management, organizing people.

Assaf Weisz noted the value gained as a camp director provided him “real leadership opportunities with real consequences.” The link he made of being forced to be accountable for the camp kids when guiding them on camp excursions into the forest prepared him for what to expect when starting YSEC and being accountable to various stakeholders.

In 1998, Damien Lee had the idea of starting an organization to address the issues of environmental racism faced in his community of Fort William First Nation. Recognizing that an environmental NGO had never been established in this community and the sensitivities around the creation of a new entity that worked beyond the control of the Band Office, he felt the need to build a ‘toolbox of skills’ before initiating anything in his community. For the next seven years he went out on a mission to learn from established environmental NGOs: both the hard management skills and as well the activist and ideological understanding of working within indigenous governance structures while working outside of the state-imposed administrative structure known as the Band Office. Seven years later, when he felt confident in his abilities and felt the community was ready for such an organization he went back to his home, bringing those new skills and experiences to create the *Anishinabek Gitchi Gami Environmental Programs (AGG)*.

Participants who had previous employment or co-op work terms made references to the skills and training gained from those jobs as beneficial in helping them with their social ventures.

## **Discussion**

In some situations, education can be beneficial as a trigger or provide the inspiration of starting a social venture. Education also provides the technical and ideological skills necessary to get an idea off the ground, however for those without education in specific skills were able to self-teach themselves.

Gary Alpert a young entrepreneur who co-founded Wet Feet Press at a young age said “every single thing about the way we started a company was totally opposite of the way they taught us to do it in business school” (cited in Lieber, 1998, p.9). Many of the other young entrepreneurs surveyed had similar comments in regards to pursuing a Masters in Business Administration (MBA). There were some young entrepreneurs who did not underestimate the importance of traditional business education as a factor in the successful establishment of their businesses (Lieber, 1998). A study was conducted by Wilson and Larson (2002) with 2000 students in the United States who took graduate and certificate programs in nonprofit management to determine their reasons for enrolling in such specialized courses. Of those surveyed, the majority were placed for careers as managers within established nonprofit organizations, but not necessarily as social entrepreneurs – or initiators of new organizations. In keeping with this finding, the training and skills that are found among young individuals from this study wishing to start a social venture are not necessarily from traditional academic means.

Although formal management training is useful and beneficial for young social entrepreneurs, it is not necessary for youth wishing to initiate their own social ventures. Rather, experiential learning and acquiring the necessary skills by action is integral. A key component of effective youth entrepreneurship training programs includes the use of experiential methods (Kapitsa, 2002; Kerka, 2005).

Similarly to academic training, in most cases training programs and participation in conferences is not necessary for a young person to launch a social venture either. The individual must be a self-directed learner. There are endless numbers of skills that are needed when starting a social venture and it is unreasonable to expect an individual to be adept in all of them before embarking on their social venture, especially if this is the first big project that they are initiating. They must also be willing to train themselves and have that ability to acquire skills and know how to apply new knowledge without expecting that it be ‘handed to them.’

Formal programs could be beneficial and necessary in the cases where they make the participants aware of, or boost, their confidence. This self-realization can enable them to seriously consider or actively pursue their desires of a starting a social venture. Training can also create an environment where motivation is ignited. These thoughts were echoed in the literature of traditional youth entrepreneurship (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, 2000).

However, recognizing that there is a high failure rate among young entrepreneurs and small businesses, education does have a role to play when preparing individuals to effectively manage their organizations (Kerka, 2005). It is important for the young social entrepreneurs to be self-aware of their capacities and realistic in evaluating what additional skills/knowledge need to be acquired prior to starting their social ventures. Although ‘learning by doing’ is expected and will

happen regardless, prior to ‘doing’, entrepreneurs must be aware of their limitations and pragmatically evaluate what needs to be acquired to overcome those limitations.

## **II. Idea**

All of the young social entrepreneurs interviewed in this study were able to identify an unmet need in society and had the desire to commit to working towards addressing these needs. When examining the idea, this section looks into the inspiration behind the social venture and the initial vision.

### **Inspiration**

There were many different sources of inspiration behind the vision of the social ventures presented in this study. For individuals who were previously involved in their communities some felt a desire to do something more and scale up their activities. Others wanted to create a social venture that was inspired by their personal desires; something they wished they had in their previous endeavours. These were social ventures that provide support to youth wishing to start projects, or build skills in certain capacities. Additionally, there were individuals who were never previously involved in the communities, but when a need became apparent - it was so obvious that something needed to be done – that that was their inspiration.

Some people experienced a life-changing or significant experience, after which they were forced to change their ways of thinking in a very short period of time to see social issues in a different light. An overseas development placement in Africa was a commonly cited example of an instigator or what one participant called “a lightning bolt.”

A few participants were reflecting on social issues at the time, however once they saw a similar model of what they were trying to achieve elsewhere – that was used as the inspiration. In Graeme Berglund’s case, it was the motivation for him to say “it showed us it can’t be that tough” when he saw a similar art show in London, UK during his travels.

The media is often used to disseminate stories of social relevance. Participants were inspired to look into a social issue that they were otherwise unaware of after reading an article in the newspaper and looking at a documentary film – and spearhead causes related to those issues.

One participant cited Jim Collins’ hedgehog concept, where “it all came together.” The hedgehog concept adapted to the social sector states that there are three elements that must converge together for an organization to produce long term results:

1. Something that you are deeply passionate about;
2. The value that you can uniquely contribute better than any existing organization;
3. The resources you have that will drive the idea (Collins, 2005).

Using these three elements, the participant involved discovered that her interests and passion could provide value to others and that she had the resources (time, emotional commitment and heart). When these three elements converged, it felt right for her to go ahead and do it. Other participants noted that there was no-one particular instigator, but after a series of events or reflections their idea of their social ventures became clear. At that particular moment in time

when it all came together, that was when they decided to take action and commit themselves to the cause.

### **Vision**

Once the need was clear, the young social entrepreneurs identified their visions. The vision was a powerful tool to translate the idea into a tangible social action. The variety in visions was almost as diverse as the sources of inspiration listed above.

Some young social entrepreneurs started with very broad visions. They had grand ideas, lofty goals and big ambitions of where they wanted to take their projects. Of those who started with very broad visions and ambitious goals most of them had to readjust these to reflect the realities in front of them, in terms of what they were able to accomplish. Regardless, they were still happy that they had big goals. One participant referenced Brian Littrell's famous quote: "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars."

Some participants had large one-time visions, but initially never had intentions of continuing their activities or scaling them up even further beyond the execution of their one-time event or project. Other social ventures started with small visions as a small project or with the intention of being a one-time event and as momentum built they slowly evolved their vision into a larger one. In such instances they described that their vision grew in a very organic process. *End Poverty Now* started with a philosophy. The vision of the young social entrepreneurs associated with this venture consisted of figuring out their approach and values in relation to ending poverty. Based on those values they then sought out projects to fit their philosophy.

### **Discussion**

Each individual's story is unique and the process of identifying a need and deciding to act on it was a very personal decision for everyone – it is however important to be aware that the inspiration came from varied different sources and that it is a personal journey for each individual. Everyone was inspired in some way to create something new. What was clear and evident across the board was the passion that everyone had for their causes. Not only were they able to identify an unmet social need, passion was an essential ingredient in pursuing that need. As will be discovered throughout this report, there are a series of tasks that need to be done, skills that need to be acquired and a tremendous amount of dedication and personal sacrifice on the part of the founder in the process of creating a social venture. Since financial return was not a driving force, as we would see in traditional entrepreneurial ventures (Mars, 2009), passion is an integral factor for all young social entrepreneurs that were examined during this study in the creation of their social ventures.

Participation in conferences and being exposed to different experiences, including international travel also fostered youth-led innovation as such experiences forced individuals to look at situations in a new light and challenged their current models of thinking (Cimone, 2009; Sebba et al., 2009). For the young social entrepreneurs, these experiences allowed them to see other possibilities which encouraged them to pursue something they would have otherwise never have thought.

Among the sample of the participants, all of those who desired to make their social ventures national from the start had large visions. Canada is a geographically large country; therefore it requires more resources to reach across 9.9 million square kilometers. In such situations, ambition was undoubtedly a common characteristic among those young social entrepreneurs.

### **III. Networks**

This section is divided into three parts. The first part describes the physical network, explaining where networks originated from and how new networks were formed and expanded. The second part discusses the value given to the social ventures and the importance of its network in the building of the social venture. Finally, the third part examines the value given specifically to the young social entrepreneurs from certain individuals within their networks, which in turn helped build a stronger social venture.

#### **a. Physical Network**

Individuals within a young social entrepreneur's network were of benefit both internally (building human resources) and externally (through funding and external support) to the social venture. All social ventures however started with the founder's pre-existing networks and with the new networks that the founder created for the support of the social venture.

#### **Pre-existing networks**

Each young social entrepreneur had a different pre-existing network depending on the type of work and interactions they had prior to starting their social ventures. Figure 6 is a compilation of the different types of individuals that the young social entrepreneurs had in their existing networks and also a reference point of places to look when creating new networks.

Having individuals in a young social entrepreneur's network was not enough for the network to have 'social capital' and be of value to the social venture. Adopting the definitions noted in the literature review in Chapter One above, social capital refers to the individuals within a network that are of value to the social venture and are willing to contribute their resources, whether it be time, money or access to their networks.

Tactics that the young social entrepreneurs used to reach out to individuals in their pre-existing networks and turn them into social capital included:

- Presenting their ideas or selling their vision to get people excited.
- Asking people for advice. Asking people for advice allowed for these people to have a sense of ownership and say in the project which further encouraged them to stay involved. Additionally, it is a good gateway to ask for referrals.
- Leveraging their existing networks, such as mailing lists to reach out further, and find relevant connections.

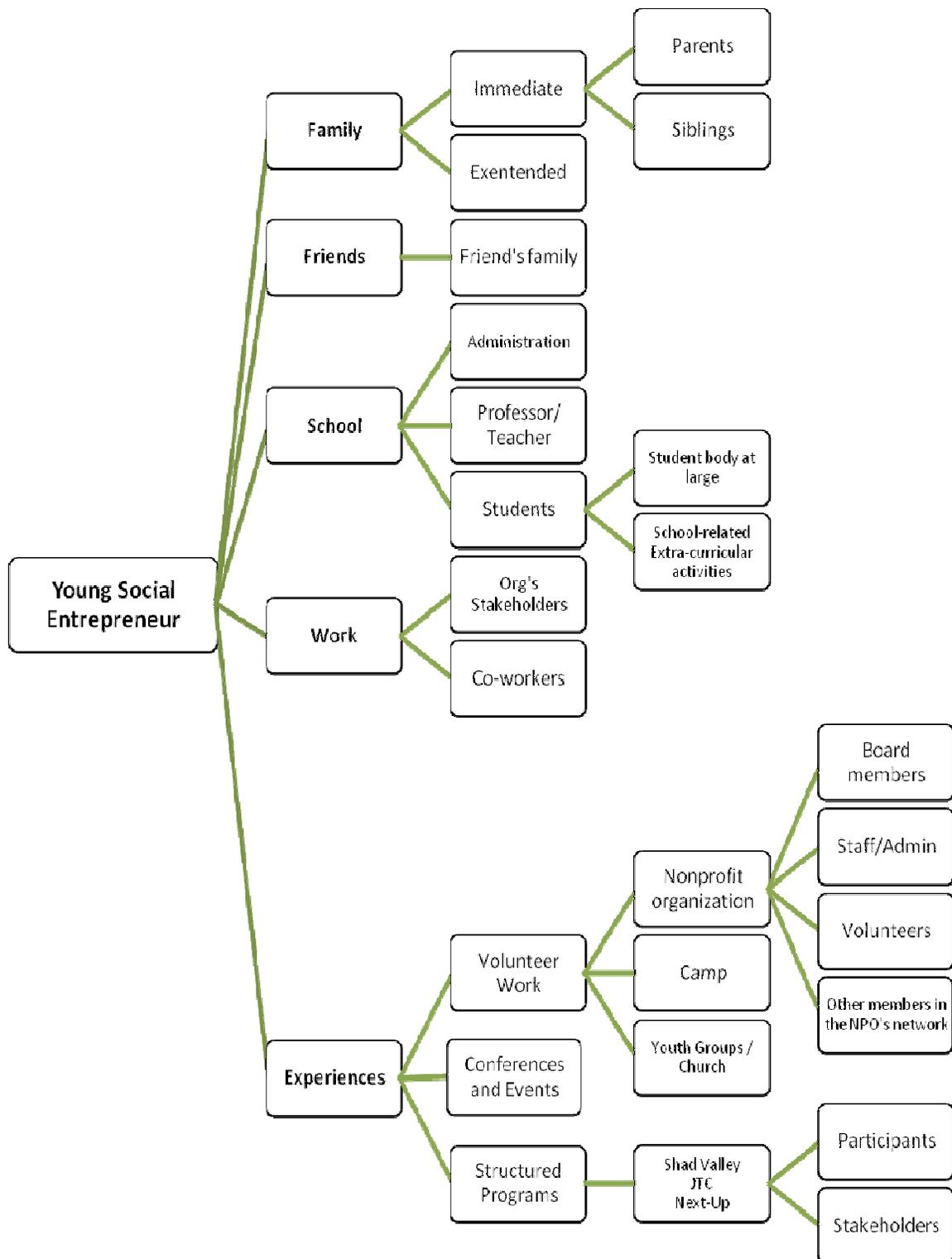


Figure 6: Examples of individuals within a young social entrepreneur's immediate network

## **Creating new networks**

In addition to their pre-existing networks, all young social entrepreneurs needed to reach out to individuals outside of their immediate networks in order to get the social capital required to get their ideas up off the ground.

### *Through pre-existing networks*

Most often, new networks were created by an introduction from someone known within their existing network. In such cases, these connections were known to have two degrees of separation. Once the connection was made, the young social entrepreneur was required to take the initiative to make that connection valuable by using the same approaches of reaching out noted above.

### *Completely new networks*

Although it was much more common to create networks through a pre-existing network, it was still possible to do so with complete strangers. Among the participants, complete strangers most often participated as donors, volunteers, connectors, advisors and spokespeople – however not as mentors. More on mentorship will be elaborated later in this section.

Physical participation at conferences and events was cited as the most common way for the young social entrepreneurs to make meaningful new connections. When they went to events or conferences, they would make a point to speak with as many people as possible, asked questions during Q&A's, and consistently made reference to their social ventures or ideas when talking with people.

Social ventures that hosted panel discussions essentially created a platform through those events that allowed them to reach out to people and had more success in building networks as they had some value to offer the panelists or individuals that came out to attend the events.

A founding member of the *SPEAKout* team said “we were speaking about SPEAKout,” as a tactic employed to get their name out there and expand their network. Many other young social entrepreneurs said they reached out to networks or organizations doing similar activities, and spoke to everyone they met about their social ventures.

Cold calls and cold emails were a commonly employed strategy. Although extremely intimidating and challenging at first, through time and experience, the young social entrepreneurs were effective in pitching and selling their ideas to complete strangers to either get their advice or get them engaged as a stakeholder to the social venture. Cold calls and emails were most often used strategically however. Due to the time intensity of reaching out to new people, only individuals who would have an interest in the social venture and of whose advice would be valued were contacted.

Although the role of the media and the level of media attention received was not a topic asked to the participants many made reference to press coverage as a positive catalyst during their social ventures' start-up phase. The media and press coverage was used to gather support and expand their social ventures' networks by getting their name out there, building donor confidence and credibility. Building credibility was very important when attracting new individuals to their

networks and trust that they were legitimate causes. With the exception of one participant from a first nation's community, all participants whose social ventures originated in cities with population of less than one million made reference to the media. Participants from larger cities did make reference to the media, however not all of them.

Online media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and online portals were leveraged to expand the social venture's network, as they have far reach and are inexpensive. These were very common tools for social ventures who were started within the past few years only however. The *CanILF* for example put a call out for volunteers on Charity Village, an online portal and was able to get an overwhelmingly positive response and now have volunteers all across North America.

### *Relationship Building*

One thing to note about networks and the individuals who may cross the young social entrepreneur's path is the importance of relationship building. Building a network is one issue, however maintaining it is a completely different issue. When reflecting on one of his biggest learning experiences in hindsight, eight years after co-founding *StudentVote*, Taylor Gunn wished he had held onto more relationships. When advising other young social entrepreneurs, he said "have coffee more than once...and have more than coffee." Although relationships were typically built beyond the start-up phase for ongoing and continual support, the young social entrepreneurs noted the importance of building relationships in the start-up phase for future benefits down the road.

### **b. Value to the Social Venture**

The founder's networks provided tremendous value to social ventures and without networks, none of the social ventures would have existed. This sub-section provides a high-level overview of the value of the social capital in the networks. The individuals and social capital listed below was necessary in order to access and obtain funding to carry out the social venture's activities. In addition to funding help, they were also valuable in many other capacities.

### *Core team and Volunteers*

Although the focus of this report is on the young social entrepreneur, the value and importance of the social ventures' core team of volunteers during its inception phase was imperative in the creation of the social venture and cannot be ignored. It is beyond the scope of this report to examine in detail the role played by the core team of volunteers, however in brief all social entrepreneurs made reference to their co-founders or core team of volunteer in getting the social ventures off the ground. Similarly to the founder; the manpower, thinking and access to networks provided by members of the core team were integral to getting the social ventures off the ground.

### *Boards*

A formal Board of Advisors was often created and publicized by young social ventures to gain credibility when first starting up. In such cases, the advisors were used in a very ornamental fashion, where their names were leveraged by the young social entrepreneurs to gain the support needed to push forward.

A Board of Directors is a legal requirement with incorporated not-for-profit corporations and charitable organizations. A Board of Directors is the governing body of the organizations and is

in place to ensure transparency and accountability in the daily operations of the organization (Industry Canada, 2002). Among the participants that were legally incorporated, very few of them made reference to having a formal Board of Directors. In the case that there were external directors, they were used in an ornamental fashion similarly to an advisory board. Either their names were used as credibility or the directors' networks were leveraged directly to expand the social venture's social capital.

In-fact, one social venture that had a formal Board of Directors from the start, which caused so many problems to the social venture that were no longer of value to the social venture. Members of the board had very different visions of how they wanted to see the organization go and fundamentally did not respect the youth-staff and their visions. The Board eventually resigned. Effective board management is an ongoing challenge among many incorporated social ventures and is beyond the scope of this report. However to reiterate the thoughts of many participants, not having a formal Board of Directors in the early days was beneficial to their social ventures, as it allowed them the autonomy to carve their path and deliver on their vision without being influenced negatively by 'outsiders'. For some participants who started their social ventures under an existing organization, they petitioned to have youth representation on the Boards.

#### *Supporters*

Individuals external to the organization were also valuable in supporting the social venture. This included individuals who came out to events, were spokespeople and cheerleaders for the cause, and provided access to their networks. Supporters that were external to the social venture were often cited in helping to expand their networks.

#### *Experts in the field*

In many cases, experts in the field or individuals with experience in a certain area were approached for guidance and advice. They served in an arms-length capacity and were involved during one particular point in time. However the advice provided to the social venture was invaluable for them to carry out on its mission.

### **c. Value to the Young Social Entrepreneur**

While the young social entrepreneur's networks provided the social capital and funding to the social venture to deliver on its mission, this part examines the value that their networks provided to them as individuals. This is illustrated through the value of mentors and advisors, and the sources of emotional and personal support.

#### **Mentors and Advisors**

This study did not attempt to make an empirical or scientifically grounded distinction between mentors and advisors, as it was not an initial goal during the time of data collection and was beyond the scope of this study. For simplicity, a broad distinction will be made between these two terms which were often used interchangeably; many participants had their own interpretation of these terminologies. Based on what the participants expressed, here are two definitions for these terms. Advisors generally have some expertise or are called upon for advice for the organization. Mentorship however involves more of a personal relationship between the mentor and mentee, as the mentor is concerned with the personal growth and development of the mentee in addition to the organization. Mentors and advisors are often expected to "ask the hard

questions” so that an individual or the organization can develop and grow from the process of change.

### *Advisors*

All individuals made reference to advisors at different points in the start-up phase of their social ventures. Leveraging off their advisor’s experience was cited as extremely useful, as the advisors had wisdom, experience and knowledge to share with the young social entrepreneurs. Although advisors did come from pre-existing networks or introductions which were facilitated through known contacts, it was also common to find total strangers as advisors as well. In such instances, the young social entrepreneurs made an effort to seek out individuals that they admired or who had a certain skill-set or expertise that they were looking for. Meeting people at events, cold calls or cold emails was a commonly used tactic for approaching these individuals.

### *Mentors*

Not all young social entrepreneurs had mentors in their start-up phase. Those who did have mentors made specific reference to them as being key allies in the development of their social ventures. Different mentors were used at different stages and it was actually quite rare that individuals had one mentor throughout the entire process of need conception, start-up phase and growth of their social ventures.

In most instances, there was a unifying thread between the mentor and mentee when the initial connection was made. Mentors were found through the following ways:

- Already part of social entrepreneur’s pre-existing network
- Had some connection to the social venture
- Referral/introduction through someone in their pre-existing network
- Met at a networking or industry event, although this was much rarer than the three instances cited above.

*Schools without Borders* for example had a key mentor during a turbulent and critical phase of re-organizing and essentially re-creating of their organization. When speaking of their mentor, they made reference to the fact that “she got it.” This was an individual who participated in one of their overseas projects and was able to understand the internal struggles faced within the organization and mentored them through the transition process. Some other participants noted the value of mentors in encouraging them to initiate their social ventures. The young social entrepreneurs mentioned that they had ideas in mind, but the guidance and support provided by their mentors was integral in allowing them to line everything up and actually initiate their social ventures. Mentors were also valuable through giving access to their networks for the young social entrepreneurs to establish a base in their early days.

One participant describe their mentor as “having someone there to go to, and just know that there would be a space where I could around ideas...and that they would be there unconditionally.” Others described their mentors as people who have already been through the experience were there to provide encouragement and tell them “it’s going to get better from you... you just have to keep on pushing and get through these trials and tribulations.”

During one of the workshops, an emerging theme was the importance of understanding of expectations among the mentor and mentee for it to be an effective relationship. Some individuals had challenges of knowing when to let go of their mentors when the relationship was no longer mutually beneficial. When the mentoring relationship no longer has value for both parties involved, then in those instances the relationships were re-evaluated and corrective measures were taken, in some cases that included ending the relationship.

## **Emotional and Personal Support**

### *Family and Friends*

The contributions that family provided for many young social entrepreneurs was quite striking in their journeys of being able to turn their ideas into reality. Some individuals thanked their parents for engraining in them strong values of community service and were supportive of their endeavours. Some made references to their parents as ‘entrepreneurial’, who supported them doing something unconventional and different. Others referred to their close friends and family as sounding boards or individuals with whom they could have philosophical questions in a very honest and open manner, as often these individuals were far removed from the internal operations of the social venture.

According to one participant, “My parents have been incredibly supportive of all my ideas...and although it must have been difficult for them to see me practically put myself into poverty [because of the forgone income through all of the time spent volunteering on The Cheaper Show], they never questioned and wanted to support me. They saw that I was having an amazing time while affecting other people in a good way. They have always been and continue to be on the sidelines cheering me on.” Another individual said “I had a good friend that believed in everything I did- she was my rock.” This type of emotional and personal support is cited as an important element in helping get the projects of young social entrepreneurs up off the ground.

Conversely, it was equally frustrating and difficult for young social entrepreneurs when their family and friends did not understand what they were doing and were not encouraging of them investing so much of their time in their social ventures. One participant described those feelings: “not being understood is alienating.” That same interviewee said that her biggest challenge in the first year of getting her projects off the ground was losing friends. She said that it was difficult to have friendships with people who did not relate or understand the new world that she wanted to be in and that subsequently created a gap. For another participant, it affected his confidence when those closest to him were not supportive and he felt as though he had an additional hurdle to climb. In most instances however, people who were skeptical came around once the social ventures had a track record of projects, received media attention or it was proven that their ideas were going to work.

### *Co-founders*

Not only were co-founders cited as being important in the operations of building a social venture, emotional support was also equally important. When co-founders came together with a shared vision and passion, they also leaned on each other for support in working towards that vision. “I don’t think I would have done it alone” is a thought echoed by more than one individual who started their projects with a co-founder. The co-founders were cited as being there to encourage

the young social entrepreneurs interviewed, especially in times of doubt or when confidence was lacking. Further, seeing someone willing to take the same risk and believed in the vision as much as they did gave them the confidence and strength to keep on pushing forward.

All of the young social entrepreneurs with one exception made only positive references to their co-founders in the first few years of their social ventures. Some made references to difficulties of co-leading their social ventures after the start-up phase, however during the start-up phase it was a very positive relationship for almost all of the participants. The one young social entrepreneur who did not have a positive relationship with his co-founders was due to the fact that they had different values and visions of the social venture. The two other co-founders soon stepped down once they realized that the social venture needed to go down another path other than what they were ready to commit themselves for.

#### *Peer support networks*

Peer support networks, both formal and informal, were mentioned as important elements in the process of starting a social venture. Informal peer support networks were most often formed organically, whereas formal peer support networks came about from programs or specific initiatives that grouped complete strangers together. The Young Social Entrepreneurs of Canada was cited as a peer support network based in Toronto, Ontario. It is a group bringing together like-minded young social entrepreneurs where individuals share ideas, talk about certain issues and have the confidence to know that one of their peers understands what they are going through, or will be there for support. Claudia Li was able to form an informal peer support network among her fellow members at Next Up, a social and environmental activism leadership program based in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Likewise, there were young social entrepreneurs who did not have a peer-support network and made reference to the fact that they wished they had one. Some described the process as being lonely and wished they had others who were going through similar things to talk with.

Individuals who made reference to support networks; either being part of one or wishing they were part of one were primarily individuals who founded their social ventures solo. That is not to say that co-founder social entrepreneurs were part of a peer support network, however most of them did not made reference to one during the in-depth interviews.

#### **Discussion**

Understanding that networks and more specifically social capital played a key role in the start-up of all of the social ventures, building of social capital was important for all of the young social entrepreneurs. None of them were able to create their social ventures alone. In the process of engaging people within their networks and creating new networks to make them of value to the social venture, the personal characteristics of the young social entrepreneurs were prominent. These include being proactive, resourceful, persuasive, and possessing restlessness.

Further, through consistently putting themselves 'out there', not being scared to talk to new people or care about what they had thought of them, the young social entrepreneurs were successful in getting new people on board with their social ventures. Sharing their ideas with others allowed others to get excited about their projects. Interest and excitement was important

for building social capital among the networks. Whether the networks are involved internally or externally to the social venture, or could potentially get involved, it is necessary that relationships be maintained and fostered.

Although personal networks were very closely linked to the founder, thinking of succession it is important that personal relationship not be dependent on the founder and the social capital remain loyal to the social venture beyond the founder. Succession is a topic completely on its own, however steps can be taken during the start-up phase to ensure a social venture is sustainable beyond its founder.

“Much of the anecdotal information concerning youth innovation and entrepreneurship gleaned from the literature and from interviews with organizations founded by youth describes the positive influence parents can have on forming values of citizenship” (Cimone, 2009, p.43). The literature mirrors the reflections of some of the participants of this study, further reiterating the importance of family background as an integral factor in youth-initiated social ventures. Conversely, that lack of support – often from places where it was expected, such as family and close friends – made it difficult emotionally for the young founders to cope and deal with during the start-up of their social ventures. Although all of the young social entrepreneurs in this study did persevere despite the lack of support given from those close to them – it is probable that many individuals do not make it to the point of starting their social ventures because their external environment, as noted by Rabbior et al.(1997) in the literature review, was not conducive to building the foundation of a social venture. Therefore the value of the support received from home cannot be underestimated.

Emotional support and “the chance to discuss ideas with peers” are integral in providing the space for youth to innovate (Sebba et al., 2009, p.36). Although a peer support network is not necessary, as many young social entrepreneurs were able to succeed without one, it still has its value and was “helpful” in the creation of social ventures. It was not necessary that they talk specifically about their social ventures; however the fact of having other social entrepreneurs there when needed was invaluable to those who had access to one. Literature also supports the positive value of peer support networks among youth (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000) and youth entrepreneurs (White and Kenyon, 2000).

Of all the individuals that were intimately involved with the social venture internally, it is important that core values and understanding of the vision are parallel with the young social entrepreneur. Among the participants of this study, in instances where this was not the case, problems were experienced on many different levels. Individual’s behaviour and intentions cannot be predicted before they get involved with the social venture; however onus remains on the young social entrepreneur to set clear expectations and maintain open communication with everyone involved.

“When people are overwhelmed with information...they turn instead for advice and information to the people in their lives whom they respect, admire, and trust” (Gladwell, 2007, p.275). It was natural to expect mentors and advisors, as young social entrepreneurs did not have all of the answers and were constantly acquiring new skills and learning how to do things for the first time. “Mentorship across generations has played an important role among youth who have

been able to get their projects across the ground. Youth have a lot to gain from those with more experience, and they also have a lot to share, and can prove to be incredibly resourceful” (Corriero, 2006, p.80). Intergenerational partnerships were not examined as a stand-alone topic, however it was clear that the young social entrepreneurs benefited from older advisors and mentors.

Mentoring relationships were often formed in a very organic way. Since a key part of the mentoring relationship is the personal relationship between the mentor and the mentee, building of these relationships took time and was often not done through cold-calling a complete stranger. An ingredient in fostering trust between a young person and their mentor is through the mentor’s awareness in the youth’s life outside of the activities of the social venture (Hamilton, 2004 cited in Cimone, 2009, p.24).

It was evident that mentorship was a key influential factor in the creation of youth-initiated social ventures. So the question is how do individuals who do not have access to pre-existing networks (such as those suggested above that can facilitate key mentoring links) find a mentor, when acknowledging that it is very difficult to get a mentor from a cold call? Out of this research, the only answer to this question came from the need of players in the youth engagement industry to make spaces where individuals are able to meet potential mentors and increase probabilities of these connections to form. Further research needs to be explored on this very key question.

Although a few young social entrepreneurs were able to build social capital uniquely through cold calling, the overwhelming majority built their social capital through pre-existing networks and organically evolved from there. This introduces another question of socio-economic class and the background of the young social entrepreneur as an influential factor in the initiation of the social venture. Are certain socio-economic classes and backgrounds more likely to have stronger networks that can provide greater value when first starting out? The issue of socio-economic class and background will be further discussed in Section VIII.

#### **IV. Funding**

The funding section is divided in two sub-sections: Funding Strategy and Funding Sources. Funding strategies consisted of determining the social venture’s approach to fundraising and determining early on how much funds were needed and how much of the social ventures resources would be needed in raising those funds. Funding sources relates specifically to the different methods through which the funds were raised.

##### **i. Funding Strategy**

For some social ventures – funding was not even a factor in their first year; primarily because they did not have projects that required large financial investments. Their focus at the time was to bring people together to talk about issues, or host activities that were primarily volunteer-driven. In such instances, funding was required when they decided to scale the activities which involved overhead expenses such as staff, office space and the operational costs associated with running the projects. Other participants stated the need for funding from their first day in order to deliver on their objectives.

While participants spoke about their initial funding strategy – they almost all made references to having no funding strategy at day one. Most ventures worked on a project-to-project model as their funding model with no planned sustained funding sources. All they knew is that they had work that needed to be done and pursued whichever sources were available that supported their projects. As Ben Peterson, from *Journalists for Human Rights*, described it “we poked out hands in every little hole we saw and tried to grab every dollar bill we could find.” It worked for them at the time, as they were in survival mode and did what they could to get things done, even if it was a personal financial commitment on the founder’s behalf.

In other instances, the young entrepreneur started with fundraising goals and very clear targets. The challenges arose when they did not meet their fundraising targets and were required to readjust expectations of themselves and the projects accordingly.

## **ii. Funding Sources**

For those social ventures that required funding in their initial phase, the sources from which funding came from are classified in four types: (a) Individual and institutional donors, (b) Grants, (c) In-kind donations and (d) Earned income sources. These sources are not mutually exclusive and most individuals used a combination of several sources for funding. For simplicity and continuity among the case studies profiled who were at different life-cycle stages when the research was conducted, this section elaborates on where individuals were able to get their first set of funds (in the first or second year) to get their first set of projects up off the ground.

### **a. Individual and Institutional Donors**

Recognizing that young social entrepreneurs can potentially have large personal networks as illustrated from Figure 6, this section elaborates on the common sources from within the founders’ networks as sources for funding.

#### *Founder*

A majority of the young social entrepreneurs made mention to the personal financial contribution they made when first starting their social ventures. These contributions took the form of a donation or taking out a loan. Ryan Aldred, from the *CanILF*, said “I did not want to do something unless I was prepared to commit my own funds.”

Equally valuable was when a personal donation was not made upfront, but that the founders were prepared to “take the loss” should a shortfall occur. For example, Norma-Jean Thompson used her tuition money as a down payment on the hotel where they held *Young Women in Business (YWiB)*’s first event. She did mention that having taken that risk with an associated timeline forced her to persevere as she had ‘no other option’ but to run a successful event and recover the funds in time for the end of that semester.

When the co-founders of *EWB* started their social venture, they racked up \$30,000 in credit card debt. Although for recent graduates with no source of income, this was a huge risk to take at the time, they said that it provided them with the credibility necessary to get larger and more sustained funders on board such as corporations.

The forgone income and opportunity cost of the voluntary hours spent on their social ventures in lieu of employment is difficult to quantify. It is important to note that this was a significant cost as well.

#### *Founder's Network*

For some, fundraising started with those close to home. Parents, relatives and close friends were instrumental in getting small funding initially to run projects either in the form of donations or loans. The networks of family and friends were also explored and used as sources of financing. When needing funds, some individuals reached out to all of the people they knew which included classmates, teachers, former and current work colleagues, contacts through previous work or volunteer experiences, people they had met at conferences, and other individuals in Figure 6.

Some interviewees who were university students at the time of starting their projects mentioned their universities as a source of initial funding or seed money. Some student unions or departments had funds allocated for student-led initiatives. In such cases, the initiatives had students on campus involved in their projects and received a one-time grant.

Some corporations under their social responsibility mandate have funds allocated for donations to community causes or under their sales and marketing budgets will sponsor events or community projects. *TakingItGlobal (TIG)* worked out a partnership with a corporation, through a connection made at a conference, where they funded members of the founding team to attend conferences in the early stages of creating the organization. Another company agreed to pay for staff interns for *TIG* in-lieu of making a financial donation.

#### **b. Grant Money**

In addition to individual and institutional donors, grants were also noted as an initial source of funding. In order of popularity, grants originated from private foundations, the government and corporations.

For the individuals that cited grants as one of the first major sources of funding, almost all of them made reference to Foundations as the source of these grants. The Laidlaw Foundation is the one of only foundation in Canada dedicated exclusively to youth and has been known to fund youth-led initiatives. Almost all of the interviewees from this study who were from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and carried out activities with local youth cited Laidlaw as one of their first source of funding. The McConnell Family Foundation launched a 10-year granting programming, YouthScape, which gave funds to youth-led initiatives in Victoria, Calgary, Saskatoon, Ottawa and Halifax. Some participants also mentioned the YouthScape in helping them with their initial set of funds. Other participants took advantage of grants given by large foundations under specific youth-led initiatives, where a pool of funds was allocated to youth-led initiatives.

Although funding did come from larger foundations and private family foundations, they were not very common in the first year, as the traditional granting process was cited as difficult to overcome due to the reporting requirements and competitive nature of grants. Individuals that had pre-existing connections to private family foundations received their first set of funding that way as well.

Very few individuals were able to secure Government grants in their first year of operations. The reasons noted were because they did not meet the criteria and that the application processes were long and extremely time-intensive. Social ventures that did receive grants from the Government in most cases partnered with existing incorporated nonprofit organizations and used them as an umbrella or partner to seek out funding based on their projects.

For example, Amelia Clarke, founder of the *Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC)*, partnered with the Falls Brook Centre (her employer at the time) with the BC Chapter of the Sierra Club to write a grant on behalf of all three organizations to the Federal Government to pay for interns. As a result, the paid interns worked on *SYC* activities one day per week. A grant Amelia says otherwise would not have been possible if she did not partner with the two pre-existing organizations. Collaboration will be further discussed as a theme in Section VI.

Some individuals were able to get small corporate grants relatively easily without having the need for an established track-record and heavy reporting requirements. Every corporation has their own granting procedures. Large grants from corporations were quite rare in the early start-up phase.

For some individuals, when they received their first grant, it was a huge boost in confidence in them and served as validation for their ideas. That first grant was also helpful in securing other grants. As Jamie Arron said, “having that first [seed] grant was so crucial. Our project felt so much more serious and the confidence of other stakeholders and allies just went up... it raised our expectations of ourselves in our team”. For others however, the expectations that came along with their first big grant added an extra layer of pressure. That pressure affected their confidence in the short term, as it was a huge sense of responsibility and overwhelming at times. In the end, they all delivered on those expectations, however reflecting back to their emotions at the time, it was evident that they were difficult emotions to overcome.

#### *Incorporation/Legal Status*

Organizations noted that once they obtained legal not-for profit corporation status that they became eligible to apply for larger grants. Furthermore, charitable status with CRA was even more useful as it either provided donors with confidence in the project or gave them an incentive that was beneficial in securing more donations. Reference was made to the hefty demands of filing for legal status, which is why a few of the young social entrepreneurs interviewed started their projects already in an existing structure so that they could save on those time-intensive steps and still reap the benefits. As well, some individuals who went on their own are currently looking to partner under an existing organization as they recognize the value of working under an existing structure.

#### **c. In-Kind Support**

Funding went well beyond financial contributions for the young social ventures, as most participants made specific reference and were extremely thankful to the in-kind donations they received. The most common in-kind donation was office space. Other examples included equipment, software, office supplies and other products. In-kind services were also donated by professionals, such as legal services for incorporation, consulting and advisory services.

In kind donations were used for the social ventures to carry out their mandates. The *UBC Agapé Street Missions* who delivers food among other activities to the homeless population of the West End and downtown core of Vancouver was able to secure in-kind food donations which were then distributed through the club to the homeless. After a few years of operations, this food was stored in-kind with another nonprofit organization's space. The *Canadian International Learning Foundation*, which provides educational support to schools in developing countries, was able to get on-line courses donated from several academic institutions to help train teachers and students in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

#### **d. Earned Income**

Recognizing that it is not sustainable to rely uniquely on donations and grants to sustain a project, some individuals generated their own funds through selling services – which included providing facilitation, research, consulting and other services to nonprofit organizations in advancing their social mandates. Fees were charged in exchange for these services. Some networking groups and online magazines followed a membership/subscription-based model. Fundraising events were also a common way to attract funds. A fundraiser is when people are asked to pay for a ticket or make a donation in order to attend an event in support of a particular cause.

*Impact* started charging for their conferences when they realized that they were providing a value and did not need to operate on a charity model. This thought was echoed by *A is B* where founder Ilona followed the “we have something you need, let us help you and you help us” mindset, where there was a mutual exchange in value from both sides.

Earned income was considered, but not an option for some social ventures. For example, during the formation of the *Anishinabek Gitchi Gami Environmental Programs (AGG)*, asking members of the community to contribute to the costs of their advocacy work would not have been a pragmatic option for raising funds. Damien and others felt that such a revenue system did not align with inherent Anishinabek values of community survival. Further, being from a lower-income community it would not have the potential to generate a lot of revenue anyways. Community support was thus determined by the interest that citizens showed in form of participation of meetings and *AGG*- run projects.

#### **Discussion**

Although funds came from various different sources, where a human connection was involved between the young social entrepreneur (or a member of the founding team) and the donor, trust was important an important element found among many of the sources. For social ventures that were funded by individuals, some mentioned they received funding because those funders trusted them as capable individuals and gave them funding subsequently. Consistent with literature from for-profit entrepreneurship and youth for-profit entrepreneurship (Mars et al., 2008), the young social entrepreneurs were able to leverage the resources found within their existing networks and environments for the financial advantage of the social ventures.

#### *Funding Strategy*

Among the participants of this study, most of them noted that a funding strategy only came into works a few years after the social venture's inception. Funding strategies are in place to ensure continuity and more stability (Foster et al., 2009). However in the start-up phase when human

resources were limited and there was much that needed to be done, it was very difficult to take time away from operations to create a funding strategy and allocate a percentage of their time to that exclusively. The trade-offs of creating a funding strategy must be evaluated in the context of the social ventures

Whether or not there was a strategy in place, importance to note here was adaptability of the young social entrepreneurs. When they realized that their targets were not being met, they were able to re-evaluate the projects and ensured that something would continue. In other cases, they ‘buckled down’ and were resourceful in going after various types of funding sources.

### *Grants*

The conditions placed on Government and some of the Foundation and Corporate grants make them inaccessible for young start-up organizations to obtain. A Government of Canada Grants and Contributions guideline requires that organizations be incorporated with audited financial statements for a minimum of two years (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2006). Ironically, even a program aimed at youth-led initiatives requires three years of audited financial statements (Heritage Canada, 2010). Some grants from corporations and foundations require charitable status. Applying for charitable status is extremely taxing in terms of overhead and administration costs. This is a trade-off that must be considered, as time will be taken away from operations and actual project implementation and delivering on objectives and mission.

Perhaps the lack of available funding to youth-initiated social ventures in Canada demonstrates the current Government’s lack of sincere interest in youth in Canada. The current funding in place is not youth start-up friendly which was evidenced by the lack of government funding received by the participants. Literature has confirmed the positive social impacts that youth make in society today, including the hundreds of youth-initiated social projects which originated in Canada alone. These thoughts are echoed by MacKinnon et al. (2007, p.34) who argue for a National Youth Policy Strategy or a Ministry:

Canada, unlike many OECD countries, has no pan-Canadian youth strategy framework. For its part, the federal government has not demonstrated that youth are a priority file – no federal minister has specific mandates responsibility for the youth portfolio. Responsibility for the youth file is spread across a large number of departments without an institutionalized policy coordination body or mechanism.

Laidlaw Foundation, which was a great resource for many participants in this study, only funds initiatives in the GTA and is therefore not an accessible resource to individuals outside that area. Similarly, YouthScape provides limited funding options only to the five cities mentioned. Those two initiatives are accessible to youth in those given cities, as application and reporting requirements are more relaxed and youth-friendly. They recognize that early social venture start-ups do not have an extensive financial or activity track record, but give the (aspiring) young social entrepreneurs small grants recognizing that everyone needs to start somewhere and on the merits of the idea and the commitment to follow through on it. Further, in many cases those youth-specific seed grants were catalysts for subsequent funding from other sources.

It is important to note that these start-up grants allocated to youth-specific initiatives are quite limited and will not be enough to sustain an organization in the long-run, which requires the need to pay for staff. Thus more longer-term and sustained funding sources are required. Although foundations such as the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Laidlaw Foundation and the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation provide larger grants to youth-led initiatives or ones that more innovative and different – it is only a handful among a large pool of applicants.

Because funding is so scarce, it is an extremely competitive reality where organizations spend more time securing a grant, giving them less time for their activities (Khosroshashi et al., 2006). In such situations, even among the participants, they said it was difficult for them to compete against seasoned grant writers, nor did they have the time to commit to such activities. With a few exceptions, grant-based funding is not accessible for youth and more should be done within the system to encourage young people to apply for grants that allow for core funding of their social ventures.

In-kind contributions were extremely valuable – as the money that would have been spent on administration related expenses were able to go towards the costs of the programming and delivering on their social goals.

Earned income reduces the cycle of dependency and also volatility that can be found from the three other funding sources listed above. It is often said to be a more sustainable route (Froelich, 2009). Social Enterprise is starting to become very popular. One element of social enterprise encourages nonprofit service-oriented organizations to be self-sufficient by finding alternative revenue streams to fund their social projects without relying on grants and donations. Instances where earned income strategies were used among the young social entrepreneurs, earned income was part of their business models, in contrast to the literature that criticizes earned income ventures as a side project to supplement fundraising. Although in theory an earned income strategy sounds appealing, it cannot work in all contexts. When looking into earned income, special consideration needs to be given to the target population, if they can afford to contribute and if it will compromise on the integrity of the social venture's work.

## **V. Youth specific Factors**

Through the lived experiences of the young social entrepreneurs, this section looks at the factors that were specific to being young, when starting their social ventures as young adults. Some of the participants who are no longer youth reflected on their time as youth, whereas other participants who are still youth spoke about the realities they are currently facing or faced in their first few years. This section only looked at the factors from the perspectives of youth, and is not meant to be compared against adults.

### **Ability to commit**

Almost all of the individuals profiled started their social ventures as a voluntary initiative with no source of income. Those that were paid started with a very modest salary. With the exception of one individual who had a small child, everyone cited that they had no responsibilities when starting their ventures. This included dependants or large financial obligations such as a mortgage. The youth social entrepreneurs were able to commit long hours and could financially

afford to sustain themselves with little or no pay. Further being young themselves, most of them had an ability to attract youth volunteers who were able to commit in a similar fashion.

*Cheap labour* jokes were cracked by multiple participants at different points in the interviews, making reference to the fact that most of them worked for free for a good part of the start-up phase; they committed long hours; and worked under less than ideal working conditions, such as having four people living and working out of a tiny one bedroom apartment for a year for example. The reference to *cheap labour* was not said in any derogatory way because it was very clear that compensation for the young social entrepreneurs at that point in their life went well beyond financial. Increased confidence and skills, pride in working towards something they believed in (in a big way), and building an increased network, were all benefits to the work that they did.

### **Risk taking abilities**

One participant said, “The level of comfort you want to have in life is directly related to the level of risk you want to have.” She went on to further say that it was a tradeoff she was ready to take because she believed in her vision, but also because she was at ‘that point in her life’. Further, many resonated with that fact that they were at point of their life that provided them with a higher tolerance for risk, as there was less to lose for them personally if their social venture did not succeed as their responsibilities were quite low at the time. Many noted that they had no fear of failure.

### **Idealism and Curiosity**

George Roter from *EWB* said, “When you are young, you do not have the ‘accepted wisdom’ that older people may have and instead ask the questions of why that cannot be. In asking those questions that allows you create very powerful ideas and organizations to see what is not there; and then work towards making it come about.” Being naïve and idealistic was said to be a good thing, as it inspired and encouraged the young social entrepreneur to push further and eventually create something of social impact. “You don’t know what you don’t know” – limited experience can be a very powerful asset as “experience sees less possibility” and “the less experienced are more likely ‘to shoot for the stars’” (in reference to quote above). “It is unique to be naïve [in reference to mind frame and experience] and just ‘go for it’ and allow for something beautiful to happen.” Those were all comments resonated among the young social entrepreneurs. As one participant said, “we never had a fear of having difficult conversations.” Similarly to idealism, the young social entrepreneurs were very curious. Even if that curiosity came from being naïve, they still had no fear of trying new things.

### **Quick movers**

Most participants said that they did not overanalyze or overthink every little situation. Some interviewees said that “if you over think, you don’t do anything.” Not overthinking allowed one participant to “run a mile a minute” which ultimately allowed her to accomplish a great deal in the early days. Graeme Berglund said “we just followed our passion and did not over think it”. He went on to further explain that if he analyzed and thought about all of the details when first starting out that the show would have lost its focus and the initial vision would have been compromised.

More than one participant said that if they took the time to sit down and reflect on all that was needed to be done; they probably would not have started their social ventures in the first place. Not because they were not satisfying an unmet need, but rather they would have been intimidated by all of the work at hand and would not have even started.

If one participant had a chance to do it all over again, she would have slowed down. In her words, “I felt like I was always in a rush and just had to do everything right away.” In retrospect, she felt that if she did things in due time, when they were ‘meant to be’ she believes that some of the social venture’s projects could have realized greater impact.

Ben Peterson on the other hand spent a year with his co-founder thinking and reflecting on how *Journalists for Human Rights (jhr)* would take shape and form. Due to the sensitive nature of *jhr*’s work, it was important for him to “get all of his ducks in order” and think through the theory and background of their first project before even publicizing their work. Another social venture who worked with a vulnerable population dove right into their activities. They were however forced to take a break from getting other students at the University engaged for a year to evaluate and reflect on the purpose of the work that they were doing. Initially, it had some unintended consequences that they did not think about when starting.

### **Credibility**

When asked if credibility was an issue when first starting out, almost all of the participants said it was. The reasons cited for which credibility was questioned include:

- Lack of experience in organizing social projects to this extent;
- Lack of experience/knowledge in the areas of work;
- No name or reputation;
- Lack of track record to prove for ability to deliver on stated goals (creating something new); and
- No legal or charitable status.

Although the majority expressed age-related factors such as lack of experience and perceptions of naïveté, interestingly there were a few individuals that cited different issues. *ACAC* was successful in informing their advocacy with grounded research which provided credibility to the work that they did. Their issue was more so around the fact that none of the core team members were of African descent and they were advocating for better accountability in an African and Canadian relationship.

### *Overcoming issues of credibility*

Passion compensated for lack of credibility in some instances. As one interviewee said, which is also resonated with other young social entrepreneurs, “people worked with us because they believed in the vision and what we were doing. We were able to create a powerful presence through our passion, enthusiasm and excitement – which became contagious.”

As one participant said, “credibility comes from integrity more than knowledge.” When approaching stakeholders, young social entrepreneurs were honest and told the different stakeholders upfront what they did not know. Demonstrating right intentions and a willingness to learn along the way, significantly aided the young social entrepreneurs in getting a buy-in from

other stakeholders. *The Cheaper Show* for example said that the organizing team stuck to its values and stayed “incredibly genuine” throughout the entire journey.

Some social ventures built their credibility slowly with small successes, and delivering on what they said they would do. Each small success was leveraged to grow a little more. Effort was made to ensure they “walked the talk.” Another social venture overcame issues of credibility by being consistent in the work that they were doing until trust and reputation was built.

In instances where individuals were new to the field in which they were starting their social venture or did not know much about the issues, research was cited an imperative way to gain credibility. The same skills noted in the Training section above of self-teaching themselves on the topic so that they could “speak on the same level” as the professionals or those established in the field. Simple things such as citing sources or connecting sound research with policy recommendations was enough for individuals to get noticed and respected for their work.

When reflecting in hindsight on one of his biggest learning experience, one participant said, “if you want to be a successful organization, you have to care some little bit about what other people think of you; but it must be second. Delivering on your objectives and what you’re passionate about will inevitably come first, however it needs to be a very close second.” Other participants echoed those thoughts by having things as such professional looking websites, promotional materials, but also when meeting individuals carrying themselves in a professional and clean way.

According to the participants who mentioned media as a source of credibility, they felt that media legitimized the work of their social ventures and also aided in spreading the organization’s name beyond the borders of their networks. More specifically, close family and friends within some of the young social entrepreneurs’ immediate networks, who did not think their projects were going to succeed, started giving them support once their work was profiled in the media. Media often made stories on the founders in the form of a personal interest story. In such situations, the social ventures leveraged the media attention given to the founder as credibility given to the social venture and used that as an opportunity to attract attention among stakeholders who otherwise would not have been aware of their social venture.

Some young social entrepreneurs were very strategic in deciding who to approach to be members of their boards. By inviting people with impressive names, they were able to leverage off the legitimacy and credibility of the ‘big name supporters’ to get the grounding necessary to raise funds and expand their networks when starting-up their social ventures. Endorsements or quotations by politicians or respected researchers and experts in the field were also very beneficial.

*SYC* and *FYBY News* accredit their immediate credibility from housing their social ventures in larger, more established organizations. They were more easily able to apply for funding and gather support necessary to deliver on their social projects by lending on the credibility and support network from their umbrella organization. Other social ventures attached themselves to their academic institutions at the time of initiation, as it allowed them to leverage the brand and reputation of the institution in the process of building their social capital.

When the social venture had no credibility because they were new, credibility was often accorded to the founder. In cases where the founder was working within their existing network to get funding or expand their networks, they received the support because as an individual they had a good track-record in past activities. The personal risk taken by the founder was used as credibility for the social venture. For example, the founders taking out a loan to fund *EWB* provided the social venture with the credibility necessary to attract funding from other sources.

For social ventures with a mandate of working specifically with youth, being young gave them an extra layer of credibility when doing outreach and working with their target populations. They were more in touch with the needs of the people they are working with and in some instances were better positioned to work with those populations when compared to adult groups. In such situations they leveraged that strength to gain even more support for their social ventures as an effective organization able to deliver on its mandate.

### **Youth Label**

Some organizations used the youth label to their advantage when gathering external support. *Otesha* for example felt as though it was coming in at the right time, as society was at a point and ready to recognize youth-led projects. Funding that would otherwise not be available was made available to them. Those thoughts were shared with other participants and as elaborated in the Funding section above, especially those who were able to take advantage of the smaller one-time grants given to youth-led initiatives.

Other participants noted that as young individuals, they received more encouragement and felt that people were willing to take the time to advise them and more willing to go out of their way to help. “It is easier to get media attention when you are 16.” Keleigh Annau for example realized that age can be leveraged by young people to good effect and that age, and the fact that it was a novelty in her city at the time, was likely the reason that *Lights Out Canada* did receive so much press in the first year.

Although there were barriers to being a young person and taken seriously, being a youth also opened doors. For example, some young social entrepreneurs were able to tap into a greater network through being able to go into high schools to make presentations or recruit a volunteer workforce among classmates at high school and university. Being young also helped the founders of the *Richmond Youth Foundation* get noticed. When they attended networking events and were the only young people in the room, it was easier for them to approach people and for others to show interest in them. The co-founders of the *Antigone Foundation* leveraged their age and their mandate of serving other young females to get other stakeholders engaged, as people were excited to see such initiatives taken on by young people.

Although some young social entrepreneurs used their age to their advantage, on the other hand, others were very deliberate in steering clear of the youth label. One participant said that he would rather be known as “sophisticated organizations that knew what they were doing” rather than “young people having fun”. Another participant said that he had to prove himself and did not want to be known as “a kid playing in the big people’s world because it is interesting, but rather because he understands the issues and really wants to be in this world.” Acknowledging that they are not mutually exclusive, however the issues of credibility that they experienced first-

hand or wanted to avoid based on what they saw around them, led them to make those statements. One social entrepreneur was told “unless you told us you were a young person, we would not have known it.” This statement implies that society places automatic filters on young people wishing to start projects.

## **Discussion**

Many of the traits noted by young social entrepreneurs were echoed in youth entrepreneurship literature. One of the biggest advantages of being a young social entrepreneur was the amount of time and energy that youth were able to contribute to their causes. Their ability to go with little or no pay allowed for all the ‘forgone income’ to be directed towards the activities of the social ventures or to pay other staff to carry out activities. Not only were they committing their time into the social ventures, but their journeys really tested their tenacity, perseverance and emotional stress on many different levels. When challenges came their way, they were capable of overcoming them.

Issues around personal sustainability were also addressed among some of the participants. How reasonable is it to expect them to go without pay, considering all of the valuable work they do? One social entrepreneur actually took a break from his social venture, as he was required to find alternate sources of income because funding was not available for his venture. Many of the other social entrepreneurs made a critical decision of putting themselves on the pay roll in order to build up the social venture to the next level. As noted in the Funding section above, with the difficulties in accessing long-term sustained funding for young people in Canada, many of the young social entrepreneurs are forced to work uncompensated in their early start-up days. Perhaps this is a test of commitment; however this can also be a barrier for young social entrepreneurs. Although compensation for youth social entrepreneurs came in other forms such as altruism and satisfaction of delivering on a social mission, it was still important that they satisfy their basic needs. Unlike for-profit youth entrepreneurs who are driven by the ultimate payoff and compensation of their ventures, social entrepreneurs were not financially rewarded the same way for-profit entrepreneurs would be when they delivered on their mission.

Although some of the young social entrepreneurs were able to turn their ventures into their full-time occupation, others still struggle with funding and either it remains a part-time venture or they do it full-time, but significantly under-resourced. Recognizing this problem, a new wave of literature and research is popping up by attempting to answer the following question: “How do you make a [comfortable] living by making social change?” (Aujla, 2008).

Idealism and naivety, a trait cited among many of the young social entrepreneurs, was in fact an advantage to them. Many young social entrepreneurs, some unconsciously, used that naivety to push the limits and present different, newer ideas. Out of idealism can create newer and more innovative ideas (Feldman, 1988). Another age-specific factor was their ability to move quickly. When reflecting in hindsight, some participants wished that they took more time to think things through. But at the same time they also acknowledged that if they did reflect, they probably would not have moved, or would have been bogged down with all of details that the social venture could have taken a completely different form. In some situations a tradeoff occurs when people decide to act rather than reflect.

A young social entrepreneur's ability to move quickly can also be linked to their naivety and youthful vitality. On the onset, having no idea what to expect or the tasks at hand, they often tackled their tasks piece by piece and learned along the way the next step. By reflecting and rationally thinking things through before starting, they felt that they would have seen *beyond* the 'tip of the iceberg' and would have been scared. Reflecting does have its merits, and again in certain situations where the social ventures can have direct influence on someone's life, it is important that they reflect before starting.

One participant himself posed a question that requires further investigation: "are there barriers just by calling yourself as a youth organization?" As noted by the participants, the literature reconfirms the fact that credibility is an issue when creating something new, without making reference to age though (Svensson et al., 2006). A method of building credibility for a social venture was through the credibility and recognition accorded to the founder, especially through the media. Such narratives can cause a problem however if founders continue to receive individual attention continually. Most social ventures are not run by one individual, and by giving the attention (and credit) to one person has great potential to cause problems internally amongst the team, as they are rarely one-person shows.

Literature states that young social entrepreneurs should "use their capacity for risk taking...to their advantage" (Clarke & Dougherty, p.24, 2010). This can be the case for advocacy work, or social ventures' whose mandates are far removed from direct impact with specific individuals, however in some cases this way of thinking should be used with caution. Young entrepreneurs and youth have a higher personal tolerance for risk as noted in the literature review. And yes, based on this study, it is clear that young social entrepreneurs have a high personal tolerance for risk as well, as participants themselves noted their *lack* of fear of failure. It is important to understand that in the situations where their social ventures create a dependency or influence someone's life – the organizational risks are quite high. Should failure occur, or projects implemented in a half-hazard fashion – a lot of damage can happen to the people they are trying to help. This caution should especially be applied to projects that deal with front-line workers and projects that influence directly the lives of individuals, such as international development initiatives. In literature, risk is often accorded to the individual; however organizational risk is often overlooked. There is a much greater opportunity cost as a young social entrepreneur when compared with a traditional for-profit young entrepreneur.

Although age-specific barriers did exist for young social entrepreneurs, these barriers did not inhibit them from carrying out their activities. As noted in the networks section above, it is possible for young people to build social capital, however effort needs to come from their end of persistently putting themselves out there and engaging with people. As was the case for all of the participants, they all believed in what they were doing and despite certain barriers persevered and overcame. As one participant said "if you have a good idea and are committed to working towards it – things will come together."

## VI. Collaboration

Collaboration can happen on many different levels. When discussing collaboration at the focus groups, all participants agreed on the need to share information and resources among social ventures. For the purposes of this report however, collaboration refers specifically to the social ventures (or the activities carried out by the social venture) making a conscious decision to work under the umbrella of an existing organization or collaborate and ‘join forces’ with an existing organization doing similar work. 6 out of the 38 participants decided to go down that route.

Throughout the sections above, benefits or reasons why young social entrepreneurs chose to collaborate or partner with existing nonprofit organizations were mentioned. Some of these include increased credibility by leveraging off an existing name and organization’s track record; increased access to funding through using their legal status to tap into different funding options and increase donor confidence; and increased access to networks. The greatest value cited of housing a social venture under an existing organization was the sharing of resources and spending less time and resources on administrative duties.

When asked if they had a chance to do anything differently, on more than one occasion, the young social entrepreneurs said that they would not have created a new social venture, but wished that they carried out their activities under an existing body. One participant felt that he ‘re-invented the wheel’ and felt his efforts would have been more effective and realized a bigger social impact had he shared his ideas with an organization already doing what he wanted to do – and just make it better together. *Shark Truth* that does a lot of advocacy work is currently looking for an organization to collaborate with, as the founder feels their message will go a lot further if they leverage off the voice of a larger, more established organization. Others, while reflecting in hindsight, stated that the amount of time and stress caused by the administrative burdens could have been eliminated had they carried out their projects under an existing organization.

Some social ventures that decided to go it alone and create a new entity said that the independence and autonomy given to them would not have allowed their organizations to be where they are today had they chosen to embed in an adult organization, and some as a result said that it was actually easier to create a new entity. The competitive nature of resources and grants also made it difficult for some social ventures to embed in a larger organization. One participant in particular said that the umbrella organization that she was considering to partner with would have applied to the same grants, and she knew that her project would not get priority over the existing initiatives within the umbrella organization that would have received precedence.

At the time of inception, *YOUCAN* was looking to develop its program activities under an existing nonprofit organization, however just prior to launching the partnership fell through and they were forced to build their own entity when starting the social venture. *YOUCAN*’s founder alluded to the fact that it was good that circumstances forced them to create a new entity, as the nonprofit organization that they would have housed themselves under filed for bankruptcy a few years ago and no longer exists, whereas *YOUCAN* is still running strong. At the same time however, he mentioned “I would have accomplished a lot more of the stuff I enjoyed [activities related to carrying out *YOUCAN*’s social mission] if I did not have to do all of the admin work associated with building an organization.”

During both of the focus groups, there were mixed feelings of whether collaboration should be encouraged among young social entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, in both groups participants made reference to the value of experiential learning in the creation of a social venture and a skill-set that perhaps the young social entrepreneur would not have gained had they worked under the umbrella of an existing organization. Some individuals also used a business analogy stating that creating new entities is good, as competition allows for innovation and newer ideas to come forward. Also presenting the argument that if the social venture is not effective because it is duplicating un-necessary efforts and not delivering on its mission better than other organizations with a similar mission, then it will eventually fail and the strongest or better social venture will ultimately survive.

## **Discussion**

A lot of time, effort and resources are spent in creating a social venture, most of which are often duplicated by many social ventures, such as legal reporting requirements, overhead costs, creation of a brand, and building of a governance structure – resources that could otherwise be spent on carrying out the vision and mission of the social venture. In these situations, when social ventures decide to create a new entity, organizational effectiveness is compromised in the start-up phase.

However the value of experiential learning cannot be underestimated either. Quoting one participant, “the pursuit is just as important as the outcome.” Many participants cited that if they did not go through the entire journey the way they did, they would have missed out on some very valuable skills – skills which they said will be of benefit to them in future social endeavours. The value of experiential learning for youth in creating a new venture or innovation has also been cited in the literature (Khosrohashi et al., 2006; Cimone, 2009; Sebba et al., 2009). And in some cases, the young social entrepreneurs felt that although at the time of initiation they duplicated something that already existed, with time they were able to carve out a niche and were confident in their valued-added objectives that other organizations did not cater to.

This report cautions however the use of business analogies in the social sector, because for some social ventures the stakes are very different. Again, in cases where projects are working directly with vulnerable populations or where some type of dependency is created, they must be more risk adverse. In such instances, they should feel confident in their abilities and know exactly what they are getting themselves into, because sometimes more harm than good can be caused if social ventures do not carry out their missions effectively.

The literature talks about the importance of encouraging inter-organizational partnerships as a means to ensure wider impact (Corriero, 2006). Inter-organizational partnerships are important, but for some social ventures not in the start-up phase, as they may compromise autonomy and freedom which are important to innovation and the creation of a new social venture.

It is difficult to equate the value of effectiveness on delivering of a social mission versus the value of personal development to a young social entrepreneur through the process of creating a social venture. Each has its own merits and nor are they mutually exclusive.

## VII. Luck and Timing

Some of the participants made explicit reference to various events that were a result of “being in the right place at the right time” and that these “chance occurrences” were integral to carrying out their visions and turning their ideas into reality. For many of the young social entrepreneurs, getting their first big break was integral in getting the social ventures off the ground. These included the first major donor, the first endorser, and the first ‘big name’ board member. In all of these instances, different participants mentioned that they felt very ‘lucky’ to get those firsts when they did – as those first facilitated the take-off of their social ventures. In other instances, the founders acknowledged their luck in being able to attract talented, smart and dedicated volunteers who were the backbone of the social venture.

For example, *Otesha*’s anchor sponsor was the Canadian division of the automobile company Honda. *Otesha* mailed Honda, a large corporation that receives thousands of sponsorship requests a year, a standard sponsorship letter without any pre-existing relationships or connections in the company. Not to diminish their abilities in delivering on their stated actions, but *Otesha* had done no previous projects and had no tangible ‘track-record’ to prove for themselves. In the opinion of *Otesha*’s co-founder, there was nothing special about the letter they wrote and that odds were very small that their letter would even be considered. It was out of pure coincidence that *Otesha*, means *Reason to dream* in Swahili and that Honda’s slogan at the time was *The power of dreams*. To date, eight years later, *Otesha* still holds to that connection of “play-on-words” for the reason they were called back to make a presentation to the head of Corporate Affairs at Honda. That invitation provided them the opportunity to sell their idea in person and secure Honda as an anchor sponsor which was integral in realizing their first bike tour, the backbone activity that essentially built the social venture.

Others on the hand made no reference to luck, but rather made it clear that they (or members of their supporting team) were really good at doing a particular thing that either opened doors or allowed their social ventures to build a solid foundation.

### Discussion

Although chance occurrences happened to several of the participants, equally important to note is that they all took advantage of the opportunities presented to them. Dr. Richard Wiseman (2003) conducted an 8 year study with over 1000 participants to better understand the factors influencing an individual’s luck. Informed from the literature and his research, he concluded that luck does play an important role in different aspects of people’s lives. However from the study, he developed a principle on how the maximization of *chance opportunities* can increase an individual’s luck. The premise of his principle was “lucky people are more likely than unlucky people to create, notice and act upon chance opportunities” (p.63). He went on to further state that creating chance opportunities is linked to an individual’s ability to “build and maintain a strong ‘network of luck’” (p.41). A network of luck is dependent on increasing the likelihood of chance encounters. Strategies of doing so include:

- Meeting a larger number of people;
- Being a ‘social magnet’;
- Keeping in contact with people.

In reference to the young social entrepreneurs who were part of this study – most of them did follow the three strategies above. One participant for example set a personal goal for himself when he was in Grade 10 to “have a larger network than anyone I know.” To carry through on that goal, even prior to initiating his social venture, he consistently set out to meeting people, going to events and conferences and constantly engaged with strangers. All of the participants noted the importance of building a network and informing as many people as possible about their social ventures. “Putting myself out there”; “We kept on talking with everyone”; “Going out over and over again” and “Looked for any opportunity I could to network in similar communities,” are examples of statements made by the participants indicating the effort made by participants to ‘meet a large number of people.’

“I’m a pretty intensely social person” is how Graeme from *The Cheaper Show* self described himself. He went on to further explain how whenever he goes out he loves talking to people and how people love talking with him; making an inference that perhaps he has an inviting personality and genuinely cares when talking with others. Although each of the social entrepreneur’s personalities are different and this study did not look into that aspect of the individuals, a social magnet refers to individuals who attract other people based on their personality, expressions, body language and being genuinely interested in what other people have to say.

The references made above in the networks section to building relationships showed that the young social entrepreneurs made an effort to keep in contact with people.

Following Wiseman’s principle on maximizing of chance opportunities, it was possible for the young social entrepreneurs to create their own luck in their journeys of building their social ventures. This did not come naturally and proactive measures were taken by all of the young social entrepreneur to do so, as noted above. And although factors are out of their control, such as how the other individuals will respond to them, by increasing probabilities from the young social entrepreneur’s side, also increased probabilities of those chance occurrences. “It’s a probabilities game. If you met twenty people in a week, chances are you’re going to meet someone who’s interesting. So, part of its just improving your odds of experiencing nice events, nice encounters, by being out there” (Wiseman, 2003, p.48). Young social entrepreneurs were able to increase their potential for chance opportunities by genuinely showing an interest in other people and making an effort to meet new people.

Environmental factors were however outside of all of the social entrepreneur’s control. For example, many of youth environmental groups started at time when society was encouraging of young people to get involved in the climate change movement. As Alysia Garmulewicz said, “being young at that point in time had currency at that field.” Although there are environmental and timing factors that influence the start-up of social ventures, it was ultimately the young entrepreneur’s ability to recognize these instances and really capitalize on them to make them of value to the social venture.

## **VIII. Socio-economic Background**

No questions asked participants of their personal socio-economic background, however during the interviews some, but not all, participants made reference to their financial situation when starting their social ventures. This section is an observation of the findings from the research during the data collection phase and it was not a topic that was going to be originally discussed. For this reason, no ethics were approved in examining their socio-economic background of the participants. Therefore the socio-economic groups that the interviewees self-disclosed and identified themselves as being part of were used at face value for this analysis. Further, this section does not reflect the views of all participants, as not all participants made a reference to their socio-economic background.

Observations from the data leads me say that privilege is a factor in the creation of youth-initiated social ventures. This section explores social-economic background of the young social entrepreneur as a factor based on observations from the data and references to the literature.

Quoting a participant, “my privilege played a large part in allowing us to get it off the ground,” and many other participants mirrored those sentiments as well. Those that self-identified themselves as being part of middle-class or upper-middle class backgrounds made mention to their parents as an integral support network to seeing their ideas take shape. Most of them lived at home, without expenses, when first starting up their projects. Having the comfort of living at home without the financial burdens and no need to get a summer or part-time job relieved a large financial burden that allowed these young social entrepreneurs to commit the time and energy without pay to invest the time necessary in implementing their ideas and realizing their visions.

Being a university student or living in the environment created in the academic institutions was a large launching pad for many social ventures to get off the ground. Benefits from being in university included the inspiration of the idea, the skills and training, instilling of an entrepreneurial mindset, financial support and access to the student network. Most young social entrepreneurs were also highly involved in extra-curricular activities prior to starting their social ventures. Further, programs such as Shad Valley and Junior Team Canada are primarily accessible only to individuals from middle-income families and above due to the high tuition fee required for participation. Conferences also have delegate fees and associated travel costs which often prohibit individuals from lower-income backgrounds.

### **Discussion**

Literature states that barriers to youth participation in the community include socio-economic contexts such as poverty (Bell & Force, 1956; Hart, 1992; Khosrohashi et al., 2006; Sebba et al., 2009). “For young Canadians, the opportunity, motivation and resources that enable engagement are directly dependent on economic capacity. Combined, education and income help to explain much of the variation in engagement among young Canadians” (O’Neill, 2007, p.22).

As noted in the Networks section above, a great deal of the social venture’s social capital originated from the young social entrepreneur’s pre-existing networks or in turn through their extended networks by two or three degrees of separation. Some of the participants who self-identified themselves coming from a middle-class family also cited family, friends and those within their immediate network as a major source of initial donations and funding for their

projects. Likewise, other participants who self-identified themselves in the same group did not mention family as a source of primary funding and decided to go in debt themselves to fund their projects.

Literature resonates with the analysis discussed above. “Middle- to upper-class networks tend to provide adolescents with social capital: relationships that provide access to resources, privileges, and power and exposure to larger, higher status, more heterogeneous groups of people. Poor students as a rule have little or no access to agents who can facilitate their incorporation into resourceful peer networks and facilitate crossing from one social or cultural network to another” (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, p.231, 2003).

On the contrary however, some social ventures expressed their socio-economic class as a barrier in carrying out their social missions. For a group that works with the homeless where forming relationships and a human connection with the homeless is integral in carrying out their mandate, the founder was very honest in saying: “we’re rich kids, what do we know about homelessness?” To overcome this visible barrier and preconceived notions that came along with it, they were forced to create credibility in other ways.

Another participant that worked with youth in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods said that she constantly reflected on privilege and her roots. “Being from that community, you are not only recognized as a professional there to serve, but also as a stakeholder.” Although she no longer resides in that community, she mentioned that having close ties and connections to the community through family and friends allowed her interactions as a professional to be more sincere and meaningful when carrying out the mission.

Based on the data collected, it was deemed that socio-economic status of the young social entrepreneurs was a factor influencing their abilities to start a social venture. However further research investigating the specific factors needs to look into this. What is the influence that socio-economic backgrounds of young social entrepreneurs play in the start-up of their social ventures? In addition to socio-economic background, further research should look into if there are factors unique to marginalized and racialized young social entrepreneurs.

## 4. Conclusion

In the spirit of creating a resource guide for young people wishing to start social ventures, this report set out to understand the factors influencing the creation of youth-initiated social ventures in Canada. This entire report was written from the perspective of the young social entrepreneur, however in most cases their supporting team of volunteers were just as integral in getting the social ventures off the ground.

Based on the limited literature on youth social entrepreneurship, primary data collection tools were used to satisfy the research topic. In-depth interviews were conducted with 38 young social entrepreneurs throughout Canada in addition to two focus groups which were held in Ontario. Through all of this information, it was clear that there is no one DNA of a young social entrepreneur and all of the individuals interviewed had a unique story with its own challenges. However throughout the process of this study, there were few common factors that were deemed important for the young social entrepreneurs when starting their social ventures.

Prior to starting their social ventures, all young social entrepreneurs came from different backgrounds. In some instances, education was important, however the majority of young social entrepreneurs cited the importance of experiential learning and education that came from nonacademic sources such as conferences and leadership programs. Secondly, all young social entrepreneurs were passionate about their social ventures and were determined to see their ideas and visions to reality. The sources of their inspiration was quite varied, as were their visions at the time of starting – however it was important that they all had a motivating or inspiring factor that fuelled their passion.

Social capital was an integral ingredient in allowing the social ventures to initiate. Social capital came from the young social entrepreneurs' networks. When investigating the pre-existing networks of the young social entrepreneurs at the time of starting their social ventures, the sizes were quite varied; normally indicative of the number of experiences and interactions they had prior to starting their social ventures. All were required to reach out and build new networks. In addition to manpower and funding support needed for the social ventures to deliver on their mandates, the young social entrepreneurs' personal networks were valuable for emotional and personal support. Some of these supports included encouragement from their parents, mentorship and peer-support networks.

While some social ventures did not require money to deliver on their social mandates in their start-up phase, the majority did. Common sources of initial funding came from the founders themselves, people from the founder's networks, universities and smaller one-time grants from youth-led project-friendly foundations. A small minority got their initial set of funds from larger foundations, government or corporations. In-kind contributions were very common, and some social ventures were successful in using earned income strategies to fund their activities.

The benefits of being a young social entrepreneur included high energy levels and greater availability of time to devote to their social ventures, ability to take risks, idealism and creativity. Credibility was the greatest challenge due to their lack of experience, however all of the young social entrepreneurs employed various tactics to overcome those challenges. The 'youth label'

was used to the advantage of some groups, whereas others steered clear from it and the association with preconceived notions that society is pre-disposed to attach to young people.

Collaboration, in the sense of partnering with established organizations at the time of start-up, was a strategy employed by some of the young social entrepreneurs. Although there are many benefits to working under an established organization, some of the participants felt strongly about paving their own path due to the autonomy and experiences gained that way.

The issues of luck and timing are quite intangible and were difficult to answer definitively in the case of the young social entrepreneurs and their abilities to start social ventures when they did. Although many 'chance opportunities' presented themselves, the young social entrepreneurs were able to capture those opportunities and make the most of them. Research outside of this study has argued that people have the ability to create opportunities – those profiled in this study fit the model in many instances, leading us to believe that they were able to create some of the 'chance opportunities' that came their way.

Finally, the issue of socio-economic class of the founders was briefly examined. Since data was not collected by all participants, this issue cannot be generalized among the sample; however through cross-analysis it was clear for some of the young social entrepreneurs that privilege was an influential factor when starting their social ventures.

Acknowledging that this report is a preliminary report to highlight the issues of youth social entrepreneurship, there are still many unanswered questions and themes to explore within this topic. Future research is required to examine the issues presented in more depth, in addition to building a theoretic framework specific to this demographic. Since many resources (both human and financial) are invested in youth-initiated social ventures, equally important is to understand how they can grow and are sustained beyond the founder. Research examining specifically the impact of these initiatives is also needed.

It is recommended that Nukoko create a resource guide for aspiring young social entrepreneurs. Throughout the course of this research, the disconnect in available information and the need for such a resource became very apparent. There are many young social entrepreneurs with knowledge and learnings to share and there will continue to exist young individuals wishing to create new social ventures who will greatly benefit from those learnings. A resource guide that captures the lived experiences and stories of young social entrepreneurs and presents it in a user-friendly language will be of greatest value.

In closing, Canada has a vital and powerful presence of young social entrepreneurs. These individuals have an ability to translate their passions and desires for social change into tangible action through the creation of new social ventures. Through providing resources to young social entrepreneurs, as well as informing the structural supports and social infrastructure in which youth find themselves, research of this type is vital in informing a highly identified gap. It is anticipated that the research gathered as part of this report and subsequent studies will be beneficial to further strengthen the youth social entrepreneurial movement.

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## Appendix A – Database Search

*Search completed between: January 20, 2010 – June 21, 2010*

### Scholar Databases

EBSCO Academic Search Complete  
Business Source Complete  
Sociological Abstract  
Social Sciences Index  
J-Stor

### News Databases

CBCA Business  
Canadian Newsstand  
CPIQ – Canadian Periodical Index

### **Search Terms**

Youth	Start-up	Social Entrepreneur	Social venture
Young	Initiation	Social Entrepreneur	Nonprofit
Young adult	Creation	Social Innovation	Non governmental organization
	Leadership	Social Innovator	Not for profit
	Innovation		Community organization
			Charity
			Social action organization

## **Appendix B – One-on-one Interview Schedule**

### ***Inspiration***

What got you started?

### ***Background***

Do you have any formal training and is your background relevant to the areas of work for your organization?

### ***Confidence***

How did you build your self-confidence when you were first starting?

### ***Funding***

How did you start collecting funds and how has your funding strategy changed over time?

*What did you learn in the process?*

### ***Social Capital***

What support did you initially have in starting the Organization and in what capacities did they provide support?

How did you approach building your network when starting out?

Who have been your allies? Was there an individual integral to your growth in the Organization?

*HOW did you find them? What value did they add? How were they effective?*

### ***Youth***

What were the advantages of initiating and growing your organization as a youth/young adult?

### ***Generic Questions***

Were you ever criticized? Did people doubt your idea/Organization/capabilities? How did you deal with such feedback?

What were the biggest challenges you faced in your first year – turning your idea into reality?

How did you overcome these challenges?

If you were to start your organization again today, do you think there would be any difference?

## Appendix C – Focus Group Supporting Materials

### Focus Group Questions

- 1) Why do youth become and stay engaged in their communities?
- 2) Formal training in management can give an individual the hard skills necessary to build an organization. In the case of initiating a social venture, how important is it for individuals involved in the creation and start-up of a community project to have formal training in management, whether it be education, past work or volunteer experiences or attendance at programs (such as conferences or leadership camps) prior to beginning?
- 3) How does an organization ensure that its activities are youth-driven? Is there a difference between imposing and facilitating youth engagement?
- 4) There is increasing criticism and concern that there is not enough collaboration among youth-led social projects and everyone is "trying to invent their own wheel." Should collaboration be encouraged in the start-up phase? If so, what can be done to encourage collaboration among early stage start-up youth-led social projects?
- 5) How do (aspiring) young social entrepreneurs gain access to networks in the fields/industries relevant to their social ventures, if they do not already have contacts in those fields?

### Focus Group Participants

Name	Experience	Location
Assaf Weisz*	Young social entrepreneur, youth engagement practitioner	Toronto
Besma Soltan*	Young social entrepreneur	Toronto
Davina Finn	Participant of leadership conference	Ottawa
Dev Aujla*	Young social entrepreneur, youth engagement practitioner	Toronto
Ena Ujic	Participant of leadership conference	Toronto
Jessica Lax*	Young social entrepreneur, practitioner	Ottawa
Kehinde Bah*	Young social entrepreneur, past funder of youth-led projects	Toronto
Lauren Larocque	Youth engagement professional: leadership conference coordinator	Ottawa
Lisa Marie Naponse	Youth engagement professional: program coordinator	Ottawa
Matt Tod	Youth engagement practitioner, experience as an active youth	Toronto
Matthew Cimone	Youth engagement practitioner, experience as an active youth	Toronto
Ron Tsang	Professional, experience working with youth	Toronto
Ryan Aldred*	Young social entrepreneur	Ottawa
Sima Atri	Young engagement practitioner	Toronto
Zach Hayes	Highly engaged youth, youth board member	Ottawa

*Note.* \*indicates participant in one-on-one interviews

## Appendix D – Recruitment Materials

### Referral for Participants

Dear Friends,

I am currently in the final stages of the completion of my Master's degree at the University of Victoria and for my final Master's research paper I am conducting a study on *The Factors Contributing to the Successful Establishment of Youth-Run Nonprofit Organizations*. The purpose of this study is to identify what it takes for young leaders to be successful in creating and sustaining a social venture.

I would appreciate any suggestions you can provide for talented and bright youth who started an organization or association that would be valuable for this research. Below is more information.

The criteria for the individuals is as follows:

- i) be the (or one of the) primary initiators of the organization/project;
  - ii) be between the ages of 16-26 at the time of starting their social venture; and
  - iii) the project's primary objective/goals must be social
  - iv) the initiative does not need to be a stand-alone, and can be embedded in an existing organization
  - v) project must have been around for at least 1 year
- \*It is not necessary that they still be involved with the project

Commitment is an initial 30-45 minute interview with the possibility of follow-up questions and/or interviews. Interviews may be recorded.

I will be conducting research for the next few weeks and would appreciate any referrals you can provide. Your help is very much appreciated (and needed) - as I'm hoping to get a representative sample nation-wide, and of all types of groups. So if you know of any individuals please provide me with their names or forward the invitation below to them.

Let me know if you have questions. Thank you.  
Kanika

## **Invitation to Participate in In-depth Interviews**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *The Factors Contributing to the Successful Establishment of Youth-Run Nonprofit Organizations*.

I am a Masters Student at the University of Victoria and am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Public Administration. The findings of this research will also be shared with the nonprofit community at large and used to create a handbook and guide for young individuals wishing to turn an idea into reality.

Research of this type is important for theoretical and practical reasons. Currently, there has been very little academic research in the area of youth leadership in the social sector and this research will help start to fill the gap. Moreover, it is information that can be useful on a practical level to many individuals within and hoping to enter the social sector. This will be an opportunity for you to share your stories and key experiences with the next generation of social entrepreneurs in Canada.

The research will be an analysis of the factors that influence the success of youth-run nonprofit organizations and social ventures, with a focus on the leaders who initiate and grow such organizations. The research seeks to identify the enabling environment, specific personal traits, and organizational constraints that allow for successful organizations.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an initial interview approximately 30 minutes long, with the possibility of follow-up conversations. Interview location and times will be held based on your preferences and availability. If an in-person interview is not feasible, then you will be contacted by telephone at a date and time that is suitable for you.

The research will be conducted within the next few weeks. Please confirm your participation by May 20, 2010. Upon confirmation, I will reach out to arrange a suitable time to meet. The interview may be tape recorded and compliance of your confidentiality and disposal of data will be explained to you in the consent form, as per the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board guidelines.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly. I look forward to chatting with you and hearing your story!

Thank you.

Kanika

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Kanika Gupta  
MPA Candidate, University of Victoria  
Email: [kgupta@uvic.ca](mailto:kgupta@uvic.ca)  
Tel: 613-983-3474

## Invitation to Participate in Focus Groups

You are invited to participate in a two-hour workshop to discuss current research about youth engagement and youth social entrepreneurship in Canada. The workshop is being led by Kanika Gupta, MPA candidate at the University of Victoria, and Eleonore Fournier-Tombs, MSc Sustainable Development candidate at the University of London. Both researchers are extremely passionate about finding out what sparks social entrepreneurship and engagement in Canadian youth and have decided to pair up to further explore this topic.

The workshop will begin with a brief presentation of Kanika and Eleonore's research results, followed by discussion around themes pertaining to youth engagement and social entrepreneurship. You will be invited to critically review the researchers' conclusions, should you wish to do so. Since the goal of this research is to ultimately share information that is relevant to these fields, a workshop of this nature is an important step in the research process.

The following workshop will be held in Ottawa:

Date: **Wednesday, June 2, 2010**

Time: 3-5 PM

Location: University of Ottawa, Morrisset Hall 230C (Déjà Vu)

A second workshop will also be held in Toronto:

Date: **Monday, June 7, 2010**

Time: 4-6 PM

Location: MaRS Discovery District 101 College St. Suite 145

You are welcome to attend either workshop, however, please remember to RSVP to either Kanika ([gupta.kanika@gmail.com](mailto:gupta.kanika@gmail.com)) or Eleonore ([eleonorefournier@gmail.com](mailto:eleonorefournier@gmail.com)) by **Monday, May 31 at noon**.

You have been selected because Kanika and Eleonore think that your presence at the workshop would greatly enhance the experience of the participants and enrich their research projects. We sincerely hope that you will consider participating in this initiative.

All the best,

Kanika Gupta and Eleonore Fournier-Tombs

## Appendix E – Participant Consent Forms



### Workshop Participant Consent Form

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#### **Factors contributing to the Successful Establishment of Youth-run Nonprofit Organizations**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Factors contributing to the successful establishment of youth-run nonprofit organizations* that is being conducted by Kanika Gupta. Kanika Gupta is a Graduate student in the department of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email at [kgupta@uvic.ca](mailto:kgupta@uvic.ca).

As a Graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Public Administration. It is being conducted under the supervision of Professor Catherine Althaus-Kaefer. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-8060 should you have any questions or concerns.

#### *Purpose and Objectives*

The purpose of this research project is to conduct an analysis of the factors that influence the success of youth-run nonprofit organizations and social ventures, with a focus on the leaders who initiate and grow such organization. The research seeks to identify the enabling environment, specific personal traits, and organizational constraints that allow for successful organizations.

#### *Importance of this Research*

Research of this type is important for theoretical and practical reasons. Currently, there has been very little academic research in the area of youth leadership in the social sector and this research will help start to fill the gap. Moreover, it is information that can be useful on a practical level to many individuals within the social sector.

#### *Participants Selection*

You are being asked to participate in this study because you initiated an organization and/or project that is of interest to this research.

#### *What is Involved*

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an initial interview approximately 30-45 minutes long, with the possibility of follow-up conversations. Interview location and times will be held based on your preferences and availability. If an in-person interview is not feasible, then you will be contacted by telephone at a date and time that is suitable for you.

#### *Inconvenience*

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including scheduling a date and time to have an interview. Otherwise, it is not anticipated that any inconvenience will be caused by your participation in this study.

#### *Risks*

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

#### *Benefits*

The potential benefits of your participation in this research are to the state of knowledge, society and to the participants by having your efforts profiled for the benefit of others.

#### *Voluntary Participation*

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. Should you wish to withdraw, you must inform the researcher in writing (email acceptable). If you do withdraw from the study your data may still be used in the analysis of the research. Should you wish to have your data removed entirely from the research, you must inform the researcher in writing (email acceptable) otherwise your data may still be used in the analysis of the research.

*Researcher's Relationship with Participants*

The researcher may have a relationship to potential participants as friend/researcher or relative/researcher relationship. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken:

- You will be under no pressure to participate and have the right to withdraw at any time.
- All interviews in the context of this study will be conducted in an objective, professional manner with no preferential or exceptional treatment given to the participant.

*On-going Consent*

It is possible that we may need to schedule follow-up interviews to gather more information. To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will ask you at the beginning of each session if you consent to the same conditions that you agree to at this time.

*Anonymity*

In terms of protecting your anonymity, your name or the name of your organization may be included in the research through the analysis or presentation of results. No malicious or incriminating information causing harm will be presented in the research results.

*Confidentiality*

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will not be protected as your anonymity cannot be guaranteed. For the credibility and meaningfulness of the analysis and results, it may be necessary to associate the name of the organization with the specific analysis.

*Dissemination of Results*

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: Directly to you and other participants, dissertation and class presentation, published articles, books, and at conferences.

*Commercial Use of Results*

This research may lead to a commercial product or service. The nature of this commercial use is published articles and/or books.

*Maintenance and Disposal of Data*

Data from this study will be stored for future use by the researcher, Kanika Gupta. It will be stored in password protected files on the researcher's computer.

*Contacts*

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Kanika Gupta, Catherine Althaus-Kaefer. Contact information indicated at the beginning of this consent form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

I agree to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study.

I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Participant to provide initials)

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.*