



YouthUnited@Winnipeg– STUDENT PARTICIPANT PROFILES – April 2017

Rachel Petkau, 21 years old Urban and Inner-City Studies, graduating 2019

I am passionate about Winnipeg's inner city. The prospect of working in a non-profit organization related to my area of study is incredibly exciting. Another reason I want to participate in the program is for the intensive course dealing with issues related to reconciliation, decolonization and implementing the TRC Calls to Action tangibly in my city. I am hoping to complete this program with a fuller understanding of the barriers faced by citizens, specifically youth, young adults and women, in the heart of our city. My diverse ancestry consisting of Eastern European Mennonite and Anishinaabe, has fostered a unique lived understanding of cross cultural relationships and the need for building bridges. I am a band member and have lived on Big Grassy River First Nation in Treaty 3 territory.

Asmahan Abdirahman, 32 years old Conflict Resolution Studies and Human Rights, graduating June 2017

I want to be a role model and at the same time give back to the community. I hope to gain a greater understanding of the needs of the community which are not met, listen to the stories of hope, and feel the passion of working with diverse people in the community. To me reconciliation means acknowledging the points of conflict, seeking forgiveness and walking through the journey of healing. Also, it means using our experiences to offer teaching moments for those who do not know about the treatment of Indigenous peoples, and may not be aware of ongoing issues like residential schools.

Anin, Piimaashi Miskwa Pinesse Ikwe n'dizhnikas, Natasha Acoby, 35 years young Urban and Inner-City Studies, graduating in 2018/19

I am grateful to be able to participate in the Youth United summer program because this will give me the opportunity to build relationships and play an active, positive role in my community. Gaining work experience through school while being paid is not only an incentive but will improve my education attainment level and success rate. With the Youth United program integrating the TRC Calls to Action, I am already learning more on building relationships. With my experience being my knowledge, I am learning to love my journey and want to keep learning how I can participate in creating change. My thought about reconciliation is to love, love, love unconditionally!

Reinaldo Contreras, 54 years old Urban and Inner-City Studies, graduating winter 2017-18

As an Indigenous person from outside Canada, it is important for me to have a grasp on how colonialism has impacted native peoples in Canada. In many cases, like El Salvador, the country I was born, a process of reconciliation was not implemented following the civil war which ended in 1992. What is important is to know the truth so people can go on with their lives. In Canada, we have a similar case with the impact of colonization and the different ways in which the white settlers imposed their views and interests over the Indigenous nations of Canada. Reconciliation is the core process for decolonization. Decolonization should give us the true version of history.

Morag Morison, 22 years old
Double major in Urban and Inner-City Studies and Indigenous Studies, graduating 2018

This program is an incredible way to gain experiential knowledge in the fields of both my majors. My favourite part about the program is the lived experience that all my peers bring into our classroom learning environment. As a white settler in Treaty 1 territory, I am looking forward to learning more about what Indigenous-led reconciliation can look like, as we, on a nation-to-nation basis, look toward solutions for problems which have been exacerbated for hundreds of years. I am hoping to genuinely listen and learn from everyone else in the program.

Marie Bergen, 23 years old
Human Rights at UWinnipeg, graduating 2018

I was immediately drawn to this mandate of facilitating community-building initiatives and forming trust, as modeled by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I believe that this program is an opportunity for me to learn about my city and to contribute to the work that is being done by non-profits to combat inequity, racism and poverty. Reconciliation must be community-based. Trust and reconciliation go hand in hand, and building relationships is vital for the maintenance of healthy communities -- not a top-down initiative, but rather incorporating all voices.

Aine Dolin, 25 years old
Graduating with a BA Honours in Anthropology (June 2017), plan to study Medical Anthropology and Public Health Policy

This is an invaluable chance to learn while also being actively engaged with organizations that are implementing unique, community-based strategies to improve the quality of life for individuals and revitalize the inner-city. My personal focus is primarily on access to healthcare, however understanding the health of a community and the individuals within it means understanding the social determinants of health, and the challenges affecting inner-city populations. The healthcare system is an area where interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are often marred by distrust and racism. I would like to work to support improved relationships and access, especially for youth. I've had opportunities to work in communities in northern Manitoba and rural Ghana and Serbia. In 2011 I volunteered in New Brunswick and Ghana while completing a Certificate in Community Development and Intercultural Relations. In 2015 I received a Northern Scientific Training Program award to work with Norway House Cree Nation on a community-led research project, studying health policy related to maternal evacuation for birth. I'm looking forward to this opportunity to work with organizations in the inner city.

Alexa Potashnik, 24 years old
Human Rights (major), Business Administration & Conflict Resolution Studies (double minor) UWinnipeg BA Arts, graduating October, 2017

YouthUnited@Winnipeg sparked intrigue for me based on the vast community involvement that students will be participating in throughout the summer. As the founder of Black Space Winnipeg*, our agenda revolves around building community while challenging systemic injustice. Creating safe space for people of colour, student politics, grassroots activism and performance art has been a part of my personal narrative and active work throughout my academic career. I hope to continue to build a strong movement and mobilize marginalized communities in working towards a more inclusive and harmonious Winnipeg.

**Black Space is a grassroots organization that fosters organic dialogue about everyday experiences on being Black, spreading perspectives of Afrocentrism, and Pro-Black conversation.*

**Ozten Paul, 20 years old
English (Creative Writing stream), graduating in 2019.**

As an Indigenous person who has spent my entire life in the North End, I've spent much of my life reading, discussing, even living through the topics made relevant in the program's summary; but I always felt that this wasn't enough, that it wasn't adding up to anything or making any real change. To say that the inner-city is a diverse place would be an understatement, but I'll say it anyways. I want to see my community through other people's eyes because my experience is only one of many and there is so much more to be learned from the various communities that exist here. It was always an alienating experience to hear professors discuss the inner-city because they would make it sound like this faraway place. I could never talk to the people in my personal life about the issues plaguing our neighborhoods because they were too busy surviving it. I'm excited to meet the other students in the program; to hear their stories and to learn with them, and I'm grateful that the University has given me this chance.

**Stefan Hodges, 25 years old
Urban and Inner-City Studies, graduating fall 2017**

I have spent some years studying and thinking about what reconciliation means as a member of the settler society living in Winnipeg. I find myself returning to the necessary actions of listening to Indigenous voices and forming personal relationships. The Urban and Inner-City Studies program has gifted me with the opportunity to engage in both these actions on a regular basis, as has community-based and Indigenous-led activism in Winnipeg. YouthUnited@Winnipeg extends the opportunity not only to continue studying and interacting with a diversity of peers, but also a chance to support the good work being done in Winnipeg's inner-city communities. I hope to leave the program with a stronger understanding of how to fulfill my role in effecting genuine reconciliation in the urban environment.

**Nikki Weselake, 28 years old
major Urban and Inner-City Studies, minor Conflict Resolution Studies, graduating 2018**

It is an amazing opportunity that is going to open so many doors by providing opportunities to get personal and work experience with some great organizations. We will be able to build relationships and bridges with the community and with each other. I am happy the course is being offered through the Selkirk Avenue campus, we have such a sense of family here and I am really excited to meet the other participants and have them come to the North End where I was born and raised. I am a mother to an almost six year-old boy. I was out of school for a very long time, until I came to the Selkirk Avenue campus and became a part of the Beginning University Successfully program. It truly changed my life. I am the first person in my family to attend University, and they are all really proud of me. I know reconciliation is not solely a government responsibility, but the responsibility of all of us. I hope to learn more about what an individual person can do to contribute to reconciliation in our city and in this country.

**Binesi Boulanger, 20 years old
Indigenous Studies with a double minor in Urban and Inner-City Studies and History
Graduating spring 2018**

The jobs available for the work portion of our program are positions rarely given to people without an undergraduate degree. The fact that the study portion of our program focuses on reconciliation and the TRC's Calls to Action is a huge added bonus. I am hoping to gain work experience I wouldn't otherwise have access to from my placement. I am also hoping to gain perspective and learn ways to further incorporate the Calls to Action in my working life. I know my home community would greatly benefit if the Calls to Action were implemented appropriately. It's humbling to know that this program was brought about by the Calls to Action and that I have the opportunity to be a part of this process.

Kailey Bradco, 25 years old
International Development Studies and Urban and Inner-City Studies, graduating 2019

YouthUnited@Winnipeg is an incredible learning experience that will hopefully provide me with insight and experience that will be important and relevant throughout my life. I'd like to become more proficient at navigating societal institutions and assessing complex situations and needs. My goal is to be accessible, and to become as competent and well-suited as possible to do community development work. More efforts need to support recommendations as laid out by Indigenous communities and leaders. Far more needs to be done than has been, and it is up to every Canadian to be an ally in the journey to achieving both truth and reconciliation.

Maya Janzen, 21 years old
Political Science and Urban and Inner-City Studies, graduating 2019

I am excited to participate in this program because I love Winnipeg and I want to learn from Indigenous leaders, activists, community members and my classmates' different lived experiences. I am excited to learn in the space where various community-based initiatives are going on, and to see how they operate. I want to use my privilege to support Indigenous-led initiatives. I come from a Mennonite background, and I have seen how detrimental it is to have an imposed, colonial description of history and of descriptions of Indigenous communities in government, church and other institutions. The communities most affected by systemic oppression hold the answers, and must be allowed the space to implement them.

Alex Ireland, 22 years old
Human Rights and Political Science, graduating spring 2017

This is an opportunity to practice and challenge the concepts of reconciliation that I have learned through my degree. We have a wealth of opportunity to learn from our community on what reconciliation means to Winnipeg. I am hoping to learn about sustainable programming that can continue the momentum of positive change reflecting the TRC's Calls to Action. My goal is to learn skills on challenging racism, furthering empowerment, safe space management and operating a successful organization for the benefit of our surrounding community I believe creative approaches to reconciliation are necessary if we hope to recognize individual and communal healing needs.

Lisa Strong, 44 years old
Urban and Inner-City Studies and Religion, graduating in 2018

I am a Sixties Scoop survivor. I think and deal with my own reconciliation on a daily basis. I know I can use my own experience to bond, listen and help other survivors with their own reconciliation process. I hope that I will learn skills that I would not learn in a classroom setting, like team work, program management, time management, and professional social skills. I hope by learning these skills I can use it my future employment. Learning to better work with the public within a professional environment will be crucial to my future career in social programming.

Melissa Paypompee, 25 years old
Urban and Inner-City Studies and Conflict Resolution, graduating in 2018

YouthUnited@Winnipeg is a great opportunity to connect with inner-city youth to contribute and give back to the community, but also to learn from others, and teach others, to build unity between myself and community members. I hope I will learn a different way of thinking about the inner-city, and a new understanding of ways to change it for the better. I am also excited at the chance to learn about reconciliation through our academic course. For there to be reconciliation, we need to understand that all human life matters, that we are on Treaty 1 territory, and that we must recognize, acknowledge and incorporate Indigenous language, culture and history of residential schools within our common curriculum.

May Henderson, 56 years old
Urban and Inner-City Studies, graduating in 2018

I feel with all my life experiences I would be an excellent role model for future students, especially women. I want to apply my learned skills and to empower woman, so they know that even though being a single mom is hard, with a lot of hard work & perseverance it can be done. I am survivor of domestic violence, a single mom of four, and a grandmother of eight (one deceased). I am a proud homeowner through Habitat for Humanity. I have been alcohol-free for over 28 years and smoke-free for one year. I have worked in the admin field for 26 years; at 53 I decided to change my career direction and return to school.