



## **TRCA Youth Council 2019/20 Report**

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## Summary

Youth Councils are being deployed around the world as a means to engage and inspire youth. Following suit in this growing trend, TRCA's 2017 Community Engagement Strategy recommended the development of a Youth Council. The program framework of the Youth Council was developed by Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) staff and Regional Watershed Alliance members. The ultimate goal of the Youth Council is to build healthy communities. This will be achieved through four program objectives:

- a) Build capacity and engage youth by providing youth across the Toronto region with learning opportunities;
- b) Build a youth network/strengthen existing networks through creation of a broad network of youth in the region that is interested in environmental and sustainability issues;
- c) Identify youth perspectives by developing an understanding of youth opinion around current environmental issues and how these might be incorporated in the work of TRCA and its partners; and
- d) Create fun opportunities for youth through entertaining and engaging learning opportunities.

The 2019-2020 term of the Youth Council marks the second full year of the program. A new Executive was selected in November 2019, which included four returning members from the first term. The Executive met in January 2020 to begin work planning, and to set program targets for the year.

Unfortunately, in March 2020 the World Health Organization declared the spread of the COVID-19 virus to be a global pandemic. That declaration resulted in the subsequent closure of many facilities, businesses, and schools. TRCA, like other organizations, has had to adapt business practices and engagement activities to suit the "new normal" brought on by the pandemic. Likewise, the Youth Council had to cancel all in-person events and shifted all programming to an online format.

Despite the cancellation of planned events, the Youth Council has done a remarkable job adapting to the situation. They continued to build the youth network through the delivery of newsletters. To provide fun learning experiences, they developed and delivered online webinars about invasive species and systemic barriers in conservation and outdoor spaces. All webinars were hosted by the Youth Council Executive, with guidance from TRCA staff. They also hosted an online movie night and launched a social media campaign to discuss access to outdoor spaces and the importance of connecting to nature amidst the situation brought on by a pandemic.

This year has been a challenge for the Youth Council Executive. The challenges posed by COVID-19 have meant that some members have not been able to participate as much as they had initially intended. It is important that we continue to use an adaptive and agile approach with our volunteers, as the challenges posed by COVID-19 are far-reaching. As it took time for both TRCA and the Youth Council Executive to adapt to the new framework imposed by the pandemic, we suggest that the Executive have the option to extend their terms so that group cohesion and momentum can be maintained.

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## INTRODUCTION

Around the world, youth councils have been created by governments, community groups, and non-profit organizations as a means of providing youth with an opportunity to gain important skills, build capacity and network, while providing the sponsoring agencies with important input and perspectives from youth stakeholders. The long-term success of efforts to advance environmental protection and sustainability in the Toronto region depend on the support of the region's youth, both now and into the future. TRCA's Community Engagement Strategy (2017) recommends more focused engagement of youth to enhance the reach of TRCA programs and activities and prepare the next generation of conservation leaders (Actions 6.1 and 6.2). Activities of the Youth Council build on existing engagement programs while deploying tools and strategies to develop a strong network of youth driven to take active ownership of their local environment.

The Youth Council reports directly to TRCA's Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA), which is an advisory committee to the TRCA Board of Directors. The mission, mandate and goals were developed by TRCA and the RWA, in consultation with relevant stakeholders. At RWA Meeting #1/2017, held on November 15th, 2017, Resolution #R002/17 was approved, establishing the TRCA Youth Council.

The 2019-2020 year of the TRCA Youth Council faced unprecedented challenges as a result of the global pandemic brought on by the spread of COVID-19. This report provides an overview of the 2019-20 Youth Council program, recruitment of new Executives, workplan, and finally a program evaluation and recommendations for program improvement.

## PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

The program framework for the Youth Council was created through a collaborative process between TRCA staff and RWA working group members. The program framework remains the same as it did in 2017 when it was developed (Figure 1).

Program goals and objectives are rooted in the TRCA Community Engagement Strategy. The overall goal of the program is to build healthy communities and there are four measurable objectives to meet that goal:

- a) Build capacity and engage youth by providing youth across the Toronto region with learning opportunities;
- b) Build a youth network/strengthen existing networks through creation of a broad network of youth in the region that is interested in environmental and sustainability issues;
- c) Identify youth perspectives by developing an understanding of youth opinion around current environmental issues and how these might be incorporated in the work of TRCA and its partners; and
- d) Create fun opportunities for youth through entertaining and engaging learning opportunities.

These objectives are intentionally open-ended so that Youth Council Executive members are able to develop their own project ideas that fit within the program framework.

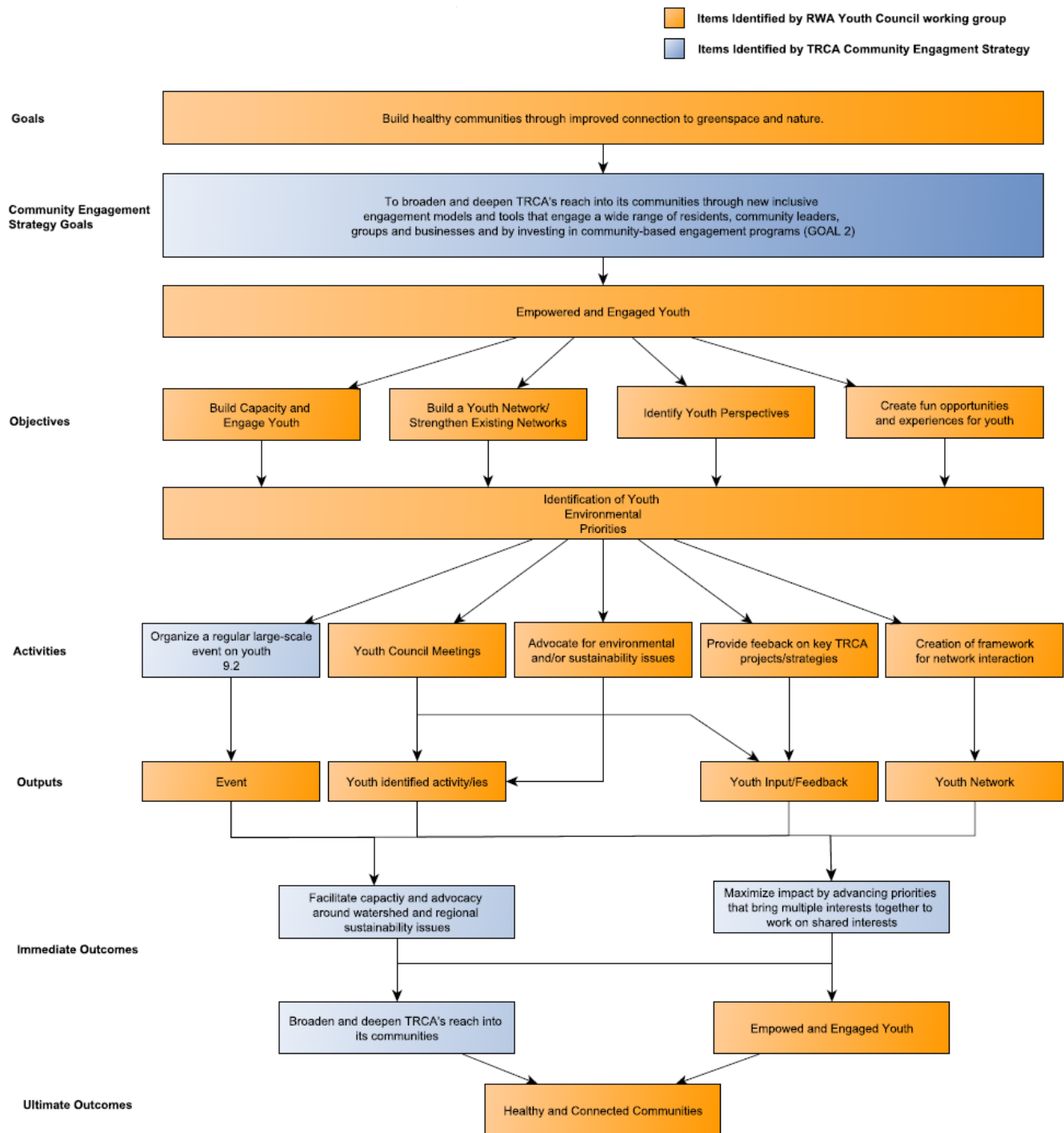


FIGURE 1: YOUTH COUNCIL LOGIC MODEL

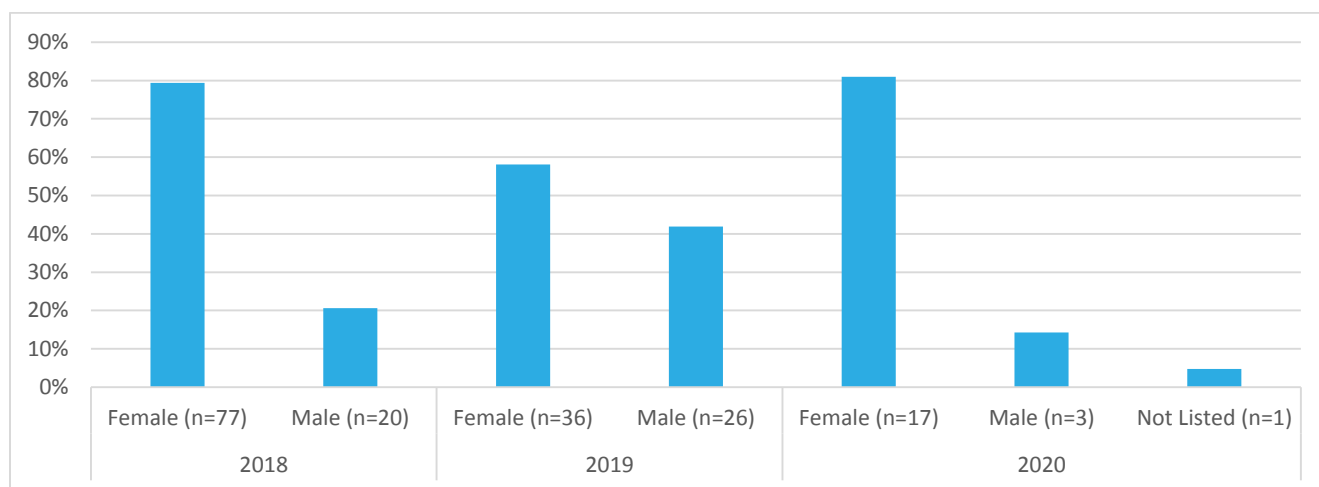
The structure of the Youth Council also remains consistent from previous years. For a more fulsome discussion of program development and rationale please see the TRCA Youth Council 2018/19 Report.

There are two methods for youth to participate: as general or executive member. General members can sign up at any time and their participation is entirely voluntary. They are notified of events and initiatives and can elect to participate. Members of the Executive must apply for one of ten positions and are

expected to volunteer approximately 20 hours each month. The Executive, with TRCA guidance, are responsible for the development of a workplan for the year and choose what topics and initiatives to pursue. The intake for general members is open year-round, while the applications for the Executive only open for a month in the Fall.

## Definition of Youth

The term “youth” has no consistent definition. Depending on program goals, the target audience of “youth” may consider only high school students or may consider larger groups all the way up to university graduates and young professionals. The original program framework for TRCA’s Youth Council set the age category to be from 16 to 24 years old. It was observed, however, that the demographics of youth recruited in those first few months, skewed heavily towards a majority of female members. After consulting with TRCA’s Education and Training Division, as well as the Regional Watershed Alliance, we made the decision to expand the age cut-off to 30 years old. This decision was based on the experience of Education and Training staff, as they have found in their programming that male volunteers tend to be older than female. Data collected from registrants suggest that increasing the age had a marginal impact on gender distribution. The average age of female members is 20.9 years old, and the average age of male members is 21.4 years old. Looking at the registration by year, there was a somewhat larger proportion of males joining in 2019, but this effect did not continue to 2020 (Figure 2).



**FIGURE 2: GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBERS BY YEAR**

## Recruitment

Recruitment for the Youth Council has relied on tapping into existing networks and social media. Applications for the executive increased from 19 applicants in 2018 to 31 applicants in 2019. Based on those applications, it appears that a strong network has been established through the universities in Toronto.

Representation on the Youth Council is not consistent across TRCA’s jurisdiction (Table 1). This is particularly the case in Durham Region. In early 2020 the City of Pickering reached out to the Youth Council to assist with recruitment in their region. This has resulted in a few more registrants. However, that outreach was done after applications for the Executive closed, which is the most active recruitment

time (general or Executive) for the Council. When applications for the new Executive are re-opened, notification will be sent to the City of Pickering, and other partners in Durham Region in an effort to see more cross-regional participation.

**TABLE 1: LOCATION OF YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBERS**

Region	City	Count	Proportion	Regional Proportion
<b>Durham</b>	Ajax	3	2%	<b>4%</b>
	Oshawa	1	1%	
	Pickering	2	1%	
	Uxbridge	1	1%	
<b>Outside TRCA Jurisdiction*</b>	Guelph	3	2%	<b>4%</b>
	Milton	3	2%	
	Newmarket	1	1%	
	Oakville	1	1%	
<b>Peel</b>	Brampton	13	7%	<b>11%</b>
	Caledon	1	1%	
	Mississauga	7	4%	
<b>Toronto</b>	Etobicoke	6	3%	<b>63%</b>
	North York	20	10%	
	Scarborough	25	13%	
	Toronto	74	38%	
<b>York</b>	Maple	2	1%	<b>18%</b>
	Markham	10	5%	
	Richmond Hill	3	2%	
	Stouffville	3	2%	
	Thornhill	3	2%	
	Vaughan	6	3%	
	Woodbridge	9	5%	
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>197</b>		

\*recruitment is open to individuals who reside or attend school in TRCA's jurisdiction. Some members, therefore, reside outside the jurisdiction.

## Recruitment going forward: breaking down racial barriers

TRCA's jurisdiction is exceptionally diverse, and it is imperative that the Youth Council reflect that diversity. With the rise in momentum in social justice and equity movements over 2020, the Youth Council has undertaken efforts to improve the racial representation of the Executive, and recruit additional members for the general membership from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) communities. The 2020 Executive agreed that it is important for BIPOC communities to know that the Youth Council is intended for their participation, and so an explicit invitation to those communities will be included in both the Executive applications, as well as the sign up for general members. A more concerted effort will be made to use racially diverse images for any advertising. And finally, this



discussion will not end with these few actions, but will continue throughout the duration of the Youth Council.

## YOUTH COUNCIL EXECUTIVE 2020

As mentioned previously, there was an increased number of applicants for the Executive this year. In order to maintain some program continuity, four seats on the Executive remained open to the 2018/19 Executive members. Four individuals elected to extend their term, and the remaining six openings were opened for new applicants. Applications opened during the month of October 2019. Received applications were evaluated by the Youth Council Working Group and TRCA staff. Considerations for the selection of Executive members included: representation from across the jurisdiction, demographic factors, and merit based on the quality of application. It was decided not to hold interviews as the role is volunteer based and it would be difficult and time consuming to schedule. Age was also factored into the assessment of their experience and writing level, as applicants ranged from high school to graduate level students. Generally, most applicants were either nearing the end of undergraduate/college degrees or had recently graduated. The new Executive was selected by mid-November 2019.



### ROM Tour

Once the Executive had been selected and had each accepted the volunteer role, they were all invited to a tour of the Royal Ontario Museum collection, courtesy of Mark Peck, Manager, Schad Gallery of Biodiversity. The goal of this tour was for the new Executive to get to know each other before embarking on the tasks of work planning and goal setting.

The newly formed Executive introduced themselves to their new peers and each spoke to their interests and why they applied for the position. The group then had a tour of the bird collection, biodiversity hall, and the wildlife photographer of the year exhibit.

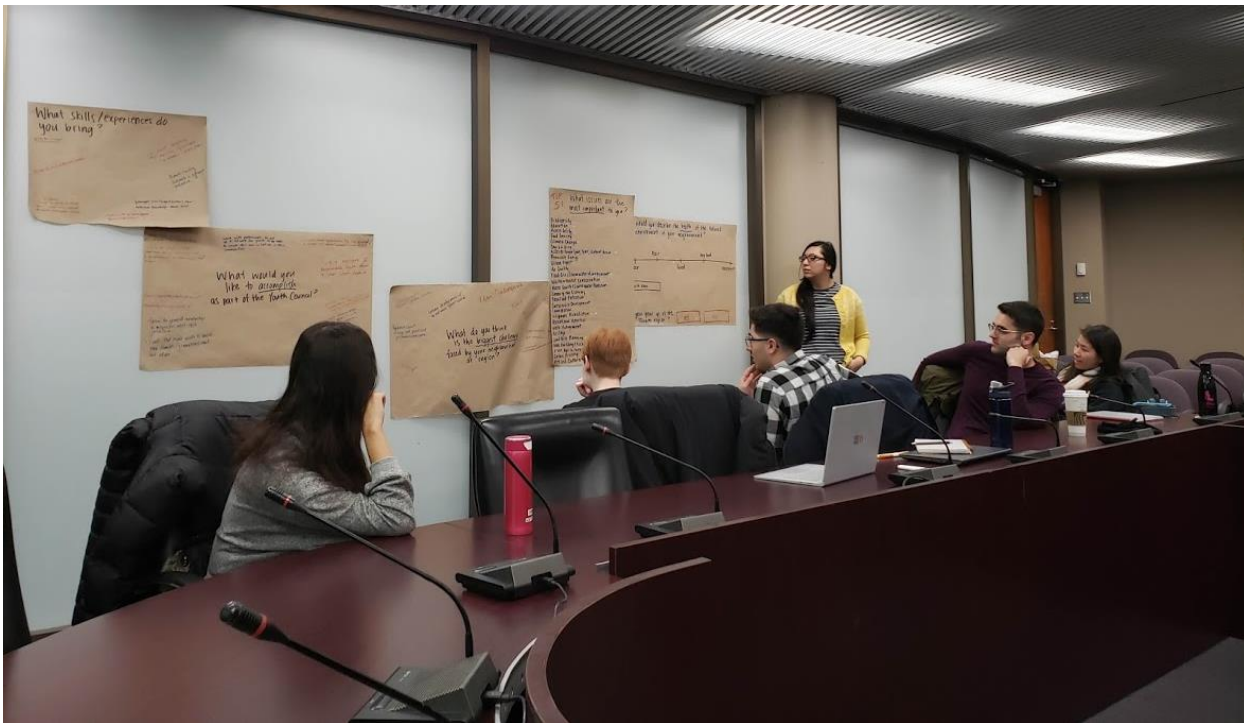
**FIGURE 3: MARK PECK PROVIDES THE YOUTH COUNCIL EXECUTIVE WITH A TOUR OF THE BIODIVERSITY COLLECTION AT THE ROM**



## Workshop at Toronto City Hall

In January 2020, the Youth Council Executive were invited to a workshop at Toronto City Hall to go over the program framework and begin work planning for the year. The workshop was planned by TRCA staff, Kate Goodale (Government and Community Relations) and Peggy Cheng (Education and Training). It consisted of team building/educational activities, an introduction to the program framework and to work planning, and finally provided time for the Executive to work together to set mutually agreed upon values, and workplan development. The Executive agreed to host monthly meetings and a WhatsApp group was created for keeping in contact.

They also discussed mutual expectations as Executive members and how to overcome conflict, should it arise. It was decided that checkpoints would be used as a means of checking in to see how the Executive members were doing on a quarterly basis. Those checkpoints would provide an opportunity for Executives to discuss and address potential areas of conflict (e.g., participation among the executive is unbalanced).



**FIGURE 4: PEGGY CHENG LEADS THE YOUTH COUNCIL EXECUTIVE THROUGH THE WORK PLANNING PROCESS**

## IMPACT OF COVID-19

In March 2020, following the World Health Organization's declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, the Province of Ontario declared a state of emergency. With the subsequent shutting down of schools, public facilities, businesses, and other places, the Youth Council, like all other groups, were forced to adapt to a "new normal". Unfortunately, many of the events that had been planned, or were in the early planning stages, had to be either postponed or cancelled. Meetings could no longer be held in person and as such, were adapted to an online format.

The impact of the pandemic has been far reaching. Many individuals have been forced into precarious situations as work, school, and other support systems have been eliminated. As a result, some of the Youth Council Executives were not able to maintain the level of commitment that they had initially agreed to at the beginning of the year. Throughout the course of the pandemic, some Executive members have been able to contribute significant amounts of time, while the circumstances of others have prevented more involvement. As individuals around the globe have been forced to adapt their lives to a new normal, or have experienced hardship as a direct result of the pandemic, we must be recognize the challenges faced by our volunteers who may not be able to commit at the level that they would under normal circumstances.

## WORKPLAN: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The broad goals and objectives outlined in the program framework remained the same from last year (Figure 1). The following section outlines the initiatives created by the 2020 Executive, and how they addressed program goals and objectives.

### Objective: Build youth network

To build the youth network, the Executive created a template email for reaching out to potential partners and collaborators, as well as a tracking system to ensure that outreach was consistent and systematic. The Executive also continued to create newsletters that were sent out on a quarterly basis, similar to last year.



Hi Kate,

We know, we know; it has been a while! Thank you for your patience.

#### Meet the 2020 Youth Council Executive



We would first like to introduce you to your brand-new Executive: Maya Adachi-Amitay, Adeena Afridi, Issa Ashtarieh, Rebecca Formosa, Tua Hytonen, Wai Ying Lam, Alessia Mole, Shannon Petrie, Luca Villeneff, and Matthew Zuniga Rodriguez. If you would like to learn more about us, check out our profiles.

During these days of constant change, we are all learning to adapt to the “new normal”. While we have been busy putting together an exciting year of new youth-focused events and learning opportunities for you—we know that some of our original plans will have to change. But we are looking at online platforms and are optimistic that one day we will be able to continue those in-person events.

That said, we sincerely hope that you will get involved. We know that we can do better in serving you, our general members, and would appreciate it if you could fill out this quick survey to tell us more about would you would like to do and how you'd like to see us improve.



[Take our survey!](#)

### Conservation Careers

In our newsletter this year we thought we would introduce you to the wide range of careers in the environmental sector. And so we have been reaching out to friends of the Youth Council to help us out. With each newsletter, we'll be including little interviews like the one below. Over the course of the year, we hope these will help guide you in your career or extracurricular interests as environmentally motivated youth. Let us know if there are specific people or groups you would like to hear from! Email Kate at [kate.goodale@trca.ca](mailto:kate.goodale@trca.ca).

Our first featured interview is with Danielle Marcoux-Hunter, Environmental Project Coordinator with Friends of the Rouge Watershed. Keep reading below for the full interview.

FIGURE 5: YOUTH COUNCIL SPRING NEWSLETTER EXCERPT

### Objective: Learn about what is important to Youth

All members, whether they are General or applying to be on the Executive, complete a survey as they register. The same survey has been used for the duration of the Youth Council program.

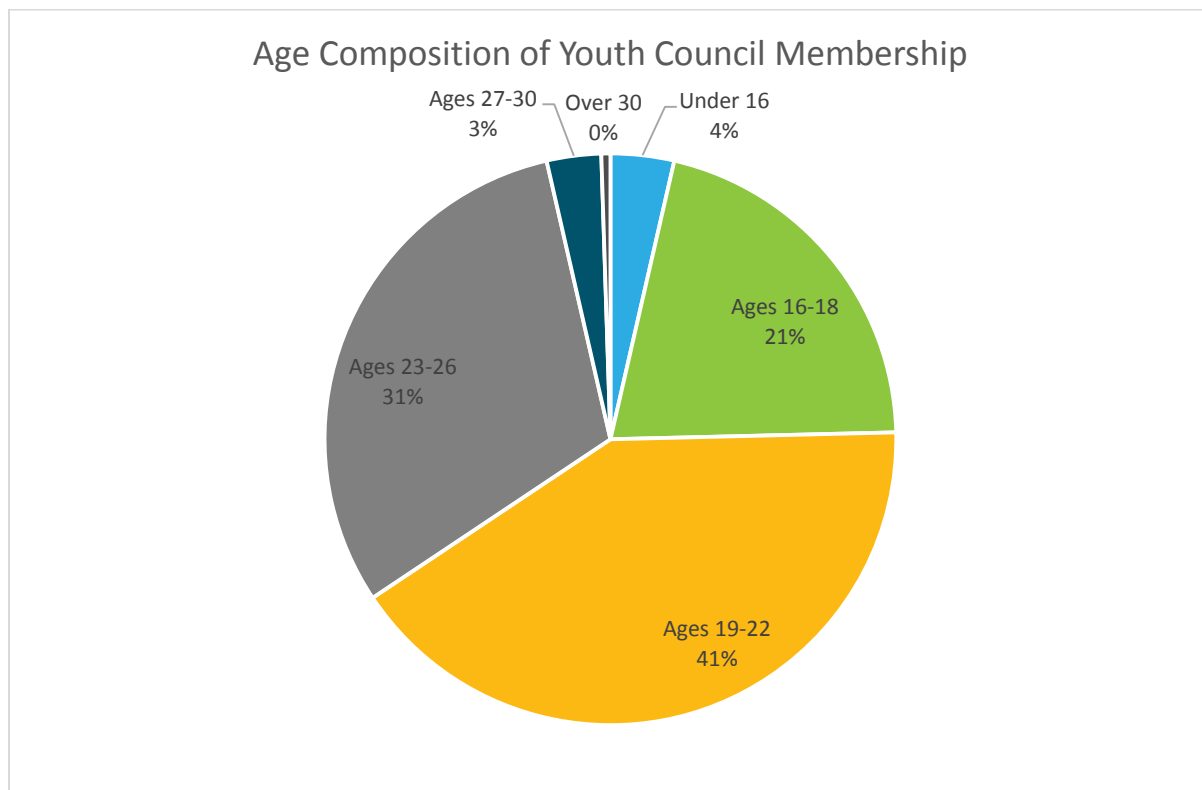
## Survey Methods

All members are required to complete a short survey at registration. In this survey, in addition to demographic questions, registrants were asked to select their top five interests from a list of 25 different topics. Topics include a range of sustainability, environmental, and social issues. For a more detailed description of the rationale for the selection of those topics and survey questions, see “TRCA Youth Council 2018-19 Report”.

## Results

### Demographics

Youth Council members are mostly from Toronto (63%, Table 1) and are mostly in their early to mid-twenties (Figure 6). This is reflective of the strong university network that we have tapped into. As mentioned in previously, the Youth Council membership is comprised of more females (72%) than males (27%).



**FIGURE 6: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF MEMBERSHIP**

### Most Important Issues

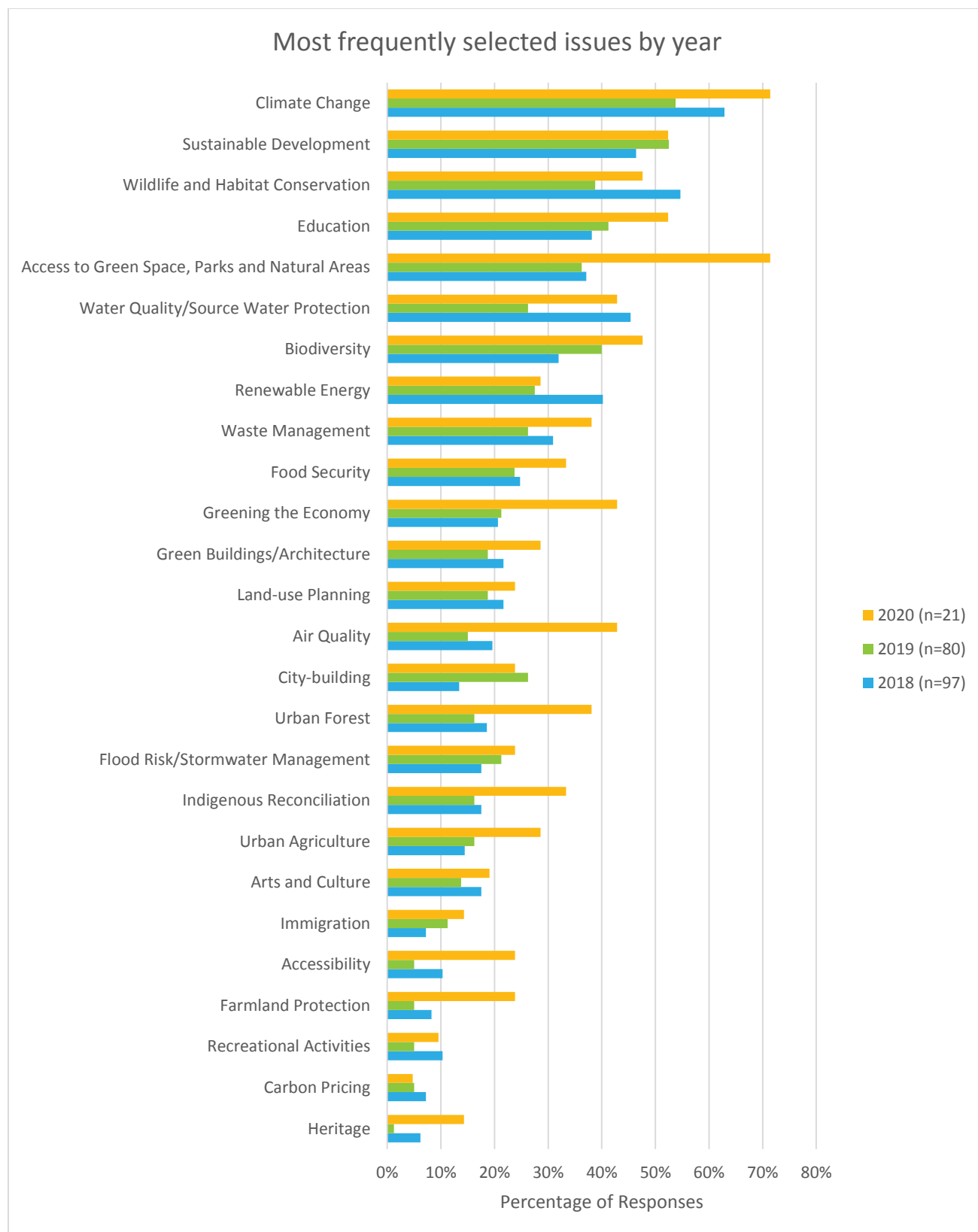
Registrants were instructed to select the top five most important issues from a list. This list included environmental, social, and sustainability issues, and was developed through a collaborative effort between the RWA Youth Council Working Group and TRCA staff (a more fulsome discussion of this process can be found in the “TRCA Youth Council 2018/19 Report”). Some respondents elected to choose more than five and those additional answers were recorded. As the option was not provided for

respondents to provide a hierarchy of importance for their selections, the overall importance of an item to the entire group was based on the number of times an item was selected.

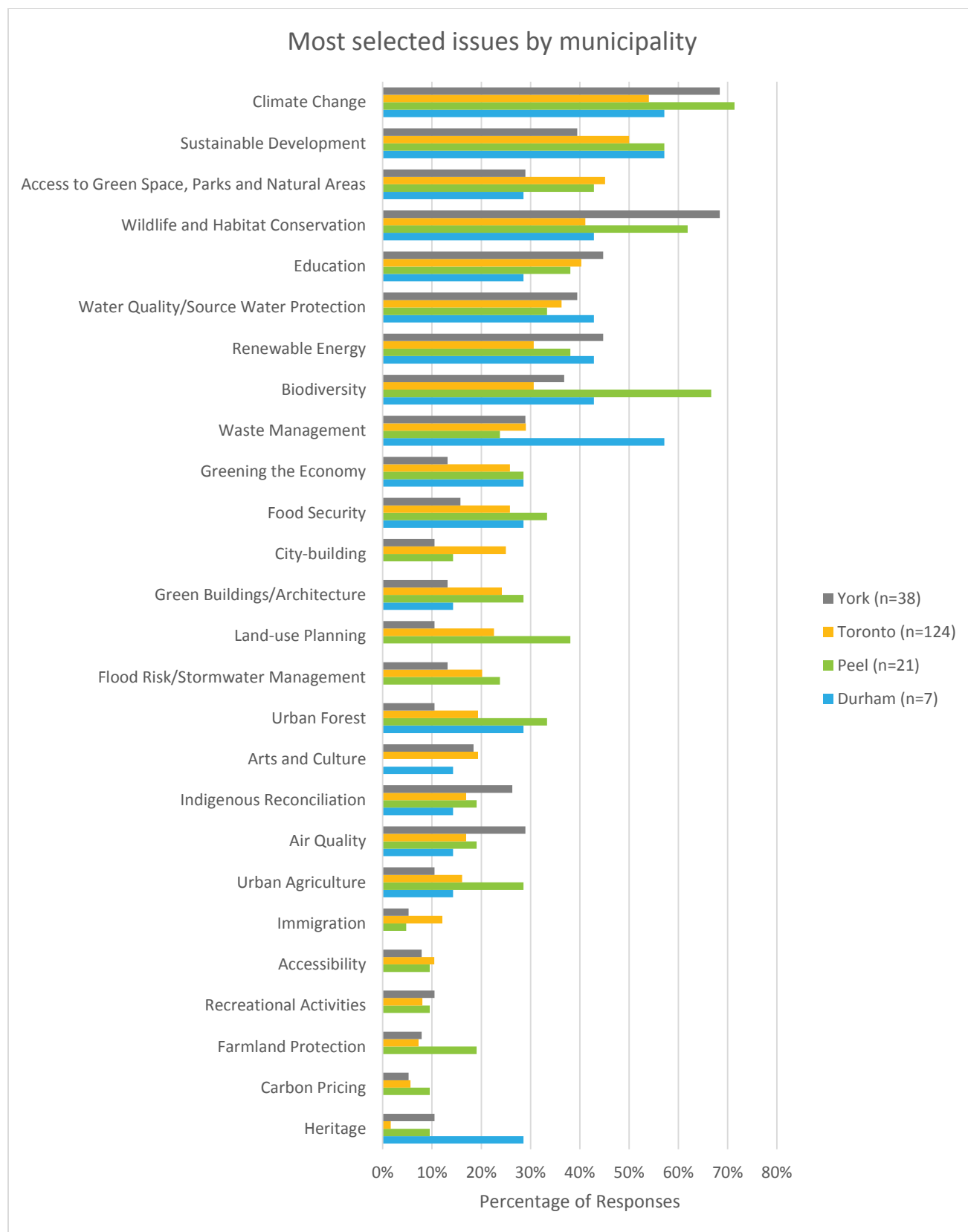
Aggregated responses were similar to last year, where “Climate Change” was once again the most frequently selected topic. There are, however, some notable changes in the data looking at responses by year (Figure 7). “Access to Greenspace and Natural Areas” rises in importance to be alongside “Climate Change”. This is likely a reflection of the situation that has arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic where, since March 2020, the demand for greenspace has increased. At a local scale this was reflective of the public’s use of TRCA facilities during the pandemic. This was also echoed in the demand for green space at a provincial and national scale, which was recorded by Google search hits (Google Community Reports, 2020). This increase in demand inspired the Youth Council Executive to develop a social media strategy to discuss the human relationship with nature (this initiative is described in more detail on p. 14).

It should also be noted that at the time of this report there were only 21 registrants in 2020, which is substantially lower than the first two years of the program (97 in 2018, and 80 in 2019), and will have an impact on the average responses. This low number is, however, unsurprising as the largest influx of new members occurs when applications for the Executive open, which at the time of this report has not yet occurred.

While there are some differences in issue priority by municipality (Figure 8), these differences should be approached with caution as the low number of members in some municipalities (e.g., Durham with only seven members) will exaggerate those proportions. Climate Change continues to be the most important issue throughout TRCA’s jurisdiction.



**FIGURE 7: MOST FREQUENTLY SELECTED ISSUES BY YEAR**



**FIGURE 8: MOST FREQUENTLY SELECTED ISSUES BY MUNICIPALITY**



## Objective: Create Fun Opportunities

As a result of the pandemic, all planned in-person events were cancelled. However, the Youth Council was able to adapt to an online framework, where Executive meetings were held online, and events were hosted as webinars. The following section provides a summary of all of the initiatives planned for the year.

### Webinar: Invasive Species

The pandemic has forced TRCA and the Youth Council to adapt their engagement activities to an online format. For their first webinar, a small group of Executive members worked together to deliver a webinar about invasive species in the Greater Toronto Area. This webinar took place as a panel Q&A where the Executive moderated the discussion. They prepared questions in advance, and then posed questions to subject matter experts from the audience. This panel included TRCA staff from Aquatic Monitoring, Community-Based Restoration, Integrated Restoration, and York Region's Invasive Species Specialist. There were 42 participants who attended this webinar.

### Webinar: Systemic Barriers in Conservation and Outdoor Spaces

Racism and inclusion has been a topic that has been gaining much attention world-wide. The Youth Council Executive decided that it would be of interest to their membership and others to host a discussion regarding systemic racism in the conservation sector. For this webinar, a small group of Executives carried out research and prepared a presentation that covered colonialism and racism in the historic Canadian context, what barriers exist today, and what work is being carried out to address those inequalities. They also secured the key speakers:

**Holly Shaw-Lopez:** Holly is a coordinator with TRCA's Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP), and has been working in the Jane and Finch community as part of the Black Creek SNAP since 2013. Much of her work has been in community capacity building and in the creation and improvement of access to green space.

**Kayla Morales:** Kayla is a research assistant in the Eco-Hydrology lab at the University of Guelph. Her research interests focus on how natural and urban areas influence each other. Kayla completed her MASc in Environmental Applied Science and Management at Ryerson University and is currently an active member of the Canadian Young Hydrologic Society's executive team and the Brampton Environmental Advisory Committee.

**Yasmine Hassen:** Yasmine is a community organizer and Master of Education candidate at the University of Toronto, where her studies focus on environmental racism and how racialized youth face barriers in outdoor education. She has worked with Climate Justice TO, and has extensive experience in community organizing, facilitation and program development in higher education and the social sector.

The webinar had an attendance of 40 individuals, and a recorded version of the event has been uploaded to YouTube. At the time of this report, the recording had been watched 166 times.



**FIGURE 9: WAI YING LAM (TOP MIDDLE) AND MAYA ADACHI-AMITAY (TOP LEFT), YOUTH COUNCIL EXECUTIVES, LEAD A DISCUSSION WITH PANEL SPEAKERS**

### Online Movie Night: Toad People

One of the most popular events held by the Youth Council in 2019 was a movie night held at the Patagonia store in Toronto. Since an in-person movie night was not possible in 2020, the Youth Council Executive instead decided to hold an online movie night featuring the movie “Toad People” (53 min). The film discussed road ecology work taking place in British Columbia to protect endangered Western Toads, with the road ecology work featured in the film being similar to TRCA’s road ecology project at Heart Lake Road in Brampton. After the film, a panel discussion was chaired by the Youth Council Executive and featured TRCA staff from the Heart Lake Road Ecology Project, as well as Isabelle Groc, the director of Toad People. This event was well attended with 34 participants.

### Social Media Campaign: Outdoor Spaces During a Pandemic (October-November 2020)

There is a well-established connection between mental and physical health and time spent in greenspace. The pandemic has disrupted normal life for many people and has had a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. As people search for ways to cope with these challenges, access to greenspace has emerged as an incredibly important strategy. This was demonstrated by the overwhelming popularity of trails and conservation areas—so much so that to ensure that “social distancing” protocols could be met, many outdoor facilities were temporarily closed as land managers sought methods to enforce and limit access for safety reasons. In Ontario, compared to a baseline, demand for parks increased 179%. Looking at the municipalities found in the Greater Toronto Area, demand increased considerably: demand in Toronto increased by 109%, Peel by 116%, York by 247%, and Durham by 101% (Google COVID-19 Community Mobility Report, 2020). This was also reflected in the rising importance of the topic “Access to Greenspace and Natural Areas” among Youth Council members.

There are several important lessons to be learned from these experiences. For many residents of the GTA, their relationship with nature and greenspace may have changed; people explored areas near

their homes that they had not previously, while others may have had those greenspaces closed to them. It is of value to learn from these stories, and the Youth Council plans to do so by starting a social media campaign that invites people to share their stories about, and experiences with, greenspace over the last six months.

The Youth Council Executive prepared a series of social media posts that featured a photograph and a short description their experiences. For example:



Despite what's been going on these last few months, I've had a great summer! I've done a lot of new things that I've never done before including camping and kayaking. During these new experiences I was reminded why I pursued conservation in the first place. Looking out at the thousands of trees around me, and breathing in the crisp air by the lake, I felt a calmness I hadn't felt for a while. Although I can't go kayaking every day, I have learned to seize new opportunities to connect with nature and experience its beauty, especially during stressful times.

My name is Alessia Molé, and I am one of the Executive members on the TRCA Youth Council. I studied Environmental Sustainability at Ryerson, and am now working as a Conservation Associate with an energy solutions company. This has been my second year on the Council, and probably the best one yet! Share your story of how you've been connecting with nature this year using the hashtag

**#NatureStoryTRCA**



Being unable to travel this summer seemed a bummer at first, but I'm grateful for the reminder that we have plenty of great opportunities to get outside in our city. I have made so many more early morning trips to the beach; paddling across glass-smooth Lake Ontario as the sun rises with the city skyline ahead has been my chosen form of nature therapy! What's yours?

Hey, I'm Wai, one of the executive members of the TRCA Youth Council. I'm a PhD student at the University of Toronto studying environmental contaminants. Outside of my research, I dabble in bread baking, trail and distance running, and artisanal soapmaking. Like Alessia, this is my second year on the Council and I'm stoked to have gotten to share several cool opportunities with our members.

Share your story of how you've been connecting with nature this year using the hashtag **#NatureStoryTRCA**

At the time of this report, the campaign is in the final planning stages and posts have not yet been initiated, but the intent is that these social media posts will inspire others to share their stories. Those stories will inform a discussion about the value of greenspace and people's relationship with greenspace across the GTA and beyond, and will be the basis for a webinar that will be delivered by the Youth Council Executive in November 2020.

While we anticipate many of the stories will be positive (e.g., trying new things, exploring new areas), it is possible that some negative experiences will be brought up. This is a crucial part of the discussion that should not be ignored and will help to bring depth to the conversation. These stories, positive and negative, will help to illustrate the value of greenspace, especially during a crisis such as a pandemic.

This campaign will also serve as an opportunity for the general members of the Youth Council to join the conversation, and to have their voices heard. Their stories could be highlighted in a final webinar hosted in November.

### Movie Night: Cottagers and Indians (planned for 2020)

With the success of the first online movie night, the Youth Council is planning to deliver a second event later on in 2020, showing the film "Cottagers and Indians." This documentary features a discussion about food sovereignty and the complexities of Indigenous/Settler conflict. Following the screening, the Youth Council will host a panel discussion with members of the Curve Lake First Nation and TRCA staff.

## Planned Events to be Rescheduled

### Sorauren Movie Night

Building on the success of the documentary film night in the first year, the Youth Council decided to host an outdoor film night. The Friends of Sorauren Park (FOSP), a volunteer group in the Roncesvalles neighbourhood in West Toronto, has regularly held summer movie nights that are well attended by the local community. The Youth Council Executive approached the FOSP about co-hosting an event, including preparing a project proposal that outlined goals, roles and responsibilities, intended audience, tentative schedule, and budget. FOSP has co-led events with the City of Toronto before, providing some precedent on their part for this type of event.

Unfortunately planning had to be paused as a result of COVID-19, but the Executive members are hopeful to result discussions with FOSP for summer 2021.

### Learn to Play Cricket and Litter Clean Up in The Meadoway

In the first year of the Youth Council, for their very first event, the Executive planned a litter clean up in The Meadoway. The 2019-20 Executive were also interested in The Meadoway project and investigated means to increase the interest and participation of general members in an event there. One sport that is rising in interest across the City of Toronto is cricket—especially among communities in the neighbourhood of Scarborough, which is bisected by The Meadoway.

The Youth Council Executive reached out to the Cricket Club at the University of Toronto Scarborough campus to see if there was interest in collaborating on an event. The Cricket Club attended one of the Executive meetings and agreed to co-host an event where they would provide cricket equipment and lead basic cricket lessons and the Youth Council would lead a litter clean up.

This event was cancelled as a result of COVID-19. The Executive will explore holding it in 2021.

### Invasive Species Removal Event and Workshop

A collaborative event was planned to take place in the Town of Mono with the Youth Council, Town of Mono Headwaters Stream Committee, Nottawasaga Conservation Authority, and the Compass Community Church as partners. The goal of the event was to provide youth with a career development opportunity through a hands-on workshop about invasive species and environmental management. It is intended that the event will teach participants about phragmites; both the impact of the invasive species, and management techniques. This event will also feature career development discussions by TRCA and Town staff.

This event was postponed until 2021 as a result of COVID-19.

### Objective: Build youth capacity and learning opportunities

The Youth Council program builds capacity among the members of the Executive to learn how to project manage and lead initiatives. This year the Executive rose to the challenge and continued to plan and deliver events/campaigns remotely.

The Youth Council Executive used webinars as a means to teach the general membership about careers in conservation, racism in outdoor spaces and the environmental sector, and about invasive species. They also used newsletters to reach the general membership and created content around these themes. They even carried out interviews of conservation professionals that were included in the newsletters. These interviews were intended to highlight the breadth of opportunities in the conservation sector (Figure 5).

To achieve capacity building, it was imperative that, above all, that it was the Executive who created the content for all of the campaigns and initiatives carried out this year. and this has been the case with all of the online content created.



## PROGRAM EVALUATION

### Structure

The structure of the Youth Council has not changed, but program delivery had to be adapted to an online framework as a result of COVID-19. Since it took TRCA some time to create the platforms that could be utilized by the Executive, and the Executive members themselves had to make personal changes to adapt to a “new normal”, it has been a challenge to continue team building and maintaining engagement among the Executive. For this reason, we are considering lengthening the term of the Executives who are interested in continuing for the 2020/2021 term and filing only the vacated seats of those who are not interested in continuing their role. This will help to maintain team cohesion and productivity as remote work will continue for the foreseeable future.

### Goals and Objectives

#### Build youth capacity and learning opportunities

The Youth Council Executive demonstrated remarkable capacity to adapt to the circumstances created by the pandemic. They sought new ways to engage their audience through online mechanisms, including learning opportunities in the form of webinars. To measure audience learning, at the end of each webinar participants were sent a follow-up survey and asked: “What was one thing that you learned or that resonated with you today”. While not all participants completed the follow-up survey, of the responses received all indicated that audience members had indeed learned something new or that the material resonated with them. Examples of comments received by audience members include:

#### Webinar: Invasive Species

- How to dispose of invasive species
- Perception of different invasive species that the public has. Need for education for a full understanding of population control measures.
- The management and the protocols of removing them can be tricky, especially near bodies of water and near community areas.

#### Webinar: Systemic Barriers in Conservation and Outdoor Spaces

- The presenters and personal stories. Also asking us all to look at how we got here and who's land we're on was a simple but helpful exercise we should continue to do and ask others to do!
- Don't drop this convo, keep it at the front of the youth councils work
- 100% of the webinar resonated with me! It made me quite emotional to think of how being a bipoc youth/adult, growing up we are naturally positioned through our parents whom have immigrated to this country to have fear in simply going out, not staying near bushes, always looking behind you when you walk. It was all so relevant. I enjoyed the realness of the conversations and interconnections between racial justice and environmental justice
- The importance of policy that is considerate of systemic barriers
- Really great webinar, I learnt mostly about the indigenous people who first occupied and owns these lands
- How there is change happening even though we can't see it up front and center

- Africville and environmental racism in Toronto (disproportionate access to green spaces)

#### Movie Night: Toad People

- The importance of citizen science. The ability to see the big picture isn't something everyone is able to do, but when a few get together and collectively bring something to the table, only time will tell how much can be accomplished. This is what I feel happened with the 'Toad People', that even though the process took a few years, the end result seems to be fruitful.
- We can make a difference as ordinary citizens.
- That there are so many other people also working on these kind of issues. It can sometimes feel like there are so few of us out there on a day to day basis.
- Did not realize toads are endangered and killed in great numbers by traffic.
- Logging in Canada, city planning, and urban expansion is really affecting the wildlife. I was unaware of how much these things have been affecting the Ecosystems!
- I was very impressed by the actions taken by the citizen scientist in the film. Young and old, they were passionate about saving the toads. How inspiring to see them sitting on the side of the road, saving one by one the toads to release them on the other side so that they could continue on their way. Such a 'small' gesture and yet so profoundly life saving for the toads. It showed that we can all do something to make a difference in saving our Nature/planet.

Furthermore, a theme that emerged through the online engagement events was that of career building in the conservation sector. Many of the Youth Council members are in university and are considering their next professional steps. The Youth Council Executive recognized this interest and added content to the webinars and to the newsletters that delved into the breadth of opportunities in the conservation sector, and asked guest speakers to reflect on their career paths. This focus will help to build capacity among audience members, and hopefully inspire them to pursue a career in the environmental sector.

#### Build youth network

To continue to build the youth network, systematic outreach to potential partners was undertaken by the Youth Council Executive. They created a template email, and a tracking system to record that outreach. In practice the Youth Council had mixed success with this venture. Contact with some new organizations and networks did take place, but the Council still needs to develop a framework for sharing opportunities through the general membership in real time. Furthermore, the disruption of COVID-19 made collaborative events/opportunities more difficult.

Despite these setbacks, connections made this year included a number of new groups. All of the events planned over this Executive term, whether in person or virtual, relied on the participation and partnership of external groups including:

- York Region
- UTSC Cricket Club
- Friends of Sorauren Park
- Headwaters Stream Committee (Town of Mono)
- Arcteryx (Toronto Location)

More general outreach (i.e., sharing resources and opportunities) included the following groups:



- U of T Trash Team
- Youth Challenge International
- Friends of the Rouge Watershed

The Youth Council continues to have groups reach out to them for collaborative opportunities. This suggests that the program has successfully tapped into the youth network.

In the March 2020 newsletter, the Executive surveyed the general membership to understand what barriers existed with respect to participation in Youth Council activities. While that survey had a small number of respondents (fewer than 10), the responses did suggest that events held on weekend afternoons were preferred. The lack of participation from the newsletter's call to action suggests that this method of communication is not ideal for reaching this particular audience. The Youth Council Executive has been continuing to investigate alternative modes of communication. Polls from the webinar registrants indicated that LinkedIn was the method by which most participants discovered the webinar. This would suggest that LinkedIn could perhaps be better utilized by the Youth Council to reach their target audience.

### Learn about what is important to youth

The entrance survey continues to provide the most robust data indicating the most important issues to youth. As was discussed earlier, some changes in the most frequently selected topics changed from year to year, which has been reflective of the current situation that has arisen from the pandemic. The Youth Council will continue to collect this data to inform their and TRCA's programming.

### Create fun opportunities for youth

The Youth Council Executive have continued to pursue diverse fun opportunities for youth. Of the activities that were delivered online, follow up surveys were used to measure participant engagement. Feedback from the surveys suggested that the participants enjoyed their online experience. The platform used also tracked attentiveness, that is, how much the participant continued to engage with the webinar and did not switch to a different window on their computer. Overall attentiveness score for all three online events was 100%--which means that the audience stayed engaged with the content for the duration of the entire presentation.

## Recommendations

Overall, the Youth Council program did a good job of adapting to the ever-changing circumstances brought on by a global pandemic. The following is a summary of the recommendations for program improvement through the evaluation of meeting goals and objectives:

- Lengthen the term of the 2019/20 Executive for interested individuals to include the 2020/21 term
- Fill only the vacated Executive positions
- Explore methods to improve communication within the Executive and General membership as the newsletters do not seem to be effective
- Continue online program delivery
- Consider new methods of network building, such as LinkedIn

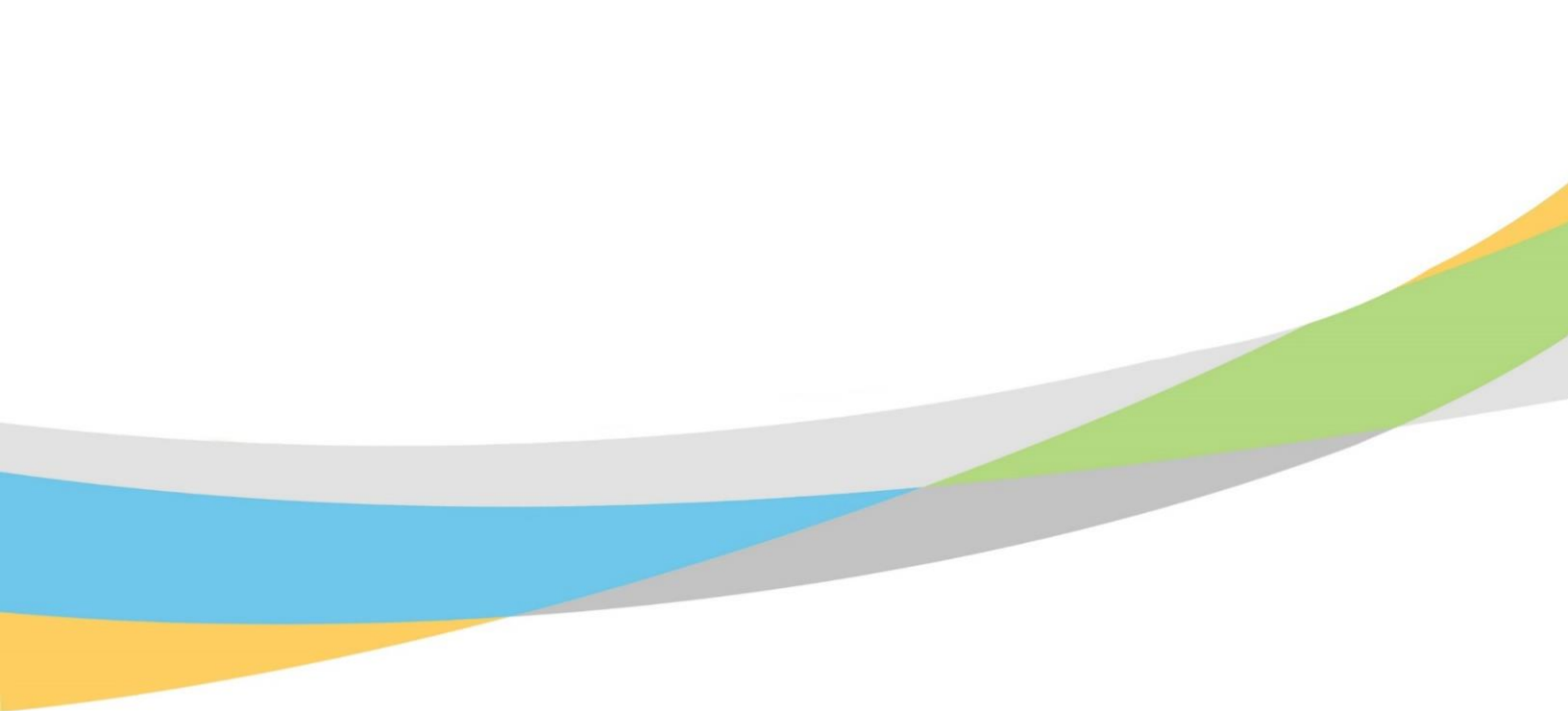
- Ensure that recruitment for Executive members targets areas outside the Toronto core, with emphasis on Durham region.
- Continue to check in with Youth Council Executive to ensure group cohesion
- Carry out a year-end reflection activity with the Executive

## CONCLUSION

This year has posed unique challenges. The situation that has arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in enormous structural and cultural changes. The Youth Council has adapted to the situation by cancelling in-person events and shifting all work online. While that programming has been successful and has been gaining more attention from audience members, the reliance of the Youth Council on volunteers has meant that the framework for program success has had to be remarkably adaptive and forgiving. The pandemic has resulted in a lot of uncertainty for many people, including job losses, uncertainty with academic pursuits, and stress brought on by these unprecedented circumstances. With these factors in mind, it is no surprise that time for volunteerism will not be the same as when individuals initially signed up for their roles. To ensure the continued delivery of the program, and to support our members, we must continue to be flexible and adaptable—something that has allowed the Youth Council program to continue to flourish despite the challenges we face in the midst of a global pandemic.

## REFERENCES

Google. 2020. Community Mobility Reports. Available: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/>



[www.trca.ca](http://www.trca.ca)

