

# 2018

Annual Report



**level**<sup>®</sup>  
changing lives through law

# Table of Contents

---

- 3 Letter from the ED
- 4 Our Mission
- 5 Our Values
- 6 Strategic Plan
- 7 Our Team
- 8 Board of Directors
- 9 Meet Shelan Markus
- 10 Programs
- 11 Youth Outreach
- 22 Research and Advocacy
- 32 Training and Mentorship
- 41 Financial Summary
- 42 Supporters



# Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters of Level,

As Level celebrates its **15th anniversary**, we have so much to be grateful for and excited about. For starters, our 2018-19 program evaluations show record high levels of engagement and impact across Canada.

With youth outreach program launches in [Thunder Bay](#) and the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, as well as the release of our [Indigenous Youth Justice Toolkit](#) (“Toolkit”), Level reached more Indigenous youth than ever before across Canada. Our first-of-its-kind Toolkit was informed and guided by the many remarkable youth profiled in this report, and is designed to educate Indigenous young people about the justice system in a culturally empowering and inclusive way. We were humbled to learn that in the first week of its release, the Toolkit was accessed over 400 times, and it continues to be distributed by educators all over the country.

Level also engaged 1,300+ law students in research and events on environmental justice in Canada, with a special focus on Indigenous water rights. In addition, our mentorship program doubled in size, partnering 47 students from 15 law schools with 15 outstanding, trail-blazing [mentors](#).

Through our training program, Level's team continued to challenge the way legal professionals perceive and respond to the access to justice crisis by cultivating humility, empathy and cultural understanding. In 2018-19, we delivered workshops, in Thunder Bay, London, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, and Saskatchewan.

In addition, in April 2019, we had the honour of hosting the Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, as well as Sheliza Jamal, Equity and Inclusion Coach, at our second annual "Facing Resistance" event in Toronto focused on uncovering systemic bias in the justice system. I am so proud of Level's team, supporters, and funders for facilitating these conversations, which are creating a new generation of thoughtful and bold leaders.

Finally, as many of you know, in January 2019 I made the difficult decision to move on from my role as Executive Director of Level, a position I have been privileged to hold since August 2013. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the hundreds of young people, students, educators, Elders, lawyers, and judges, who joined me in advancing Level's mission over the past six years. As a small organization, with big and complex ambitions, your support - quite literally - made all the difference.

After a comprehensive search, in July 2019, Level welcomed [Shelan Markus](#) as our new Executive Director. Shelan brings a wealth of non-profit and social justice experience to Level, and with her at the helm, I am confident that Level will reach new and impressive heights.

Thank you for your generous support.

Sincerely,



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 [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 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

---



Brittany Twiss  
Executive Director



Lisa Del Col  
Director of Programs



Tristan Mohamed  
Program Manager



Thomas Milne  
Program Leader



Tara Christine Regier  
Program Leader



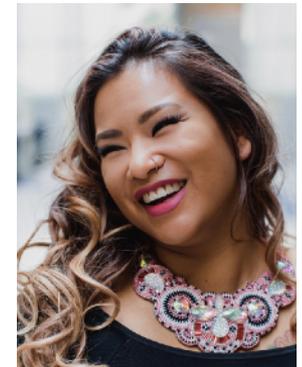
Alyssa Bird  
Program Leader



Robert Bassett  
Program Leader



Emily Bonnell  
Program Leader



Rheana Worme  
Program Leader

\*Not pictured here are the following Program Leaders: Alison Fung, Ty Buhler, Daniel Cox, Dale Lediard and Roberta Bald.



# Our Board of Directors

---



Jennifer Guerard  
Board Chair



Alexandra Dostal  
Vice-Chair



Susan Spence  
Secretary



Richard Zeni  
Treasurer



Heather McKay  
Director



Adrian Di Giovanni  
Director



Hannah Riding  
Director



Tanya Mushynski  
Director

# Introducing **Shelan Markus**

Effective July 2019, Level's Board of Directors is thrilled to announce the appointment of our new Executive Director, Shelan Markus.

Shelan is a social justice advocate with a passion for education and providing individuals with the necessary preventative and integrative tools to live positive and socially empowered lives. Shelan completed her undergraduate degree at McGill University in sociology and gender studies. She then completed her law degree at Western University, where she was involved in community initiatives to provide accessible Canadian legal education to marginalized and at-risk youth. Shelan attended a semester abroad in India, focusing her studies on international human rights law.

Following law school, Shelan practiced at a boutique litigation firm in Toronto, mainly in the area of human rights in employment. Pursuing her passion for education, Shelan moved into the public education sector at the University of British Columbia (UBC). She negotiated legal partnerships between UBC, non-profit organizations, government, and multinational companies to advance ethical and environmentally sustainable research. Shelan is continually involved in pro bono legal services for marginalized groups and she is the founder of a philanthropic print business, [CityandShe.com](http://CityandShe.com), which supports human rights and environmental initiatives worldwide.

We are confident that Shelan's enthusiasm and breadth of knowledge and experience in the human rights and non-profit sectors will enable her to take the organization to new heights, and we look forward to her leadership.

Please also feel free to join us in welcoming Shelan to our team - [shelan@leveljustice.org](mailto:shelan@leveljustice.org).



# 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 a justice education and mentorship program that engages First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth aged 11-14 across Canada through experiential learning opportunities designed to empower youth to reach their full potential.

Throughout the program, students are mentored by 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 inspiring way. With its focus on building relationships, the program provides youth participants with a positive experience with the justice system during a critical time in their development.

IYOP is rooted in **building trust, acknowledging colonial legacies, honouring Indigenous practices and customs, and maintaining a two-way transfer of knowledge** between students and volunteers. The program increases access to justice by breaking down barriers between the justice sector and Indigenous communities, and creating powerful, cross-cultural conversations and relationships that support the path to reconciliation.

IYOP started as a pilot project in Toronto, serving 25 youth and 12 justice sector professionals. Since then, the program has grown to be delivered in 15 locations, engaging with over **315 youth and 100 justice sector professionals** annually from Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.



# Youth Testimonials

---

What did you **learn** about yourself through the program?

“That I like to defend someone with all of my heart”

“That if I put my mind to something, I can complete it”

“That there is nothing to be afraid of”

“That I can talk in front of people more clear than I thought I could and had more bravery through it”

“That I want to be a lawyer”

What **surprised you** about the program?

“Having a real judge”

“That we got to do a trial. I thought we would just sit in class”

“How flexible it is concerning Indigenous traditions”

“That it was more fun than expected. I thought the program was fun, really fun, and at first I just thought we would do some boring stuff”

What did you **like best** about the program?

“The volunteers were very helpful and supportive”

“The lawyers were so kind, funny and taught us so much”

“I liked meeting the judge. The judge was really kind to everyone”

“I liked the mock trial and lawyers the most”



# 2018 Highlights

---



317

YOUTH ENGAGED

in justice education and mentorship activities across Canada.



3

PROGRAM EXPANSIONS

increasing the breadth of outreach and building new partnerships.



86%

OF YOUTH

feel learning about the law is fun.

# Communities Engaged

In 2018/19 Level's Indigenous Youth Outreach Program was delivered in 15 locations, reaching youth in six provinces and territories. In 2019, Level also launched IYOP in Thunder Bay and the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation for the first time.

Level has identified potential program expansion opportunities in Edmonton, Niagara, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Vancouver and Yellowknife for the 2019/20 program delivery.

## Ontario

**Beausoleil First Nation**  
Christian Island Elementary School

**Chippewas of Rama First Nation**  
Mnjikaning Kendaaswin Elementary School

**Chippewas of the Thames First Nation**  
Antler River Elementary School

**Thunder Bay**  
Kingsway Park Public School

**Toronto**  
Wandering Spirit First Nations School of Toronto  
University of Toronto Faculty of Law "Come Together" outreach event

**Ottawa**  
Meadowlands Public School  
Robert E. Wilson Public School

## Alberta

**Siksika First Nation**  
Siksika Outreach School

**Calgary**  
Ernest Morrow Middle School

## Saskatchewan

**Saskatoon**  
Westmount Community School

## Manitoba

**Winnipeg**  
William Whyte School

**Fisher River Cree Nation**  
Fisher River First Nation



# Justice Harry LaForme

---

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. 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.

In 2018, Justice LaForme retired from the Ontario Court of Appeal, and now acts as Senior Counsel at Olthuis Kleeer Townshend, one of Canada's most prominent Indigenous rights law firms. Despite his departure from the Bench, and very busy practice, Justice LaForme has remained committed to IYOP, and working with the youth at Wandering Spirit.

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!

*Thank you*





“ I feel so lucky to participate as an IYOP volunteer. I am thrilled to see the students on the journey from learning about the justice system as an academic topic to the moot court where they really start to “**think like lawyers**”.

My eyes were opened to some of the realities of being an Indigenous person living in our city - the students' commonalities with other youth, and how their learning is enriched by their cultural framework. Practicing **Restorative Justice** as an integral part of the IYOP program demonstrates the weight Level puts on Indigenous culture and traditions. Also key to the students' (and my) experience was the diversity of the Level team – across ages, genders, ethnicity and professions.

I felt proud to be a **role model** – not just as a lawyer, but as a participant in the justice system along with the teachers, elders and especially Justice LaForme, who brought a special degree of warmth to the climax of the program. ”

**Richard Pratt** - Senior Counsel, RBC Law Group  
2018-19 IYOP Volunteer

An illustration of Indigenous youth in traditional regalia, featuring vibrant colors like teal, red, and purple. The youth are shown in profile, looking down, with intricate feathered headdresses and traditional patterns on their clothing. The background is a soft, pastel gradient with small white speckles.

# INDIGENOUS YOUTH *Justice Toolkit*

With the support from Justice Canada, the Calgary Foundation and the Laidlaw Foundation, Level developed the [Indigenous Youth Justice Toolkit](#) (the “Toolkit”), a resource led and designed by Indigenous youth. The development of the Toolkit commenced with a consultation period, where we surveyed Indigenous youth across Canada between the ages of 11-18, asking them to identify the top justice issues that impact them. Level selected the top five areas identified through the survey – drugs/alcohol, assault, sexual assault, interactions with police, and bullying – and created a resource to help youth navigate these issues under the leadership of our [Indigenous Youth Council](#) (the “Youth Council”).

The Youth Council provided guidance and feedback on the contents and design of the Toolkit to ensure it was accessible to a youth audience. Interspersed between the summaries of rights and obligations under the Canadian [criminal justice system](#) is artwork created by Indigenous youth and traditional teachings from Elders who were interviewed for the project.

# 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**

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 Moose**

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 Dawn Marie Sparvier-Red Old Man**

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 Pakinewatik**

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 culturally-anchored 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

# Research Projects

Empowerment through Knowledge

Founded in 2004 on the premise that impactful change requires awareness and education, Level's Research Program works in conjunction with its Campus Chapter program to activate students as socially conscious and empowered leaders.

Level's Research Program recruits undergraduate and law students to create educational resources and reports. These projects are designed to increase knowledge and awareness in the legal sector on pertinent human rights issues, while building institutional resources and ensuring our Campus Chapter initiatives are well equipped to advocate at the forefront of community change.

For the 2018-19 academic year, Level oversaw two research projects, and were fortunate to work closely with 7 dynamic and engaged research fellows.



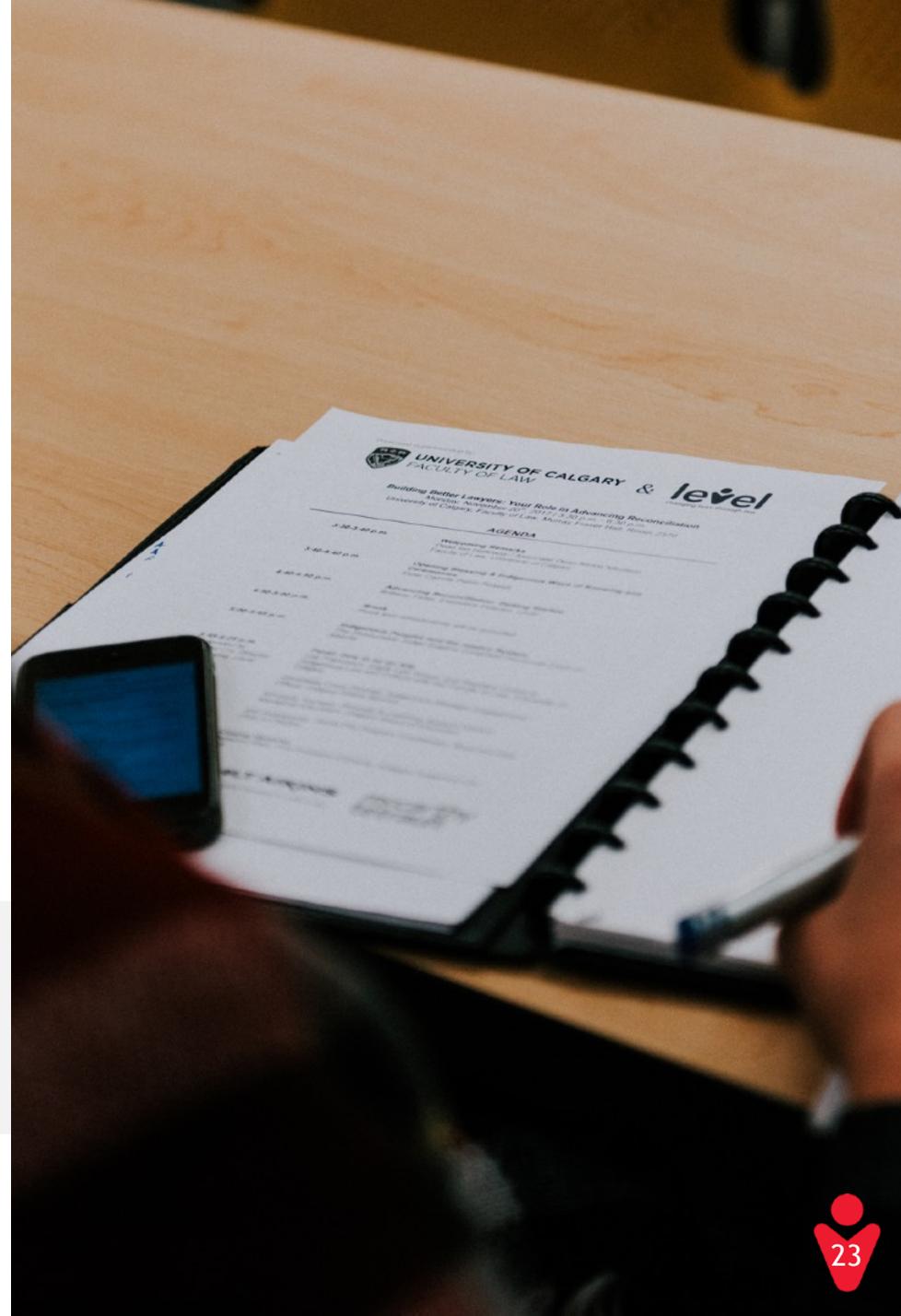
Indigenous Water Rights  
Fellows

Molly Bachmeier  
Danielle Mihok  
Priya Patel



Building Financial Resilience  
Fellows

Massimo Chiarella  
James Hannay  
Bonnie Lao  
Louisa You





# Indigenous Water Rights

A Level-PBSC Queen's Research Project

For the 2018-19 academic year, Level had the pleasure of partnering with Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC) Queen's law students to prepare a short research primer on the ongoing and systemic drinking water crises on Indigenous reserves.

This research will form the basis of an informational pamphlet providing a cursory introduction to water advisories, identifying a few of the key stakeholders, summarizing the current Canadian legal regime, and highlighting the resulting impacts of the Canadian legal system on Indigenous water rights in Ontario.

## Research Fellows



Danielle Mihok  
J.D. Candidate



Priya Patel  
J.D.

\*Not pictured here: Molly Bachmeier, J.D.

# Building Financial Resilience

A Level-Munk PCJ Research Project

In 2017, Level was excited to partner with the Munk School of Global Affairs, at the University of Toronto to work with and mentor a team of service-learning students enrolled in the **Peace, Conflict and Justice Studies (PCJ)** program. In 2019, for the second year in a row, Level worked closely with four dynamic and engaged students acting as research fellows on our human rights research team.



The students (L-R), Massimo Chiarella, James Hannay, Bonnie Lao and Louisa You, worked closely with Level to learn more about the inner workings of a Canadian charitable organization, while contributing to research and reporting on existing funding and sponsorship opportunities which align with Level's organizational mandate and program-specific goals.

The research fellows work culminated in a presentation to Level HQ, and will mark the beginning of the pursuit of new and exciting **sponsorship opportunities** for Level's Human Rights, Research and Advocacy programming, and Training and Mentorship programming.

# 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 2018-19, our campus chapters promoted awareness of **environmental justice in Canada**, 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.



# Chapter Locations



## Active Chapters

University of British Columbia  
University of Calgary  
University of Saskatchewan  
University of Manitoba  
Western University  
Queen's University  
University of Ottawa  
Université de Montréal

## Future Chapters

University of Windsor  
University of Victoria  
Lakehead University

# Student Initiatives



## DOCUMENTARY SCREENINGS

Campus chapters hosted documentary screenings around our annual human rights theme, including screenings of *Colonization Roads*, *Fractured Lands* and *Water Warriors*, accompanied by critical discussions on environmental justice in Canada.



## STUDENT-LED JOURNAL

Level's Campus chapter at the Université de Montréal edited and published a student-led journal on environmental justice in Canada, which included 13 submissions in both English and French from law students across the country. A digital copy is accessible [here](#).



## PANEL DISCUSSION

Student leaders engaged law students, legal professionals and community members through hosting panel discussions on pertinent environmental justice issues. Topics included Indigenous water rights, agricultural practices, food security and resource extraction.



2018-19 Université de Montréal Chapter Executive  
(L-R) Mathilde Romano, Béatrice Eng, Marie-Pier Villeneuve-Leroux, Célia Jutras, Jenna Albanese and Alessia Greco (missing: Valérie McRae)

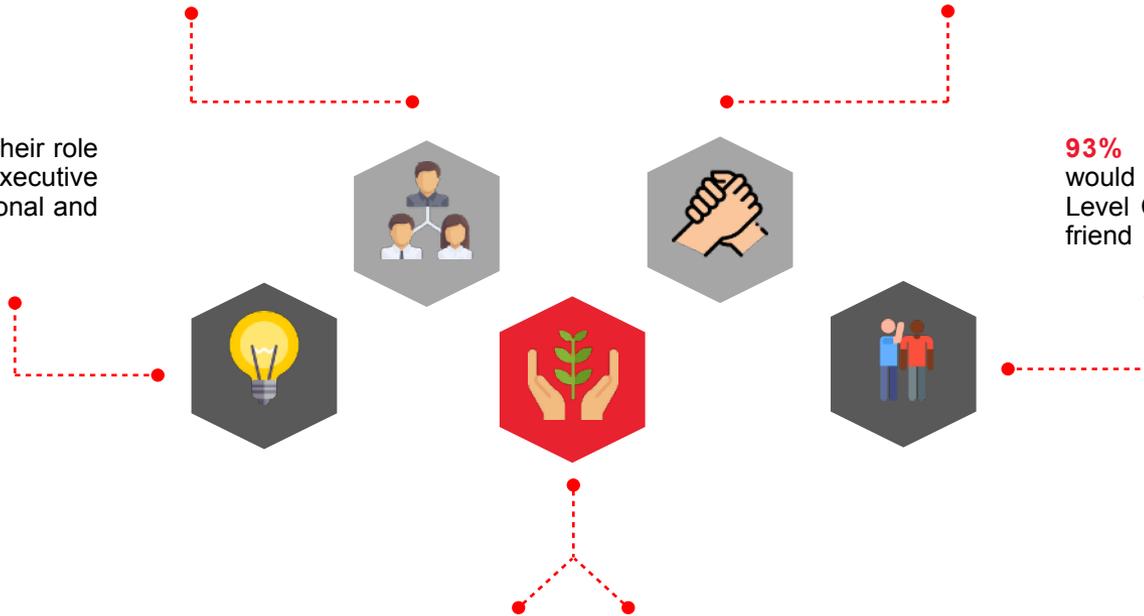
# Impact Highlights

**70%** of respondents felt the program helped them connect with diverse colleagues that they otherwise would not have been exposed to

**74%** of students leaders felt their involvement with Level inspired them to stay involved with human rights and social justice issues

**74%** of respondents felt their role as a Level Chapter executive improved their organizational and problem solving skills

**93%** of student leaders would recommend joining a Level Campus Chapter to a friend



**81%** of student leaders felt more confident of their knowledge of environmental justice issues in Canada

**74%** of respondents felt the program helped them better understand and identify systemic barriers to environmental justice



8 Campus Chapters



56 Student Leaders



Engaging over 1300 students and legal professionals

“ Working with Level is a great and rewarding experience.

Level has wonderful values and the fact that it is still niche just encourages students to take initiatives which are rewarding.

Level’s campus chapter program is a valuable experience and opportunity to learn how real life issues affect real life people.

Level does great work and has the right kind of people heading it up, with hearts in the right place. ”

- 2018-19 Campus Chapter leaders



# What did you gain as a **leader** with your Chapter?

## **Skill Development and Achievements**

- How to properly work with and lead a team.
- Organizational skills.
- Experience working and collaborating with others, planning, outreach, financial management.
- The accomplishment of knowing the small work I did made a difference in my community
- I was able to raise awareness and create real change in the law school. I also learned how to efficiently organize events and reach out to professionals effectively.

## **Community-specific Knowledge**

- Knowledge of Indigenous and environmental legal issues as well as the role lawyers can play in making change.
- A community perspective on social justice.

## **Network and Relationship Building**

- Connections to students in other provinces and greater knowledge of other areas of law.
- Working with the students through IYOP and getting to know a new community better.
- Meeting new people, especially upper years.

## **Legal and Human Rights Knowledge**

- I gained knowledge in areas of law that are not necessarily discussed in law school such as environmental justice.
- Good knowledge about some of the issues that affect access to justice in areas that I personally don't experience.
- I learned valuable insights on many issues concerning the Indigenous community.

- 2018-19 Campus Chapter leaders



## Training & Mentorship

# Cultural Humility Training

BRIDGING THE GAP

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.

In 2018 and 2019, Level delivered training sessions in Thunder Bay, London, Ottawa and Toronto.



# Empathy Building

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, recognizing that many law students and legal professionals often lack skills fundamental to empathetic communication, Level began delivering **empathy-building workshops** tailored to post-secondary, law students and legal professionals.

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.

In 2018 and early 2019, Level delivered empathy building workshops for the following stakeholders:

- University of Saskatchewan, College of Law
- Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC) Queen's Students



# Facing Resistance

## Uncovering Systemic Bias in the Justice System

In April 2018, Level hosted its first annual [#FacingResistanceTO](#) event which inspired Toronto's legal community to challenge the status quo and think about new ways of disrupting inequitable access to justice in Canada. Continuing with the tradition, Level held its second [#FacingResistanceTO](#) event in April of 2019, with the focus on collectively uncovering and disrupting **systemic bias in the justice system**.

Opening for the event and setting the tone with a powerful land acknowledgement was **Elder Constance Simmonds**, long-time Level supporter and retired Senator from the Métis Nation of Ontario. Level was graciously joined by **The Rt. Hon. Beverley McLachlin** who shared her perspectives and wisdom garnered from an illustrious legal career and over 17 years serving as the first female Chief Justice on the Supreme Court of Canada, recounting the hurdles in advancing equity, and calling all legal professionals to investigate their own biases. Sitting down for a Q&A discussion with Ms. McLachlin was **Molly Reynolds**, counsel with Torys LLP, and last but certainly not least, Equity and Inclusion Learning Coach **Sheliza Jamal** engaged the audience in activities designed to discover the ways we perceive the world based on deeply ingrained biases, and provided us with the tools to create change in our daily lives.

With the help of our attendees and event sponsors, this event was successful in raising **\$25,000**, the proceeds of which will go towards continuing the discussion on systemic bias, and supporting Level's outreach, training and mentorship programs. Thank you to our event sponsors, [Blake Cassels & Graydon LLP](#), [Torys LLP](#), [WeirFoulds LLP](#) and [Enbridge](#) for their generous support of our Facing Resistance event for the second year in a row! Read more about the evening [here](#).



**TORYS**  
LLP

**ENBRIDGE**  
Life Takes Energy™

*Blakes*

**WeirFoulds** LLP



# 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.

For the 2018-19 academic year, Level's Blazing Trails program doubled the number of participants, partnering **47 law students** representing 15 law schools across the country, with **15 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.



# Our Mentors



**Tony Carfagnini**  
Buset LLP



**Rizwan Khan**  
Viridus Lex LLP



**Akosua Matthews**  
Falconers LLP



**Jesse McCormick**  
Office of the Minister of  
Environment and Climate Change



**Ian Miron**  
Ecojustice



**Stéphanie Nowak**  
Innocence Canada



**Kim Stanton**  
Goldblatt Partners LLP



**Molly Reynolds**  
Torys LLP



**Lori Thomas**  
Thomas Defence



**Joy Wakefield**  
Nokiiwin Tribal Council

“

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  
2018-19 Blazing Trails Mentor

\*Other mentors not pictured here: Robert Edwards, Ian Mackenzie, Heather McKay, Jacqueline Swaisland and Patricia Vo

# Impact Highlights

**75%** of student mentees felt the program increased their knowledge of opportunities in law

**95%** of student mentees felt the program assisted in pursuing their career goals

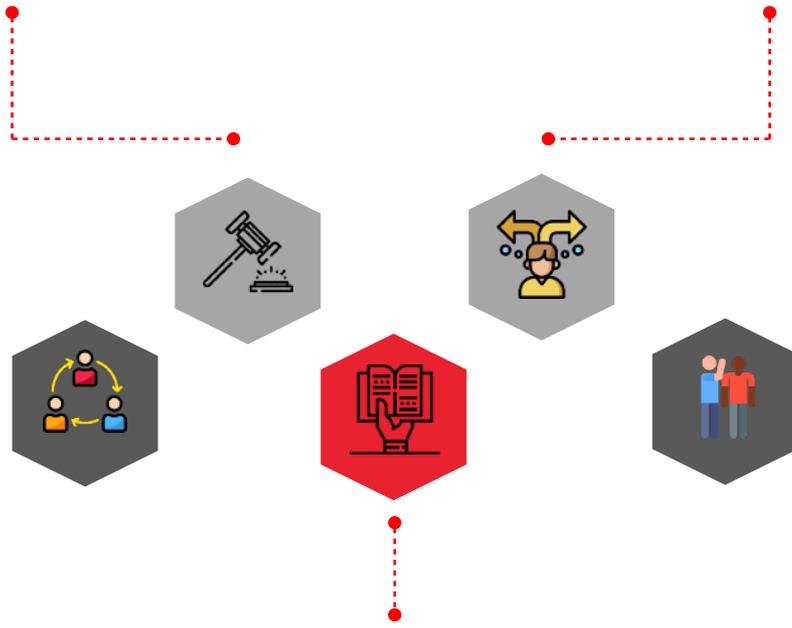
**85%** of student mentees wished to remain connected with Level as a Blazing Trails alumni

**95%** of student mentees would recommend Blazing Trails to other law students

**92%** of legal mentors want to be considered as a future mentor in the program

**85%** of legal mentors felt the program material was useful in guiding their conversations with mentees

**92%** of legal mentors would recommend Blazing Trails to other mentors and mentees





# What did our student **mentees** have to say?

## Increased Knowledge of Career Opportunities

The discussions with my mentor broadened my understanding of the legal opportunities beyond traditionally litigation/larger firm work. In sharing some of my interests and goals, my mentor was very helpful to discuss their career path as well as the paths of people in their network.

## Increased Clarity of Goals

Prior to starting this program I was feeling conflicted about how to proceed with my career search and was having difficulty identifying what objectives I hope to achieve in the future. The program assisted me in articulating what my goals are and what this might mean for next steps in my career search. Both our mentor and other group members were very receptive to my ideas and concerns, which helped me to feel less isolated with my career goals.

## Relationship Building with Fellow Participants

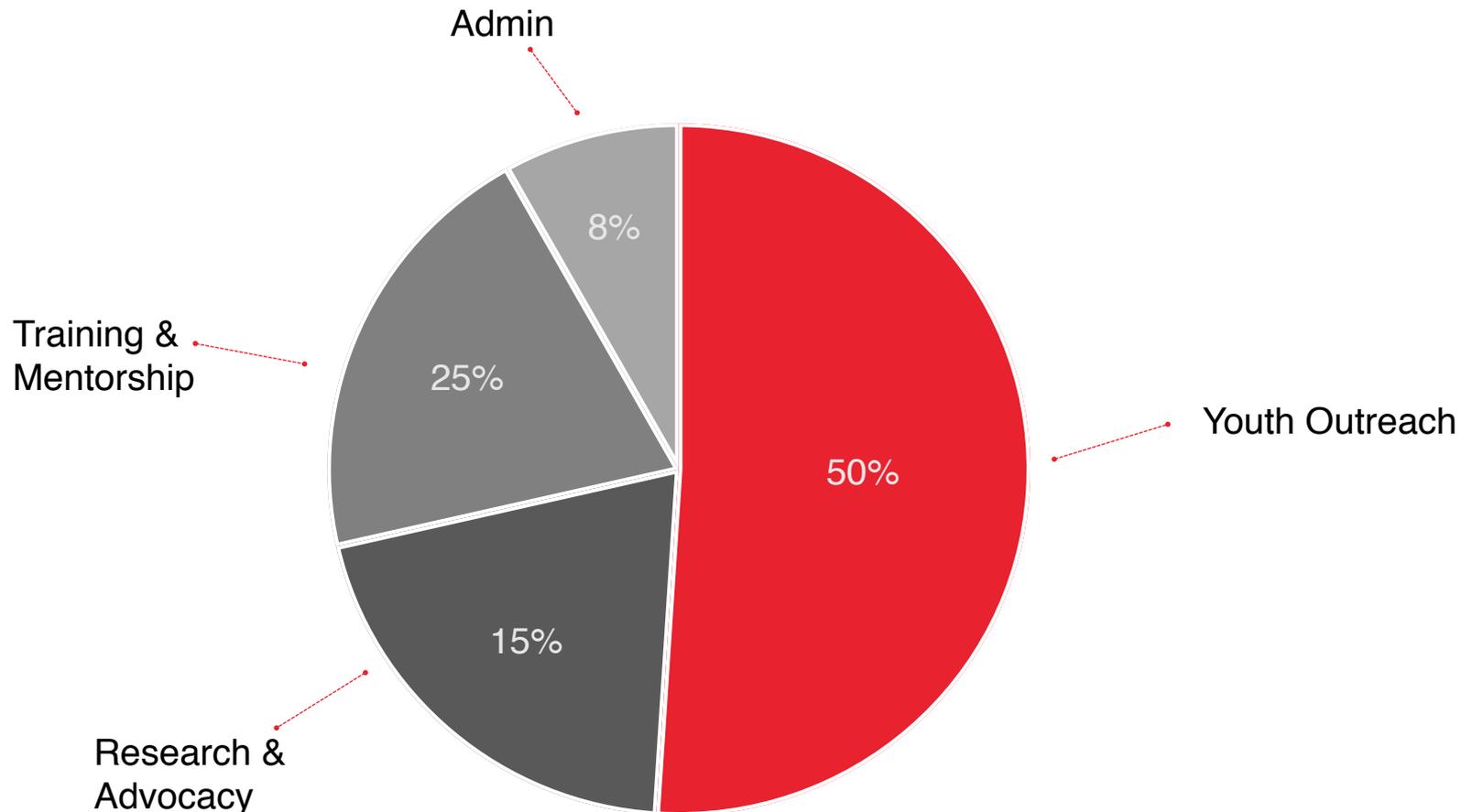
Although I learned tremendously from my mentor, I also feel that I learned from my fellow mentees. They all came from diverse backgrounds and had different experiences, which fostered very interesting and thought-provoking conversations between us and our mentor. We had several conversations about diversity and inclusion in the legal world, both as legal professionals and as people who would interact with a diverse clientele. This taught me a lot about empathy among colleagues and vis-à-vis our future clients.

## Improved Understanding of Empathy and the Law

I think that understanding and being exposed to the give and take that is environmental law, with constant setbacks and hardships that balance the gains really showed me the reality and humility of the law. I also believe it is easy to see law as one, uniform profession, without much emotion. But the passion and autonomy of my mentor exposed me to the empathy inherent and necessary in, at least, environmental law.

# Our Financial Summary

Level's audited financial statements for our fiscal year ending August 31, 2018 can be found [here](#).



# Our Supporters



Ministère de la Justice  
Canada

Department of Justice  
Canada



## 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 [Kenya-Jade Pinto](#) for Level. Staff headshots (with the exception of Lisa Del Col, Tristan Mohamed and Emily Bonnell), research fellow headshots, mentor headshots, Indigenous youth council and Indigenous youth artists headshots, board headshots for Heather McKay and Tanya Mushynski, and pictures on pages 24, 28 and 30 were taken by the respective volunteers with Level.

Page 9: photograph by [Alexa Mazarello](#).

Page 11: third pictures from the left taken by IYOP volunteers.

Page 14: First and third icons made by [One Percent Studio](#) via Creative Market. Second icon by [flaticons.net](#)

Page 22: first picture on the left taken by Université de Montréal Level Campus Chapter volunteers.

Page 24: photograph on the left by [Kent Linz on Flickr](#).

Page 34: leftmost picture by [rawpixel.com](#) on [Pexels](#); rightmost by Lisa Del Col for Level.

Icons on pages 5, 6 and 29 are made by Freepik from [flaticon.com](#)

Icons on pages 30 and 39 are made by "mynamepong", "Freepik", "surang" and "Eucalyp" [flaticon.com](#) and [flaticons.net](#)

Join **Us**

---



