



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **ROI Introduces the 2023 Rural Change Makers**

GUELPH, ON, October 3, 2023 - The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is excited to announce the thirty-two emerging rural leaders who have begun their leadership learning journey together through the Rural Change Makers (RCM) program this fall in the spirit of growth, discovery, respect, reconciliation and rural community development.

*“The 2023 Rural Change Makers come from all walks of life and communities throughout rural Ontario. It’s inspiring to see the passion and skill set of these young leaders who want to continue to hone their leadership skills and play a part in shaping the future of their rural communities,” says Melanie Bidiuk, ROI Communications and Program Manager.*

With the support of regional partners: Timmins Youth Wellness Hub (YWH-Timmins), Opiikapawiiin Services LP (OSLP) and Community Futures Huron, the program is equipping these young leaders (aged 18-35) from rural and northern Ontario to mobilize community-led action on a local priority. Over the course of the program Change Makers will participate in a series of developmental training sessions and come together for experiential gatherings, complete self-assessments, form planning committees for local activities and develop a Youth Summit culminating the program in the Fall of 2024.

*“Rural Change Makers are the leaders of tomorrow. During the program, rural youth will develop a broad network of mentors and discover the many unique and innovative approaches to community economic development and resiliency in rural communities” says Ellen Sinclair, Executive Director, Rural Ontario Institute.*

*“I want to bring a big welcome to Change Makers. I am in awe of the potential they have to make change in their communities for the better. Our organization supports new or existing small businesses and social enterprises, and we also support programs that strengthen the economic and social fabric of our communities. From our perspective we are really excited to be involved as partners and mentors in this program and we cannot wait to see the amazing efforts change makers lead in their rural communities,” Heather Boa, Community Futures Huron.*

*“One of the most impactful lessons that I have learned from my time working with youth is that meaningful and powerful work is a form of self-care. Working on a project you care about really is a form of self-care. It is one of the most vital forms of self-care. Over the journey that change makers are embarking on they are going to be nourishing and uplifting of course their community, but also themselves by doing this work. We are really excited for everyone embarking on this journey. Your voice is powerful and your actions over the coming months are going to spark meaningful and lasting change,” Catharine Lockhart – Timmins Youth Wellness Hub.*

*“Opiikapawiin Services LP (OSLP) is owned by a partnership of 24 First Nations, also majority owners of Wataynikaneyap Power (Watay Power) - a transmission project currently undertaking the construction of 1800km of transmission lines to connect 17 remote First Nations to the Ontario power grid. Our goal is to support and train a local workforce for Wataynikaneyap with the necessary skills to ensure young leaders and communities are ready for future governance and ownership of Wataynikaneyap,” says Laura Calmwind, OSLP Training Manager. “Our young peoples bring change and good ideas for the peoples. They are important to carry forward the knowledge, teachings, language and lead the future of our communities.”*

ROI would like to thank all those who applied to undertake this leadership learning journey through the 2023 Rural Change Makers Program.

Support for the 2023 Rural Change Makers program has been generously provided in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, RBC Foundation, the Sarnia Lambton Economic Partnership and Community Futures Huron.

Many partners are supporting program delivery and rural youth by giving gifts of time, knowledge, expertise and financial support including: Libro Credit Union and Each One Teach One (Carolina Triana and John Kiser), Community Futures Huron (Paul Nichol and Heather Boa), Perth-Huron United Way (Lisa Harper), Opiikapawiin Services LP (Laura Calmwind), SERA Community Ventures (Natasha Eck), Centre for First Nations Governance (Amsey Maracle), City of Peterborough Social Services (Suzie Johnson-Smith and Julie Johnson), Good Roots Consulting (Meredith Davis), Trillium Foundation Youth Opportunities Fund Staff (Muna Mohamed and Caceila Trahan), and Tanya Rumble |Inclusive Fundraising (Tanya Hannah Rumble).

### **2023 Rural Change Makers:**

- **Amanda Henderson** (Brant County) – Master Beekeeper who is passionate about lifelong learning and building communities.
- **Amanda Kiezebrink** (Durham Region) – Third Generational Farmer, Falconer, Marine Engineering veteran of the Royal Canadian Navy with 14 years of service. Amanda is an entrepreneur, having started two new businesses while taking over her family farm. She is passionate about ensuring the future of the family farm.
- **Carly Knibutat** (Seaforth) – Mechanical Engineering Graduate from the University of Waterloo. Carly is passionate about positive change for the future and building resiliency in her rural community.
- **Carrie Lyon** (Bearskin Lake First Nation) – Is among the women to “learn the line”, transmission line maintenance and operation in the mega energy project Wataynikaneyap Transmission. She is passionate about healthy lifestyles, social engagement, and creating art.



- **Daisy Mckay** (Sachigo Lake) – Family Well-Being Program through the Income Assistance First Nation Youth Employment Strategy (IAFNYES). Daisy is passionate about youth and sharing her Indigenous culture with her community.
- **Dakota Derosier** (Wabigoon Lake Ojibwee Nation) – Community Liaison with Wataynikaneyap Power. Dakota is passionate about working with communities, food security, agriculture and vertical farming.
- **Danika Tait** (Huron County) – Business Marketing student at Fanshaw College with more than 12 years' experience in economic development. Danika is passionate about addressing the youth gap.
- **Ezra Kamenawatamin** (Bearskin Lake) – Is actively engaged in community work. Ezra is passionate about teaching and coordinating youth sports.
- **Gagandeepsingh Gill** (Timmins) – Student Ambassador with Northern College. Gagandeepsingh is passionate about bridging the cultural gap for newcomers and creating understanding and inclusivity.
- **Hannah Field** (Bayfield) – Registered Early Childhood Educator, is leading an entrepreneurial pursuit “Trees and Me Forest School” with a passion for bringing nature to children.
- **Hardik Patel** (Belleville) – Founder of the Belleville International Association and recipient of the Community Champion Award from the MPP of Bay of Quinte this year. Hardik volunteers in many boards as a director such as Quinte Immigration, Centre for Workplace Development (CFWD), Trenval Business Co and is also a committee member of City of Belleville Youth Committee and Downtown Belleville Events. He is passionate about bridging the gap between international students, newcomers and local community to promote sustainability and diversity.
- **Jillian Bjelan** (Huron County) – Executive Assistant for the Municipality of Central Huron and recipient of the 2016 Ontario Medal of Young Volunteers. Jillian is passionate about social justice and interested in creating cohesive community hubs throughout regions for community gatherings.
- **Jobby Strang** (Poplar Hill First Nation) - Brings 3 years' experience at Wataynikaneyap Power and is passionate about learning and opportunities for growth. Jobby would like to see more access to education in his remote northern community.
- **Josie Linton** (North Durham Region) – Third Generational Farmer, Queen of the Furrow, On Farm Program Coordinator and Mobile Agriculture Educational Exhibits &

Resources Trailer Coordinator with Durham Farm & Rural Family Resources. Josie is passionate about agriculture and education.

- **Kayla Portugie** (Timmins) – Financial Services Officer with Caisse Alliance, and Tutor with Timmins Learning Center. Kayla is passionate about safety and harm reduction in community parks.
- **Kimberley Lawlor** (Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh) – Agronomy Manager with Lucknow District Co-operative. Kim is passionate about giving back to her community, sharing the abundant gifts of Huron and Bruce County, and providing support for others to contribute to the success of her rural community.
- **Kisha Kakegamic** (Thunder Bay) – Dene Cree Designs Inc. Kisha is inspired by her father. She is interested in becoming a leader like him and sharing knowledge with her community.
- **Krystal Brideau** (Hensall) – Registered Nurse & Diabetes Educator who is passionate about conservation. Krystal is interested in engaging her local community to help promote backyard mini ecosystems that support our planet.
- **Lawna Atkins** (Durham) – Indigenous Friends Association. Lawna is passionate about starting a mental health support and career development not-for-profit for first responders and caregivers in the Bruce Grey area with a focus on creating a supportive community through a support group and mentorship program.
- **Luanne McGregor** (Kippen) – Jr Logistics Coordinator with V.D.B. Grain Elevators. Luanne is passionate about her community and its people and wants to encourage others, especially youth to take advantage of opportunities within her community!
- **Mabe Kyle** (Brant County) – Expressive Arts Therapist in Training, Peer Support Specialist in practice, Co-founder of the Rural Ontario Community for Queer Youth (ROCQY). Mabe is passionate about expressive therapy and creating safe and inclusive spaces.
- **Mahbuba Airin** (Guelph) – Master's student in Capacity Development & Extension at the University of Guelph. Mahbuba is passionate about the bond between food and people and how food, gardening and plants can bridge cultural divides.
- **Martha Kataquapit** (Attawapiskat First Nation) - Martha is passionate about lifelong learning and giving back to her community.
- **Mary Fiddler** (Sandy Lake First Nation) – Summer student of Wataynikaneyap Transmission and Aboriginal Advocacy student at Confederation College. Mary is passionate about working with vulnerable youth aging out of Child Protective Services care in the Tikinagan CFS Region.



- **Moriano Owen** (Poplar Hill First Nation) – General Arts & Science Program student at Sault College. Moriano is committed to learning and has a passion for aviation science with plans to achieve his pilot license.
- **Rainelle Keeper** (Pikangikum First Nation) – Community Liaison with Opiikapawiiin Services LP/Wataynikaneyap Power. Rainelle is passionate about housing and developing community lands for community needs with a focus on economic development.
- **Raven Chikane** (Weagamow Lake) – In addition to entrepreneurial pursuits, Raven is actively involved in community initiatives and is interested in starting a drug, alcohol and bullying prevention program for children and youth in the community.
- **Sebastian Fortin** (Timmins) – Sebastian is passionate about art and supporting the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as well as creating healthy spaces for animals, residents and indigenous communities.
- **Shayne McGregor** (Cameron) – Addiction and Mental Health Worker, and founder of *AndThenIWasFree*. Shayne is passionate about supporting community members who are struggling. Through his organization he works to fill the gaps between community systems and understanding so individuals do not slip through the cracks.
- **Storm McKay** (Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation) – Energy Consumption with Wataynikaneyap. Storm is an avid outdoorsman with a passion for sports and recreation in his community. He is interested in starting a ball hockey league in his community.
- **Takudzwanashe Mundenga** (Waterloo) – Specialist in International Development with a passion for sustainability, environmental conservation and community wellbeing. Taku is interested in supporting his community's adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Tyron Moose** (Poplar Hill First Nation) – Computer Science university student. Tyron is passionate about learning, his community and continuing education.

## ABOUT

The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is a non-profit organization committed to developing leaders, informing decision makers and connecting communities. ROI delivers the renowned Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) entering its 40th year of operation, and the Rural Change Maker program, a youth leadership initiative for young rural, emerging leaders to address local priorities. We provide data research and analysis on rural trends and demographics. Information is disseminated in our Rural Ontario Facts products - factsheets and

accompanying dashboards. Currently, ROI is engaged in a rural housing initiative that will help communities to address the housing and homelessness crisis being faced by thousands of Canadians.

#### **ASSOCIATED LINKS**

- [RURAL CHANGE MAKERS](#)
- [RURAL ONTARIO INSTITUTE](#)

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