

# Annual Report 2020-2021

level  
changing lives through law



# Table of contents



4	Letter from the ED
6	Mission
8	Values
9	Strategic Plan
10	Team
12	Board of Directors
13	Programs
14	Youth Outreach Program
21	Research & Advocacy Programs
28	Training & Mentorship Programs
35	Facing Resistance Speaker Series
36	Level Portraits
44	Funder Spotlight: Olivier Chouc at CN
48	Financial Summary
49	Supporters

A Level Student taking part in  
the Mock Trial Portion of IYOP.

*Photo by Kenya-Jade Pinto*



# Letter from the Executive Director



*Shelan Markus*  
Executive Director

On behalf of the team at Level, I would like to personally thank you for your support of Level's programs, especially during the continued pandemic challenges this year. Your support helps us deliver specialized justice education programming, training and mentorship for social justice leaders, and professional development opportunities for the socially conscious lawyers of tomorrow.

This year Level's Indigenous Youth Outreach Program reached 400+ students in 21 locations across Canada. We were lucky to have outstanding volunteers join the program including Justice Jodie-Lynn Waddilove, Justice André Chamberlain, and Justice Murray Pelletier.

In January 2021, Level hosted its first virtual Cultural Humility and Empathy Training Event. The Event brought together over 200 attendees to learn about the lived realities and histories of Indigenous Peoples and move from a passive form of reconciliation to an active one.

Level's Campus Chapter Program ran in 8 law schools this year. Students engaged their peers on the topic of systemic racism in the justice system, held panel events, and published a student-led journal. We engaged over 1,300 students through Level's Campus Chapter Program. Former Windsor Chapter President, Tasha Stansbury, joined Level as a Research Fellow this year. Tasha wrote a detailed report about climate action on Canadian university campuses.

# Letter from the Executive Director



***Shelan Markus***  
Executive Director

This year Level welcomed 40 law student mentees from 16 law schools across Canada. We matched the mentees with 16 mentors who offered their insights on how to carve out a successful and meaningful career path in the legal profession.

Lastly, Level hosted two Facing Resistance Speakers Series to confront challenging justice topics and questions, but also learn how we can collectively create a justice system that is responsive, balanced and fair. Thank you to all of our supporters who joined these two successful events!

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, The Judge Linda Giesbrecht Fund, Justice Canada, The Law Foundation of BC, Law Foundation of Saskatchewan, McMillan LLP, Enbridge, Torys LLP, Blakes LLP, Weirfoulds LLP, Goodmans LLP, McMillan LLP, McCarthy Tétrault LLP, and our individual donors.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shelan Markus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small flourish at the end.

Shelan Markus

# Our Mission + Vision

*Who?*

Level is a Canadian charitable organization.

*How?*

Programs focused on innovative justice education, mentorship, and training.

*What?*

We level the barriers to justice by disrupting prejudice, building empathy and advancing human rights.

*Why?*

We want to see a world where every person can exercise their fundamental human rights.

Level has supported critical human rights work for over 15 years

*Annually, we engage...*

400+

Indigenous youth in justice education and mentorship

150+

Legal professionals mentoring Indigenous youth and law students

1,300+

Law students and professionals to champion social justice issues



# 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 STRATEGIC PLAN AND THEORY OF CHANGE.](#)



## *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 professionals*

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



Gabby Maatouk  
Education Program  
Coordinator (Summer)



Natalie Oleksinski  
Summer Student



Giovanna Batti  
Summer Student



Misko Kicknosway  
Program Facilitator



Paul Porter  
Program Facilitator



Desneige Frandsen  
Program Facilitator



Thomas Milne  
Program Facilitator

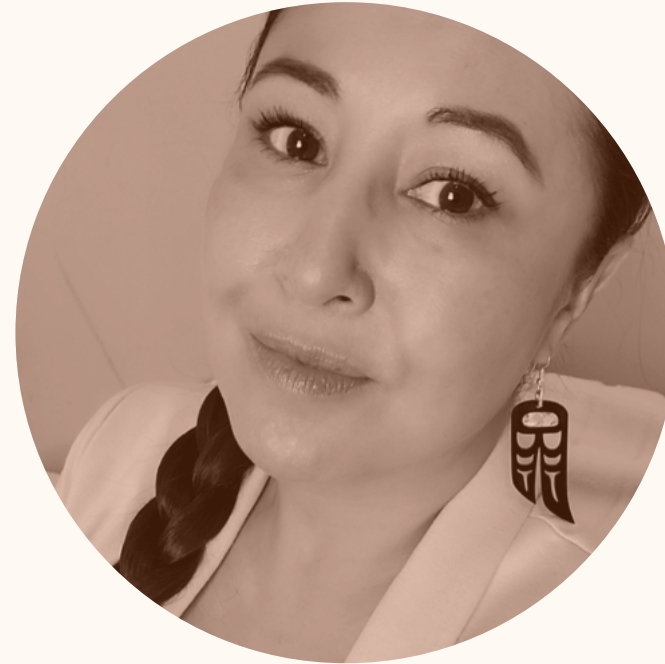
# Our Team



Samantha Craig-Curnow  
Program Facilitator



Rory Erickson  
Program Facilitator



Anita Stewart  
Program Facilitator



Tyson Acoose  
Program Facilitator



Madison Frehlick  
Program Facilitator



Brooke VanderKoi  
Program Facilitator



Kennedy Pinette  
Program Facilitator



Robert Bassett  
Program Facilitator



Gavin Wilkes  
Program Facilitator

# Board of Directors



Jennifer Guerard  
Board Chair



Susan Spence  
Secretary



Richard Zeni  
Treasurer



Adrian Di Giovanni  
Vice-Chair



Hannah Riding  
Director



Fallon Melander  
Director



Brittany Twiss  
Director



Heather McKay  
Director



Tanya Mushynski  
Director

# Our programs

We advance our mission through three main program areas:

## *Youth Outreach*

Indigenous Youth  
Outreach Program

Youth Justice  
Toolkit

## *Research & Advocacy*

Campus Chapters

Research Fellowship

## *Training & Mentorship*

Facing Resistance Events

Blazing Trails Mentorship

Cultural Humility  
Training



# Youth Outreach *Program*

# 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 11-18 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. The resource is made up of a series of lectures that teach students about the law.

Lecture topics include:

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



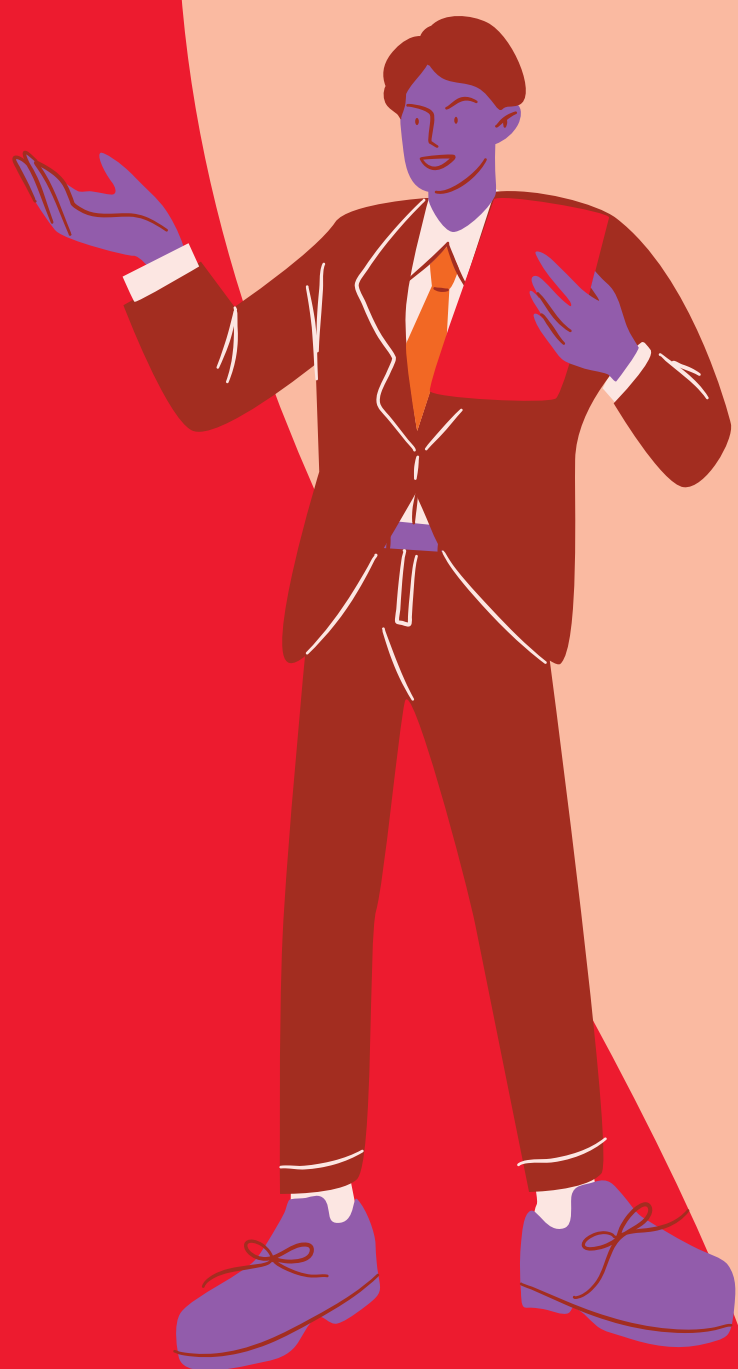


Students getting ready for their Mock Trial activity.

*Photo by Kenya-Jade Pinto*



# What participants have to say *About the program*



"I would love to become a lawyer" **2020/2021 student participant**

"Although COVID-19 presented challenges and could have been the end of it, Level not only figured out a way around them, but actually put together what I felt was the most successful mock trial we've had in many years. Not just in terms of how smoothly it went but in how engaged the students were and how much they got out of it. Well done. Already looking forward to next year " **2020/2021 Volunteer**

I cannot express how thankful and grateful for the time we have spent together over the last 2 months, but I will try! In speaking with the students and observing the level of enthusiasm they have for your programming has provided amazing learning opportunities and the outcome has FAR EXCEEDED my expectations. I am certain that this not only provided an incredible amount of experience and knowledge gained, but this will impact the students' lives for years and years to come. Many of them want to get involved in the legal system now and have found new passions and interests in ensuring people get treated fairly, equitably and with respect." **2020/2021 Supervising Teacher**

# Program Highlights

400+

*Youth engaged*

In justice education and mentorship activities across Canada

21

*Program delivery locations*

increasing our outreach and impact each year

79%

*Of students*

Feel comfortable around lawyers because of this program

# 2020/21 Program locations



## *Alberta*

Ernest Morrow Public School in Calgary  
Jasper Place School in Edmonton

## *Ontario*

Wandering Spirit First Nations School in Toronto  
Eastview Public School in Toronto  
Meadowlands Public School in Ottawa  
Mnjikaning Kendaaswin Elementary School in Chippewas of Rama First Nation  
Antler River Elementary School in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation  
Georgian Bay District Secondary School in Midland  
Beaver Brae Secondary School in Kenora  
Sioux North High School in Sioux Lookout

## *Manitoba*

William Whyte School in Winnipeg

## *Saskatchewan*

Westmount Community School in Saskatoon  
Sakewew High School in North Battleford  
Yellow Quill First Nation  
Ochapowace First Nation

## *Yukon*

Haines Junction  
Whitehorse

## *Nunavut*

Rankin Inlet  
Gjoa Haven



# Research & Advocacy *Programs*

# Research fellowship project

## *Canadian universities in climate action*

Tasha Stansbury, former Windsor Chapter President and current LLM Candidate at the University of Ottawa, joined Level as a Research Fellow this year. Tasha wrote a detailed report about climate action on Canadian university campuses. The report serves as a deep dive into the current actions being taken on university campuses and a guide for those who want to take bolder action.

Tasha Stansbury (she/her) is an LLM Candidate at the University of Ottawa, focusing her research on Canadian protections for individuals displaced by the effects of climate change. She completed her J.D. at the University of Windsor (2020) and holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Equity Studies from the University of Toronto (2016). She has a range of legal academic interests, including international human rights law, refugee law, sexual and gender diversity in the law, environmental law, and food law and policy. Tasha was the founding president of the University of Windsor Level Justice campus chapter, and is happy to continue supporting Level's work.



Volunteers in Level Swag.

*Photo by Kenya-Jade Pinto*



# Campus Chapter Program

## *Activating changemakers*

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 2020/21, our campus chapters promoted awareness of systemic racism in Canada's criminal justice system, and encouraged their peers to use their budding legal skills to make positive impacts in their communities. With 8 chapters activating over 50 students as leaders and change-makers, and a national impact on over 1300 students and legal professionals, Level's Campus Chapter program is creating the next generation of empathetic and engaged leaders.





# 2020/21 Program locations



## *Our Chapters*

University of Victoria  
University of Saskatchewan  
University of Manitoba  
University of Windsor  
Western University  
Queen's University  
Ottawa University  
Université de Montreal

# Campus Chapters

## *Student initiatives*



### *Panel events*

Student leaders engaged law students, legal professionals and community members through panel events on the annual theme of systemic racism. Topics included: Civil Law and Indigenous Communities and Prison Abolition.



### *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 submissions in both English and French from law students across the country.



### *Student engagement*

Campus chapters engaged students at their universities on discussions around our annual human rights theme of systemic racism in the Criminal Justice system in Canada.

# *Impact Highlights*

8

*Campus Chapters*

At Law Schools across Canada

50+

*Student Leaders*

Engaged through the Campus  
Chapter Program

1300+

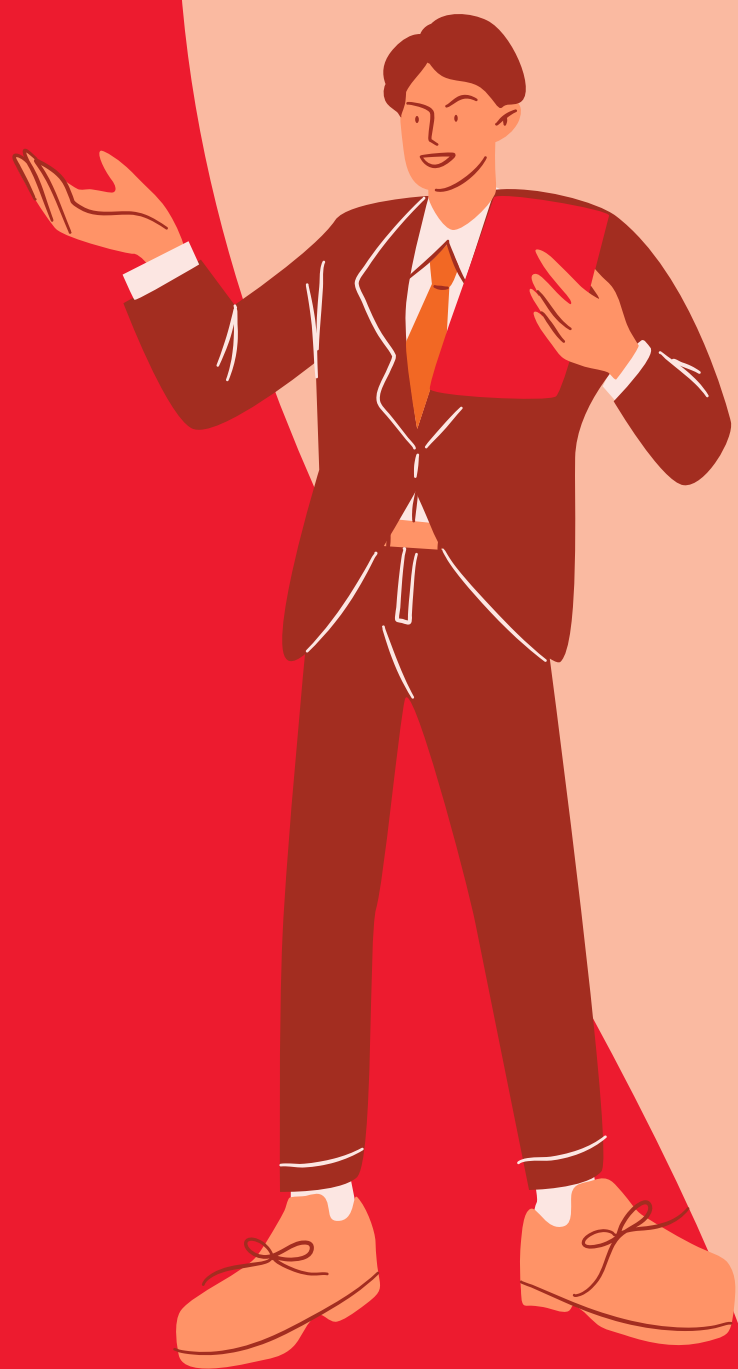
*Students*

Engaged through Campus Chapter  
activities and events



# Training & Mentorship *Programs*

# Cultural Humility and Empathy *Training*



Our specialized cultural humility training involves working with justice sector responders 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.

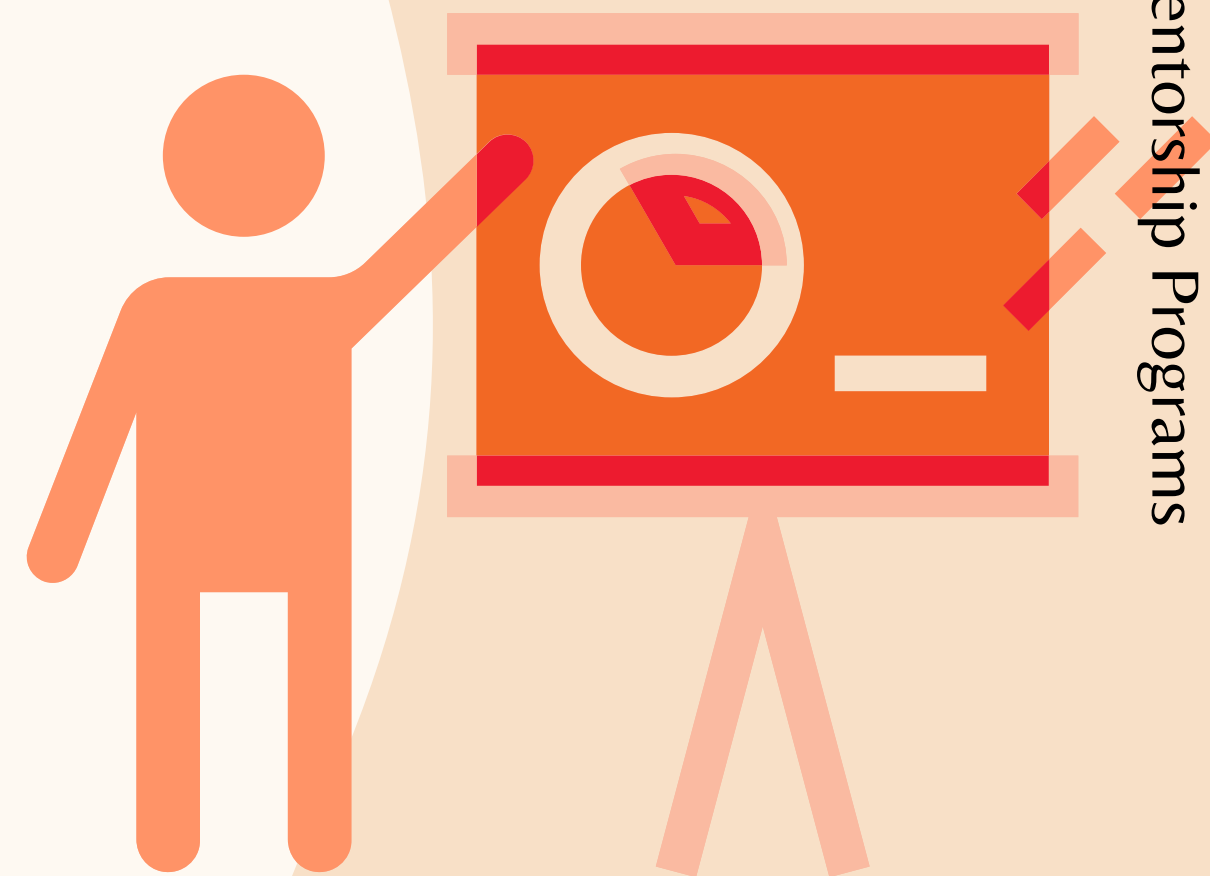
These sessions highlight the histories and lived realities of Indigenous peoples in Canada and encourage attendees to approach their work with Indigenous communities from a place of allyship. Sessions are led by Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers, who provide a cultural teaching, often focused on humility and finding balance using traditional practices, followed by 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 attendees to embrace cultural humility rather than mere cultural competence.

# 2021 Cultural Humility Event

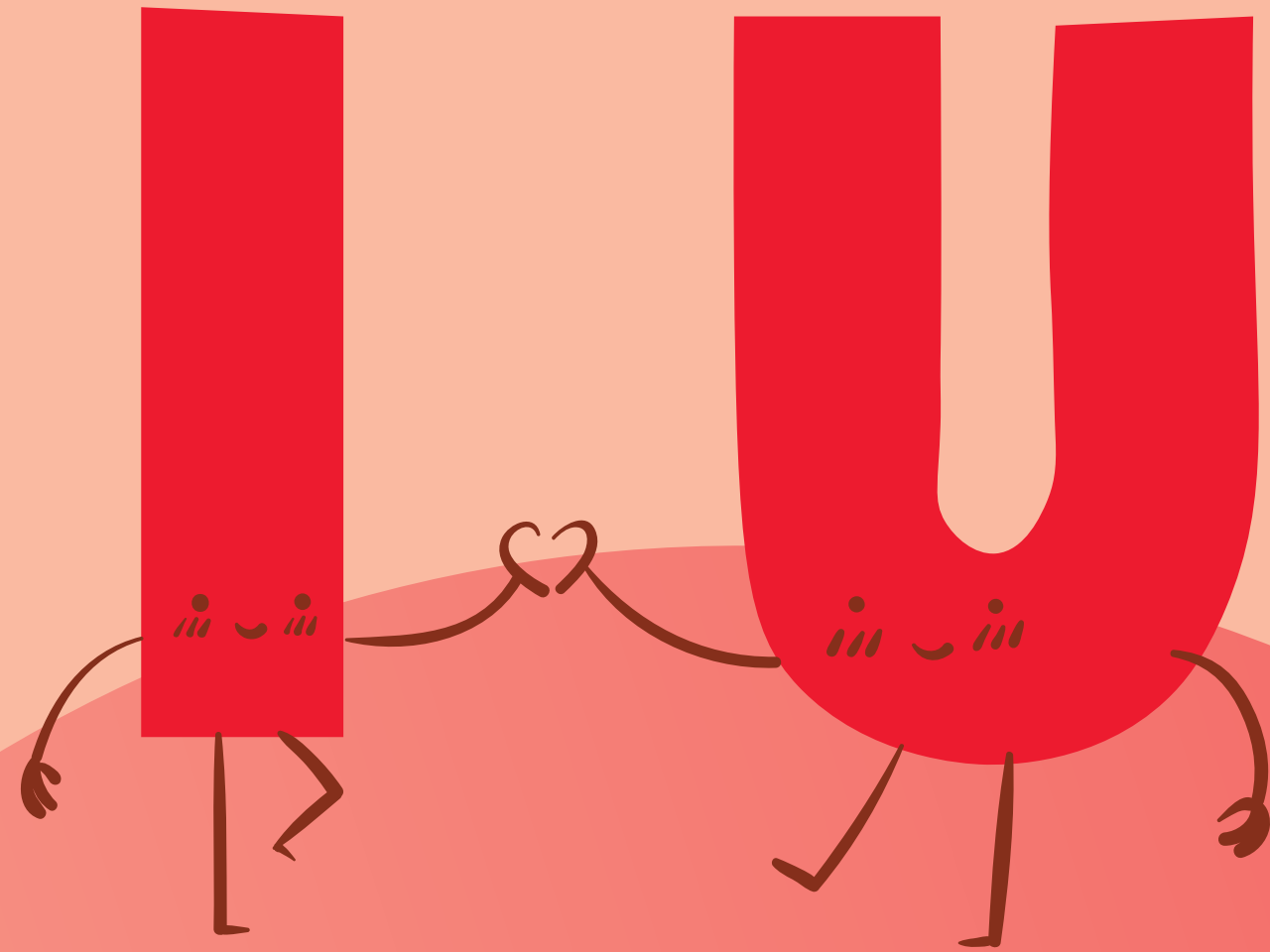
## *Moving from passive to active reconciliation*

On January 27th 2021, Level hosted its first virtual Cultural Humility and Empathy Training Event. Over 200 attendees joined the event. This training event provided participants with an opportunity to learn about the lived realities and histories of Indigenous Peoples and move from a passive form of reconciliation to an active one.

To open the event, Level was joined by retired Senator from the Métis Nation of Ontario, Elder Constance Simmonds and Knowledge Keeper, Kim Wheatley. Following Constance's opening, Professor Frankie Young shared information about the inequities of the justice system and what can be done to transform the way in which law is taught and practiced in Canada. The session ended with an anti-racism training workshop from Samantha Matters at Future Ancestors Services. Samantha spoke about decolonization as a practice and how we can use this concept to make the justice system more equitable.



# 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 Empathy Toy.

Students at an Empathy  
Training event.

*Photo by Kenya-Jade Pinto*





# 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. In the 2020/21 Academic year, Level’s Blazing Trails program partnered 40 law students representing 15 law schools across the country, with 16 legal mentors. Mentorship cohorts were provided with a toolkit to facilitate discussion, and worked through four 1-hour sessions designed to provide law students with the support and answers they needed to navigate the early stages of their legal career.



# Impact Highlights

40

*Mentees*

Recruited from Law Schools across  
Canada

16

*Mentors*

Who have Blazed their own trails  
and defined their own metrics of  
success

16

*Law Schools*

Represented as part of our  
mentorship program

# Facing Resistance *Speakers Series*

Level's Facing Resistance Speaker Series offers a diverse virtual platform to not only confront challenging topics and questions, but also learn how we can collectively create a justice system that is responsive, balanced and fair. This year, we hosted two virtual Facing Resistance Speaker Series events:

## **CANADA'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE CRISIS AND ITS EFFECT ON MARGINALIZED YOUTH - OCTOBER 2020**

Our first event brought together 100 youth, legal professionals and law students to share in a candid discussion on the topic of Canada's access to justice crisis and its effects on marginalized youth. Level was joined by retired Métis Senator, Constance Simmonds who provided a traditional opening. Level Executive Director, Shelan Markus, then moderated a panel discussion with Maggie Wenthe and Anthony Morgan on the event topic. Following the panel discussion, Justice Jodie-Lynn Waddilove shared her personal story on being an Anishinabe and Lenape woman, born and raised on the Munsee-Delaware First Nation, and her path to becoming an Ontario Court Justice in 2018.

## **INCREASING DIVERSITY IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM - APRIL 2021**

Our second event brought together 80 youth, legal professionals and law students to share in a candid discussion on the topic of increasing diversity in the justice system. Level was joined by Ojibway Anishinaabe Grandmother and Knowledge Keeper, Kim Wheatley, who did an opening prayer and sent forth good intentions for the event. Following Kim's opening, Shelan moderated a panel discussion with Ish Aderonmu and Bhavan Sodhi on the topic of increasing diversity in the justice system. Following the panel discussion, Margaret Froh, Metis Two-Spirit lawyer and educator, and President of the Metis Nation of Ontario, spoke to her career journey and her thoughts on increasing diversity in the justice system.



# Level *Portraits*



## Level's Story

Level's story begins in the year 2005. Co-founded by Catherine McKenna and Yasmin Shaker, the two started Canadian Lawyers Abroad with a simple goal: to engage the Canadian legal community to positively change lives in Canada and abroad. In September of 2015, 'Level' was produced in the hopes of combating injustice, promoting equality in rights and opportunities, and changing lives through law.

The programs within Level provide innovative justice education, training, and mentorship. Level's vast network of people strive to disrupt prejudice, build empathy, and touch the lives of many.

Level's prosperous community of teachers, mentors, law students, advisors, directors staff provide critical services that advance Level's mission and goals. These non-profit leaders are the voice of the people Level serves. Let's explore the Level Portraits to discover some of their wonderful stories...

## Gabriella Maatouk

Education Program Coordinator

---

Gabriella is a second-year law student at the Lincoln Alexander School of Law at Ryerson University. During her first year of law school, she was the Co-founder and President of the university's First-Generation Network, a chapter aimed at reducing barriers for students who are the first in their family to complete post-secondary education. Gabriella also took part in the Ryerson Law Refugee Pod as a Student Case Worker, where she observed hearings and assisted lawyers with developing alternatives for detention for specific cases. Prior to law school, Gabriella went to Carleton University where she completed a Masters in Legal Studies and an undergraduate degree in Law and Women's and Gender Studies.



“My interests and my areas of research before going to law school were mainly in immigration and refugee rights, women’s issues, and prison abolition.”

Gabriella is new to Level - drawn to the organization "because of the aspect of human rights and access to justice. A lot of work Level does tend to relate to those areas. During law school, I ended up enjoying indigenous law, and that's also an area focus that they're working on right now, especially with the mock trials and access to justice for Indigenous youth."

Gabriella stated that "we need to allow indigenous people to have a voice-first and not speak for them in terms of cultural sensitivity. I think it is important to be an ally and understand how they would view a culturally sensitive, open and safe space."

### **Kim Wheatley**

Ojibwe Anishinaabe Grandmother & Indigenous Advisor



Kim Wheatley is an Ojibwe Anishinaabe Grandmother for the Shawanaga First Nation Reserve. Wheatley carries the spirit name Head or Leader of the Fireflower and who is Turtle Clan. Kim has worked with over 34 First Nations Communities and volunteers on various boards as an Indigenous advisor, one of which is Level Justice.

Kim has been involved in event organizing and consulting for environmental agencies, governments, secondary schools, and many more: "I work with people fit in elevating and promoting the Indigenous perspective in a meaningful way as we try to figure out what the path to reconciliation is all about."

Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in the Canadian criminal justice system, both as victims/survivors and accused/convicted individuals. Kim has had personal experiences in the justice system: "I have been a victim of racial targeting by the police and, of course, mistaken identity, and later was incarcerated. I have been on both sides of the fence in the justice system. I have also had family members go through the justice system in really negative circumstances."

When Kim was asked to join Level, she briefly read Level's mission and goals. "I have done lots of work with Level. I have done water work, water protection, water ceremonies, and there was a recognition that I have an upper-level perspective of who they are." Level provides a "unique opportunity for students that you do not see

widespread. It helped to demystify what the court of law is and what it is like to be in a courtroom. What is it like to be in a courtroom? Who's there? What roles do they play?"

She clarifies, "I tell personal reflections about what I have seen and the ongoing life changes we experience." Kim provides experiential stories based on family and extended networks, "Indigenous people have a complex history with the justice system. It is not just Indigenous students, and it's all indigenous perspectives. Our stories are not actively inserted into our educational experience. There is a gap. So I bring that authentic voice perspective for students to see themselves in me, hear the stories based on my family's experiences and understand the questions they might have."

In the IYOP program, students have the opportunity to understand the court system. Kim believes that "it (IYOP) should be a mandatory credit within school systems. All students, Indigenous or otherwise, should learn about the Indigenous perspective and what the court system is about. Understanding that you can teach students that there are consequences for the choices you make. You have free will and have choices that can impact you for the rest of your life, in positive and in negative ways."

## Jennifer Guerard

Level Board Chair



Jennifer Guerard is Managing Director, Legal at OMERS Infrastructure. Before joining OMERS, Jennifer was Senior Counsel for GE Capital Americas, located in Toronto, overseeing the Corporate Finance and Workout portfolios for Capital Canada. Before joining GE, Jennifer was at Torys LLP, practicing in both the Toronto and New York offices of Torys in the Corporate and Insolvency Groups.

Jennifer has been with Level for ten years. She was initially brought into Level by the organization's founders - Catherine McKenna and Yasmin Shaker, "the organization has pivoted since then. It was mostly about sending layers aboard on internships. The organization pivoted towards an internal focus in Canada and on mentoring programs. It has been great to see the organization develop over the last ten years I have been involved."

She directly volunteered in the IYOP program at the First Nations School in downtown Toronto. It was an excellent experience for Jennifer "it was a great experience for me

because I got to see the program work firsthand. I recruited some lawyers to come in, and none of us are litigators. We are what we call 'corporate counsel.' One of them turned to me and said, 'I don't know how to do any of this, and I said, 'you probably know more than the kid in grade seven.' It was a bit out of our comfort zones, and it was a great learning experience."

Jennifer has driven the expansion of IYOP in Northwestern Ontario. The pandemic has allowed the program to expand in remote regions "we had to develop online tools and modules. It became easier to provide it in remote communities." Level Justice has prepared teams to go into schools across Canada while continuing the online version for those hard to reach. She hopes that the possibility of a hybrid model will be put into place in the near future.

### **Gavin Wilkes**

IYOP Program Facilitator (Edmonton)

---

Gavin Wilkes is a first year law student at the University of Alberta. Originating from the Northwest territories, he completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Alberta. For several years, Wilkes worked as a student recruiter and student advisor at the University of Alberta. He is currently an IYOP Program Facilitator at Level.

Gavin became a first-year representative in the Indigenous Law Students Association (ILSA) at the University of Alberta. He then discovered Level Justice "Level Justice sounded great, because for myself, as a youth growing up in small northern communities, on reserve, you were told that the law and justice were not an option for native people. It was against you from day one."

Indigenous youth are rarely exposed to the repercussions of the law, the importance of justice and how Indigenous peoples can use it to benefit as communities. "Level exposes Indigenous youth to what the law is, how the process works - being charged or arrested, how the legislation comes into play and what happens in a broken-down process."

The IYOP program invites students to learn and listen; however, their feedback is invaluable to the organization's mission. Gavin recalls, "there were some high school students who wrote me a letter. I received comments such as: 'you changed my perspective on the law' and 'you have made me reevaluate what kind of citizen I want to be in society.' These were good things to hear because it shows that Level Justice



offers a program that is inspiring a marginalized minority to pursue a legal education." The law influences our lives, and if youth choose to pursue a career in law, it offers a chance for diversity.

### **Brooke VanderKooi**

IYOP Program Facilitator (Edmonton)

---

Brooke VanderKooi is a first year law student at the University of Alberta. She completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Alberta, majoring in Sociology and minoring in English. She works at Bennett Jones, a law firm located in Calgary. Brooke is currently an IYOP Program Facilitator at Level.

Brooke is a member of the Indigenous Law School Accusation at the University of Alberta. She took part in the mock trial portion of IYOP with fellow program facilitator Gavin Wilkes. "He and I teamed up to help run and coordinate the program. It was a very cool experience, considering how everything was online this year."

The mock trial portion of IYOP usually starts with presentations on different aspects of the legal community. Brooke explained: "being Indigenous in Canada and dealing with the justice system is, unfortunately, a higher statistic than it is for other populations." It is essential to promote Indigenous peoples to enter the legal sector because they are overrepresented on the "end of the spectrum."

There are different activities presented in each IYOP lesson. Which include "the students taking quizzes, asking about the different teachings, and having students answer questions." Brooke did an exercise with the students that involved a case study: "we read the details of the case and judge the different levels of empathy within that case. We tried to brainstorm how we could help the fictional individual charged in the case. This being so that the individual could strengthen her ties with the community and apologize and make amends, rather than jail time or typical punishments in law enforcement."

## **Bhavan Sodhi**

Blazing Trails Mentor

---

Bhavan Sodhi is the Legal Director at Innocence Canada. Innocence Canada is a non-governmental organization working to identify, advocate for, and exonerate individuals who have been convicted of a crime they did not commit. She is an Executive Director of the Innocence Project at Osgoode Hall Law School and an adjunct professor. She has been with Level for many years as a mentor in the Blazing Trails Program.

The Blazing Trails Mentorship Program is a unique program aimed at helping law students connect and engage with daring lawyers. There is “a lot of conversation about diversity and inclusion in the program and what it means to be represented in the legal profession.”

The program is best suited to aid future lawyers in their metrics of success. Bhavan recalls: “Level allowed me not just to continue to move forward, but also allowed me to offer guidance to the mentees that participated in the program. I had an opportunity to participate, give back, and make sure others were coming behind me. Allow them to follow the same path.”

## **Rick Nathanson**

Crown Attorney & IYOP Volunteer

---

Rick Nathanson is an Assistant Crown Attorney in Toronto. He completed an undergraduate degree at Western University and received his law degree at the University of Toronto in 1993. He began his career in criminal law began working at a small defence firm in Toronto, and then worked with Legal Aid Ontario as Duty Counsel at various Ontario Court of Justice courthouses in Toronto. Rick joined the North York Crown Attorney’s Office in 2000, and has been an Assistant Crown there for the past twenty-one years. Rick works with Level Justice as a volunteer with the Indigenous Youth Outreach Program (IYOP).

Rick has been volunteering with Level since 2014. “The program [IYOP] focuses on introducing Indigenous youth to the criminal justice system, encouraging students to consider working within the justice system one day, and to recognize that being a lawyer, or someday a judge, or working in another capacity within justice system

function is something they can work towards and achieve”, he explains. When Rick started with the program, he found that while there were a number of lawyer volunteers, most were from larger corporate law firms with commercial law backgrounds, and as such had little practical experience with what happens in a criminal trial or court, beyond what they learned in law school. The opportunity to use his on-the-ground experience to assist in the IYOP program has been very rewarding.

As a volunteer with IYOP, Rick has worked with students in grades ranging from grade five to twelve. Rick explained how the curriculum is laid out: “We typically start with several sessions discussing how the justice system in Canada works, and how the court system works. We compare various aspects to traditional Indigenous approaches to justice. From there, we move on to the mock trial exercise. The mock trial presents a more hands-on way for students to see how the court system works.” Students are given the opportunity to take on roles such as defence lawyer, crown attorney, court clerk, juror or witness, and prepare and run a trial, based on a fact scenario provided to them. They are supported in their preparation by volunteer lawyers who provide coaching and guidance, and the actual mock trial usually takes place before an actual judge.

“Like anything else, being a lawyer and conducting a trial is a skill that you learn. But there is nothing about the mock trial process that these kids cannot do. Rather than simply draft scripts for them to read [in the role of Crown attorney, for example] I try to help them come up with their own questions, by looking at the fact scenario and figuring out what information is important that they need to get from the witnesses,” Rick says. “It sometimes takes a bit of encouragement, but generally they really enjoy the process and really get into it.”

Rick recalls the variety of students he has encountered “Some students are keen to participate from the outset. And sometimes there are kids who at first blush seem like they are disengaged and disinterested, but it turns out that they have been paying attention the entire time. As we get closer to the mock trial, I have sometimes been a bit worried about how a given student is going to fare, but by the time the mock trial begins they have become more motivated and confident and really shine. Sometimes it is the student you were worried about most who really surprises you.”

Over the years that he has been involved with Level and IYOP, Rick has really been impressed with the program’s focus on inspiring students to take action, evaluate their career goals and participate in educational activities, while continually encouraging confidence and pride in their culture and identity.

Interview with Olivier Chouc, Vice President,  
Law at Canadian National Railway

level  
changing lives through law



*Funder Spotlight*

## 1. Why is it important to CN to support the success of programs such as Level's Indigenous Youth Outreach Program (IYOP)?

Because at CN, we believe in equal opportunities. We also believe that differences should be celebrated, not depreciated. Fundamentally, we believe in the significant potential of Indigenous youth. And we believe this potential is only limited by bigotry and a lack of understanding.

We love the principle on which IYOP is built. The belief that with a greater understanding comes greater acceptance. And that greater acceptance is the first step towards true reconciliation.

Indigenous youth are over-represented in our criminal justice system. That is a failure and it is not the failure of Indigenous youth. It is a failure of the system.

At CN, we believe programs like IYOP are essential tools to help fix the system. By increasing non-Indigenous awareness of Indigenous culture and beliefs, we will be able to adapt our system to Indigenous culture. And by increasing Indigenous understanding of that system, we will help Indigenous youth better navigate that system and avoid its pitfalls.

This is not about fitting Indigenous youth into the existing system. It's about improving that system so it serves the interest of every Canadian.

## 2. Why do you think Level's IYOP creates a positive impact for Indigenous youth?

I think it gives Indigenous youth the ability to better understand a system they did not choose, but also gives Indigenous youth access to leaders who will become ambassadors for a better, more inclusive and more representative legal system.

## 3. How does CN invest in the future of Indigenous youth in Canada through its support of IYOP?

CN recognizes the tremendous potential of Indigenous youth. But we also recognize the numerous obstacles that threaten that potential. We believe that IYOP contributes to levelling the playing field and eliminates those obstacles. When Indigenous youth rise up, all of Canada becomes stronger. And a stronger Canada is a stronger CN.

## 4. What do you see as the benefits of engaging vulnerable youth participants in a positive experience with the justice system?

I don't think anybody can embrace a system he or she does not understand. Particularly one that has had significant adverse effects, such as the Canadian legal system has had on Indigenous youth. I think a better understanding of the system will lead to more engaged youth and a system that actually avoids the pitfalls of that system. But the system has to evolve to reflect the reality of all Canadians. As more Indigenous leaders emerge and as more non-Indigenous leaders start to better understand Indigenous communities, we will change that system to make it a more inclusive system.

## **5. How do you see IYOP as a program which develops respectful and mutually-beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities across Canada?**

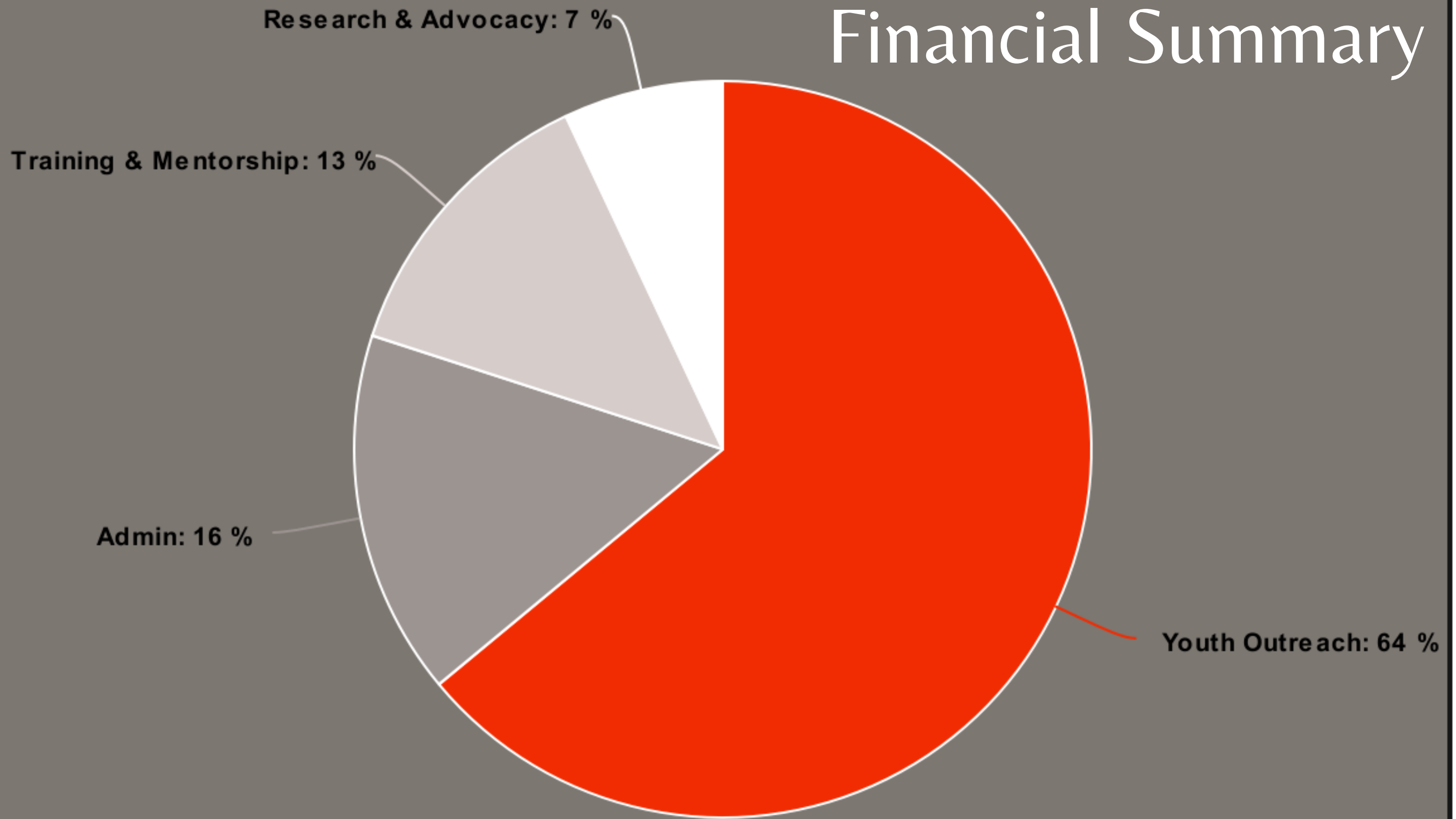
IYOP is a two-way street. It fosters communication between Indigenous youth and non-Indigenous leaders and increases awareness and mutual respect between our communities. It is premised on equality and the richness of diversity. This is the model of social justice Canada must aspire to and, from that point of view IYOP is a pioneer.

## **6. How can we continue to raise awareness on access to justice issues in Canada?**

I think we need to talk about the weaknesses in our system. I was reading on your own website that “despite making up only 8% of the youth population in Canada, Indigenous youth aged 12-17 account for nearly half of all of admissions to correctional services in Canada at 46%. From a gender perspective, Indigenous boys account for 47% of male admissions to penal youth facilities. For Indigenous girls, the numbers are even more stark, making up 60% of all female youth in the correctional system”.

This is unacceptable. And I believe it happens because of a lack of awareness. So we need to talk about these failures of our system. And we need to better prepare Indigenous youth to navigate that system. And ultimately, we need to raise all Canadians’ awareness about the great potential of Indigenous youth so that not only the next generation of Indigenous leaders emerge, but also the next generation of inclusive, non-Indigenous leaders also emerge, to build a stronger Canada, together.

# Financial Summary



 Youth Outreach     Admin     Training & Mentorship     Research & Advocacy



# Our supporters



Department of Justice  
Canada

Ministère de la Justice  
Canada



Judge Linda Giesbrecht  
Foundation



# *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.





Thank you!

[www.leveljustice.org](http://www.leveljustice.org)

[info@leveljustice.org](mailto:info@leveljustice.org)