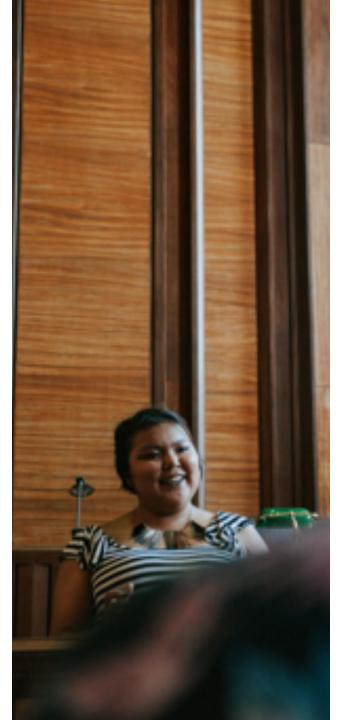


### Table of Contents

- 3 Letter from the ED
- 5 Our Mission
- 6 Our Values
- 7 Strategic Plan
- 8 Our Team
- 9 Board of Directors
- 10 Programs
- 11 Youth Outreach
- 14 Youth Outreach Online
- 23 Research and Advocacy
- 29 Training and Mentorship
- 36 Financial Summary
- 37 Supporters





### Letter from the Executive Director

#### Dear Friends and Supporters of Level,

In my first year as Executive Director of Level, I am inspired and humbled by the immense support and engagement of so many social justice stakeholders and volunteers. This year marks Level's 15th year of programming, and we continue to share how grateful we are for the dedicated staff, students, and volunteers who champion Level's mission to transform the justice system and fight against systemic inequities.

This year was fraught with a global pandemic and reminders that systemic racism persists in Canada and abroad. In the face of these challenges, Level and our supporters made leaps and bounds to stay hopeful, continue innovating, and serve our communities with empathy and purpose.

Even with school closures caused by the global health crisis this year, Level was lucky to continue delivering our Indigenous Youth Outreach program (IYOP) to schools virtually. In the wake of the pandemic, Level pivoted quickly and created an online version our program: IYOP Online (leveljustice.teachable.com/p/justice-education-for-indigenous-youth). This online resource has the potential to reach communities we could never access before, connect with justice leaders from across the country, and bring a new depth of impact to IYOP. Developed in 2012, IYOP's positive impact still rings true today. One grade 7/8 teacher at Mnjikaning Kendaaswin Elementary School, of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, expressed her feelings about IYOP and it's ability to help students realize their true potential:

"You are all such a gift and I can't begin to express as their teacher, how thankful I am. You bring to them something they never considered. And in turn, give them the strength to overcome their fears and take on a role they never believed they could conquer...you're changing lives. No exaggeration!"

I had the privilege to attend multiple IYOP sessions this year with Level's extraordinary Program Manager - Youth Outreach, Caitlin MacDonald. The students, teachers, Program Leaders, and volunteers are a continual source of inspiration. We would like to give special thanks to Knowledge Keeper Bob Badger, as well as the Honourable Justice Jodie-Lynn Waddilove, for your support of this important work.

As you will see in the pages of this report, Level partnered with Pro Bono Students Canada to facilitate Level's Empathy Training to 200 first-year law students at U of T Law. Level also delivered Empathy Training to students at Windsor Law. During these trainings sessions, students shared their thoughts and reflections on how empathy allows justice sector responders to better understand the root causes and impacts of barriers to justice, improves communication and provides the tools to approach legal issues from the client's perspective.

This year, Level's Chapter Program ran at 8 law schools across Canada. Students across the country organized community events, hosted conferences, and disseminated information on the topic self-represented litigants.



### Letter from the Executive Director

We also welcomed 50 law student mentees and 20 mentors across the country to participate in Level's inaugural Blazing Trails Mentorship Program, which challenges young social justice champions to carve out bold, entrepreneurial careers in law. Students were matched with strong role models, covering topics related to effective leadership, navigating the lack of diversity in the legal sector, and how to define principled metrics of career success grounded in social impact.

Of course, all of this would not be possible without the generous support of our funders, including: The Law Foundation of Ontario, CN, Peter Gilgan Foundation, LexisNexis Canada, Winnipeg Foundation, Edmonton Community Foundation, Law Foundation of Saskatchewan, Koskie Minsky, McMillan LLP, Enbridge, Torys LLP, Stockwoods LLP, and our individual donors.

Thank you for supporting Level, especially throughout this challenging year. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to creating a justice system that can serve and reflect every member of our communities. Level's focus on making this a reality – through the collective learning and leadership of our stakeholders – is made possible by your continued support.

Sincerely,

Shelan Markus

**Executive Director of Level** 







### Our Mission

We are a Canadian charitable organization on a mission to level barriers to justice by disrupting prejudice, building empathy and advancing human rights.

### Our Vision

We envision a world where every person is treated with dignity, can exercise their fundamental human rights, and has the opportunity to thrive.

## Our Approach

Unlike education and health care, inequitable access to justice and its devastating impacts are not well understood by the Canadian public. Creating access to justice for all is a complex endeavour. It requires more than just the keys to a courtroom. Transforming the justice sector requires the collective effort of an empowered and empathetic society.

We believe that if our stakeholders are empowered to understand, shape, and use the law then they can become active participants in breaking down barriers to justice. We also believe that if our legal professionals have **empathy** and **cultural humility**, we can disrupt prejudice and create a justice system that serves the people who need it the most.



### **Our Values**



Integrity

#### We believe in transparency and accountability.

We are accountable to the communities we aim to serve and are committed to following best practices for charitable organizations.



#### Dignity

Inclusion is only possible with respect and humility.

We listen to, respect and empower our communities, building confidence and curiosity for the benefit of all.



#### Diversity

#### Fairness requires the input of many.

We build bridges by connecting a wide range of people and cultures to make a tangible difference.



## Our Strategic Plan

In 2017, our Board of Directors and Executive launched a new Strategic Plan which will guide Level's programs and activities over the next five years. Staying true to our roots, Level will continue to place emphasis on young people and raising up the next generation of leaders to ensure long-lasting, systemic change.

Read more about our <u>Strategic Plan</u> and <u>Theory of Change</u>.







# YOUTH EXPERIENCING INTERSECTIONAL BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

Level will prioritize
engagement with Indigenous
youth, as well as other youth
communities that are
disproportionately affected
by Canada's access to justice
crisis.

### POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS

Level's second Priority
Target Group is college,
university and law
students in Canada in any
field of study who have an
interest in advancing
Level's mission.

#### **LEGAL PROFESSION**

Finally, Level will engage with justice sector professionals or "responders" and any other members of the legal profession committed to advancing Level's mission.



### Our Team



Shelan Markus
Executive Director



Caitlin MacDonald
Program Manager
Youth Outreach



Anita Stewart
Program Leader



Thomas Milne Program Leader



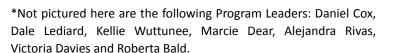
Robert Bassett
Program Leader



Katya Ukrainetz
Program Leader



Rheana Worme
Program Leader





### **Our Board of Directors**



Jennifer Guerard

Board Chair



Alexandra Dostal
Vice-Chair



Susan Spence
Secretary



Richard Zeni Treasurer



Fallon Melander



Heather McKay

Director



Adrian Di Giovanni



Hannah Riding
Director



Tanya Mushynski
Director



Brittany Twiss

Director



## **Our Programs**

1

#### Youth Outreach

- Indigenous Youth Outreach
  - Program (IYOP)
- Indigenous Youth Justice Toolkit

2

#### Research and Advocacy

- Research Fellowships
- Campus Chapters

3.

#### Training and Mentorship

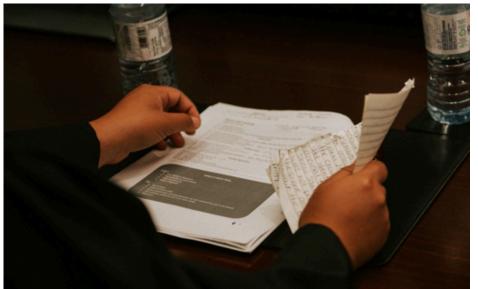
- Facing Resistance Event
- Blazing Trails Mentorship Program
- Cultural Humility Training
- Empathy Building Workshops







Youth Outreach





## Indigenous Youth Outreach Program

Launched in 2012, Level's Indigenous Youth Outreach Program ("IYOP") is an innovative justice education and mentorship program for First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth aged 11-14 that achieves the following:

- Engages First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth in fun and collaborative justice based activities
- Empowers youth to reach their full potential
- Builds the confidence, critical thinking and leadership skills of youth
- Promotes relationship development between youth and justice sector volunteers through storytelling and a two way knowledge exchange
- Celebrates Indigenous customs, practices and beliefs
- Advances reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities

Throughout the program, students work with justice sector volunteers and participate in experiential learning opportunities like mock trials, sentencing circles, and field trips that expose them to the justice system in a positive and culturally -empowering way.

With its focus on building relationships, the program provides the youth participants with a positive experience with the justice system during a critical time of their development.

IYOP is rooted in building trust, acknowledging colonial legacies, honouring Indigenous practices and customs, and promoting a two -way knowledge exchange between volunteers and Indigenous youth.





## Indigenous Youth Outreach Program Online

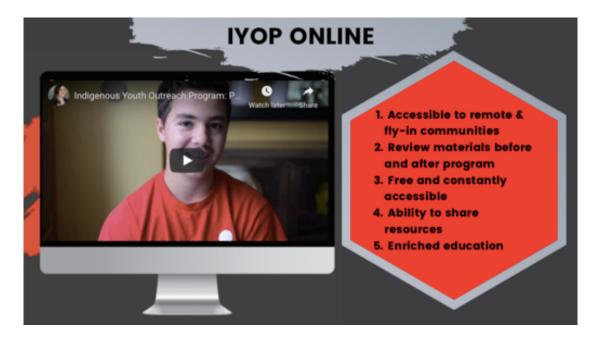
In response to COVID-19, in March 2020, Level developed a self-paced online curriculum called IYOP Online for students and teachers to replace Level's in-classroom activities. IYOP Online can also be paired with in-classroom programming and mentorship for students. The beauty of IYOP Online is it has allowed Level to reach students we never could before. IYOP Online is completely virtual and can be accessed any place, any time, for free!

IYOP Online is an interactive online curriculum that includes text and video lessons and accompanying quizzes to test students' knowledge. IThe resource is made up of a series of lectures that teach students about the law.

You can access the IYOP Online resource here: https://leveljustice.teachable.com/p/justice-education-for-indigenous-youth

#### **Lecture topics include:**

- The Justice System and Indigenous People
- Canadian Criminal Justice System
- Youth Criminal Justice Act
- Restorative Justice



In creating this resource, Level hopes to continue to develop and expand its online educational resources. With these offerings, Level will provide education on Indigenous customs and practices, as well as the Canadian legal system to more students, teachers, Program Leaders and volunteers across Canada. Ultimately, the further development of Level's virtual education resources means farther reach and bigger impact!



### **Teacher Testimonial**

"You are all such a gift and I can't begin to express as their teacher, how thankful I am.

You bring to them something they never considered. And in turn, give them the strength to overcome their fears and take on a role they never believed they could conquer!

I can say it all day and all year long - but I'm kind of like a mom; so when they hear it from all of you, you're changing lives. No exaggeration!"

Kelly Keddy, teacher at Mnjikaning Kendaaswin Elementary School



## 2019-2020 Highlights



340

YOUTH REACHED

through outreach to schools across Canada.



3

PROGRAM EXPANSIONS

increasing the breadth of outreach and building new partnerships.



100

YOUTH MENTORS

engaged in justice education and mentorship activities across Canada.



### Justice Harry Laforme

"I do want all the amazing people at Level to know how very special you are. It has been my honour to have presided over the mock trial from its beginning.

I loved every second of it and saw beautiful and heartening results each time. The staff, volunteers, and especially the students always inspired me."

Level has had the privilege and honour of working with Justice Harry LaForme on our Indigenous Youth Outreach Program (IYOP) since the program's development and launch in 2012. Justice LaForme was the first Indigenous person to be appointed to an appellate court in Canada, and has been a staunch supporter of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups. Justice Laforme is a member of the Mississaugas people. Since IYOP's launch, he has remained heavily involved with the program, often presiding over the mock trial activity with the youth at Wandering Spirit First Nations School in Toronto and speaking at volunteer training events.

Level wanted to take this opportunity to congratulate Justice LaForme on his retirement, and to thank him for his passion and commitment to advancing access to justice. We are so grateful to have such an amazing role model consistently inspiring the youth who participate in our program! We wish him the best in his retirement, and look forward to continued friendship and mentorship!





Volunteering with Level's Indigenous Youth Outreach Program was an absolute treat. It was great to have an opportunity to share my knowledge of the justice system, but the real perk was interacting with such a dynamic and bright group of students.

I was constantly inspired by their spunk, interest and creativity, and I often left our sessions feeling like I had learned just as much as the students had, if not more! The program provides a rare platform for lawyers and students to collaborate and I very much look. forward to participating again in the future.

Michelle Manning 2019-20 IYOP Volunteer Lawyer Mentor



## **Indigenous** Youth Toolkit

Building on the success of our Indigenous Youth Outreach Program, Level has developed an Indigenous Youth Justice Toolkit, which is a youth-led and youth-designed resource built to help youth navigate the justice system. The project was inspired by the report and calls to action created by youth through the Ontario Child Advocate's Feathers of Hope Forum on Justice and Juries. Youth at the Forum used words such as "intimidating, foreign, strange, and discriminatory" when describing the justice system, and highlighted the need for accessible educational resources and training sessions regarding the justice system.

Working from these recommendations, Level surveyed First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth aged 11-18 across Canada, asking them to identify the top justice issues that impact them and their peers. We also asked them to identify the teachings that influence their daily life, who they would turn too if they faced legal trouble, and what qualities make a great leader, mentor or ally.

Following the survey period, Level took the top five issues identified by the youth-drugs/alcohol, bullying, sexual assault, discrimination and interactions with police-and created a resource to help youth navigate these issues. Level worked with volunteer law student researchers, who created summaries of the law on each of the identified areas.

To ensure the resource was youth-driven, Level recruited an Indigenous Youth Council to do the design of the toolkit. The Youth Council guided us through the development of the resource, offering their perspectives and suggestions on the content and design of the toolkit to ensure accessibility and responsiveness. Additionally, understanding that youth communicate in different ways, Level also recruited Indigenous Youth Artists to contribute justice-related pieces to include in the toolkit. Finally, we interviewed Elders regarding the justice system, and included some of their teachings to ensure the resource was culturally-empowering.





## Indigenous Youth Council



**Josh Favel** 

#### Toronto, ON

Josh is from Poundmaker Cree Nation, and is currently studying law at the University of Toronto. He is passionate about issues impacting Indigenous youth.



**Avianna Mackenzie** 

#### Rankin Inlet, NU

Avianna is a Cultural Early Years worker at Tungasuvvingat Inuit. She works with the ages 0-7. She teaches the Inuit Children about the Culture and traditions, to provide support for the child to find his/her identity as an Inuk living in Ottawa; and to understand where their strength, resiliency and ancestors came from.



Ellena Neel

#### Vancouver, BC

Ellena Neel is of Kwakwaka'wakw and Nuuchahnulth descent. She has been working at Indigenous Non-Profit organizations with a focus on youth and art since 2013, and now works for Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. When not working, Ellena creates fashion forward regalia for herself and family.



**Kelsey Borgford** 

#### **Nipissing First Nation**

Kelsey is a seventeen year old activist, learner, and creator from Nipissing First Nation who has a great passion for her community.



## Indigenous Youth Artists



Cleo Keahna



**Marley Moose** 



Charli Dawn Marie Sparvier-Red Old Man



**Evelyn Pakinewatik** 

Cleo Keahna is an actor, writer, and visual artist from the White Earth Anishinaabe. His visual art has been featured at Native Works for Chief Seattle Club and the Walker Point Center for the Arts in Milwaukee, WI.

Marley was born in The Pas, Manitoba and currently lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is Cree from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, and is 14 years old.

Charli, age 11, is from the Siksika Nation and attends school in Calgary, AB. Charli is part Blackfoot and Cree and dances Jingle. She helped design her own regalia, and loves to paint, bead, play piano and help others. Her favourite subjects are math, art and gym.

Evelyn is a Two-Spirit Ojibwe artist and filmmaker who was trained in traditional textile arts by their parents. They are dedicated to stories and the concept of community and found family, as well as the many visual interpretations of what love can be.



### Youth Impact

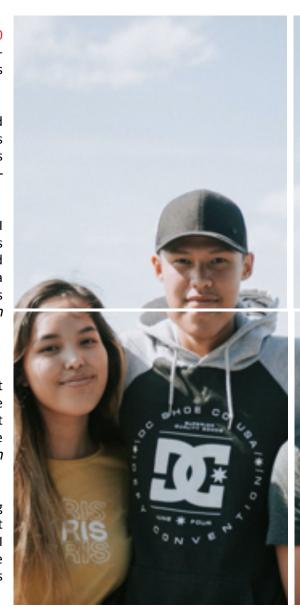
In its first week of release, the Toolkit was accessed online over 400 times, which demonstrates the desire for youth-friendly and culturallyanchored resources of this nature. Further, the leadership opportunities given to youth have had great impacts. Some testimonials include:

"Being Indigenous is phenomenal, beautiful, complicated, and dangerous. Knowing your rights and how to stand for them, as well as who will stand with you, unfortunately is quite essential. This resource is needed, and I am honoured to have been invited to take part in it." -Youth Artist

"Joining the Youth Council was an incredibly rewarding experience. I enjoyed the opportunity to discuss and learn more about the issues facing Indigenous youth in relation to the justice system, and I am proud of the Indigenous Youth Justice Toolkit and my contributions to it. As a member of the Youth Council I felt that my comments and suggestions were welcomed and made an impact on the final project." - Youth Council Member

"Working on this project has been really rewarding. My favourite part was understanding how traditional teachings play a significant role in the lives of Indigenous youth across the country. The fact that this project was youth-led was very empowering and it was a privilege to have the opportunity to work alongside such passionate individuals." - Youth Project Leader

"Being on Level's Indigenous Youth Justice Council was an amazing experience. I was lucky enough to get this opportunity and I enjoyed it wholeheartedly. It helped me grow my confidence as it was something I was proud of. I always looked forward to our meetings and furthermore looking at the end product and knowing how it would impact Indigenous youth." - Youth Council Member









Research & Advocacy





## Campus Chapters

Activating Change Makers

Since 2005 Level's Campus Chapter Program has motivated tomorrow's lawyers, leaders and change-makers to champion social justice causes and make positive contributions to their communities. Focused on an annual theme, students across the country organize community events, host conferences and fundraisers and empower their peers.

Social consciousness is at the heart of Level's chapter program. Students are encouraged to think critically and assess how their unique set of skills can be used to better the world around them. In 2019-2020, students shed light on the topic of self-represented litigants in the Canadian justice system.







## **Chapter Locations**



### **Active Chapters**

- University de Montréal
- **Q** University of Ottawa
- **Q**ueens University
- Western University
- University of Windsor
- **Q** University of Manitoba
- **Q** University of Saskatchewan
- University of Victoria



### Student Initiatives



#### PANEL DISCUSSION

Student leaders engaged law students, legal professionals and community members through hosting panel discussions on pertinent access to justice issues. Topics included: systemic racism and access to justice, access to justice as it relates to eviction and access to justice for Indigenous peoples.



#### STUDENT-LED JOURNAL

Level's Campus chapter at the Université de Montréal edited and published a student-led journal on access to justice in Canada, which included 8 submissions in both English and French from law students across the country. A digital copy is accessible here.



#### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Campus chapters engaged students at their universities on discussions around our annual human rights theme of selfrepresented litigants to raise awareness of access to justice in Canada.



## **Impact Highlights**

74% of students leaders felt their 70% of respondents felt the program involvement with Level inspired helped them connect with diverse them to stay involved with human colleagues that they otherwise would rights and social justice issues not have been exposed to 74% of respondents felt their role 93% of student leaders would as a Level Chapter executive recommend joining a Level improved their organizational and Campus Chapter to a friend problem solving skills 81% of student leaders felt more 74% of respondents felt the

program helped them better

understand and identify systemic

barriers to justice in Canada

confident of their knowledge of

self-represented litigant justice

issues in Canada



















8 Campus Chapters

10 Student Leaders

Engaging **54** students and legal professionals



The experiences I've gained in my time with Level have been incredibly valuable and fulfilling. The Campus Chapter program gives law students an opportunity to create real change by raising awareness of access to justice issues within the legal community, with the goal that the next generation of lawyers will be able to address these problems from within the justice system itself.









Training & Mentorship



## Cultural Humility & Empathy Training

Our specialized cultural humility training involves working with justice sector responders (lawyers, law students, judges, etc.) to increase their knowledge on the histories and lived realities of Indigenous communities. "Cultural humility" is a step beyond mere competency and involves critical self-reflection to understand how personal and systemic biases impact the way we interact with the individuals and communities we aim to serve. Level's training sessions provide participants with some of the tools needed to approach their work with empathy and understanding.

Level has been facilitating cultural humility training sessions with justice responders since 2012. These sessions highlight the histories and lived realities of Indigenous peoples in Canada and encourage attendees to approach their work with Indigenous communities from a place of allyship.

Sessions are led by Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers, who provide a cultural teaching, often focused on humility and finding balance using traditional practices. Following this, we generally facilitate panel discussions featuring Indigenous leaders from various backgrounds, including lawyers, social workers, teachers, and police officers, who share tips and best practices for working with Indigenous communities and youth.

Our training sessions provide attendees with insights and challenges for shifting from a passive form of reconciliation to a more active one, encouraging people to embrace cultural humility rather than mere cultural competence.



### **Empathy Training**

Empathy, or the capacity to understand or feel what another is experiencing, is a skill that is not necessarily promoted, fostered or developed through law school or the legal profession. However, empathy is incredibly important in order to effectively serve the individuals and communities that legal professionals work with. Building empathy allows justice sector responders to better understand the root causes and impacts of barriers to justice, improves communication and provides the tools to approach legal issues from the client's perspective. In 2017, Level began facilitating empathy training sessions with justice sector professionals, using specialized training obtained through our friends at 21 Toys.

Level's training focuses on the importance of empathy in the legal profession and helps fosters these skills through the use of the <u>Empathy Toy</u>.

These workshops incorporate the Empathy Toy, an innovative tool designed to spark conversations about mutual understanding, frustration, communication, and empathy. Participants are encouraged to be vulnerable, embrace discomfort, and are guided to reflect on these experiences, drawing parallels to their work as social justice advocates, lawyers and/or law students.







### Empathy Training x PBSC at U of T Law

Empathy, or the capacity to understand or feel what another is experiencing, is a skill that is not necessarily promoted, fostered or developed through law school or the legal profession. However, empathy is incredibly important in order to effectively serve the individuals and communities that legal professionals work with. Building empathy allows justice sector responders to better understand the root causes and impacts of barriers to justice, improves communication and provides the tools to approach legal issues from the client's perspective. In 2017, Level began facilitating empathy training sessions with justice sector professionals, using specialized training obtained through our friends at 21 Toys.

Level's training focuses on the importance of empathy in the legal profession and helps fosters these skills through the use of the <u>Empathy Toy</u>.

These workshops incorporate the Empathy Toy, an innovative tool designed to spark conversations about mutual understanding, frustration, communication, and empathy. Participants are encouraged to be vulnerable, embrace discomfort, and are guided to reflect on these experiences, drawing parallels to their work as social justice advocates, lawyers and/or law students.





### **Blazing Trails**

Mentorship Program

Since 2004, Level has worked closely with law students across the country on advancing various human rights issues. Through this work, we have gathered 15 years of feedback, and one of the common themes that stood out was the feeling of disempowerment among students seeking to pursue alternative legal careers. Specifically, students communicated that law school had the effect of obscuring their career goals, and pushing them towards more traditional streams of law that they were not passionate about.

In 2017, to help address this concern, Level launched Blazing Trails, a unique program designed to connect law students with "trailblazers" - daring professionals who carved out their own path and redefined what it means to be successful in the legal profession.

Over the course of the 2019-2020 academic school year (beginning in November 2019), Level mentees and mentors were divided into groups of up to 4 mentees per mentor and will meet 4 times for 1 hour, for a total of four hours. Once mentors and mentees were introduced through email, parties exchanged availability and scheduled their meetings. Mentors and mentees are both provided with resources to facilitate discussion and work through during the course of the program.



### **Our Mentors**



Bhavan Sodhi/Gurvir Gill

Innocence Canada



Joy Wakefield

**Nokiiwin Tribal Council** 



**lan Miron** 

Ecojustice



Rizwan Khan

Viridus Lex LLP



Kim Stanton

Goldblatt Partners LLP



Molly Reynolds

Torys LLP

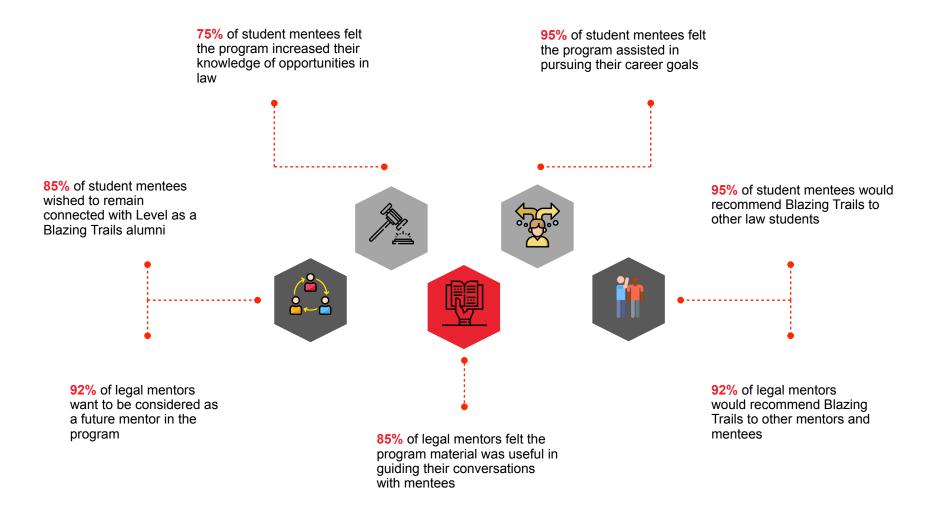


I love my mentees. They bring vibrancy and earnestness to our discussions. Each of them has quite a list of accomplishments to their names, and I remind them of that. Our most important topic has been integrity, articulating and staying true to your values. Law school can be like a powerful river, and without an anchor, it will take you along haphazardly rather than you setting out the ways in which you want to use it to get to your destination. I have enjoyed connecting with them and I really look forward to staying in touch and hearing about who they become going forward.

- Joy Wakefield, Nokiiwin Tribal Council 2019-20 Blazing Trails Mentor

\*Other mentors not pictured here: Elba Bendo, Fatima Cader, Ian Mackenzie, Jacqueline Madden, Laura Morrison, Nana Yanful, Jacqueline Swaisland and Stacey Mirowski

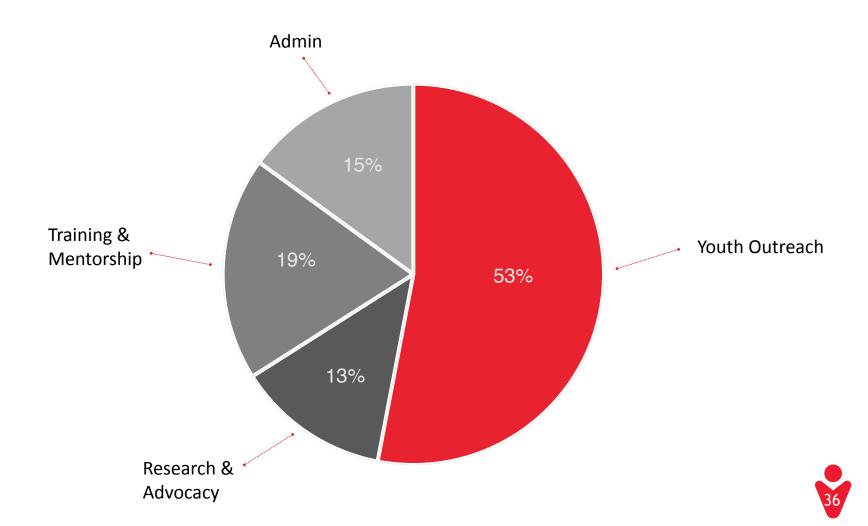
## **Impact Highlights**





## **Our Financial Summary**

Level's audited financial statements for our fiscal year ending August 31, 2019 can be found <a href="here">here</a>.



## Our Supporters





























### Thank You

To our sponsors and supporters, including the countless elders, experts, knowledge-keepers, teachers, judges, volunteers, mentors, advisors, research fellows, community leaders, champions and donors, thank you for your contributions. It is through your continued support, we are able to disrupt prejudice, build empathy and advance human rights.





## Acknowledgments

All photographs in this report, unless otherwise indicated, are taken by <u>Kenya-Jade Pinto</u> for Level.

Page 4: photograph by Alexa Mazarello.

Page 13: Collage created by <u>LAWS</u> Summer Student Luna Galvez-Pozo.

















