



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**ROI Celebrates the Graduation of the 2025 Rural Change Makers**

GUELPH, ON, October 16, 2025 - The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is excited to announce the 22 young leaders of change who have completed their leadership journey together through the Rural Change Makers (RCM) program. The class will celebrate with a private graduation ceremony this October.

*"We are excited to celebrate the accomplishments of these bright young leaders," says Melanie Bidiuk, ROI Communications Manager and RCM Program Manager. "The graduation ceremony is the culmination of a yearlong learning journey and meaningful rural development outcomes. It's an opportunity to honour these young rural leaders and celebrate the incredible personal and professional achievements they have made over the course of the program."*

*"As a sponsor and supporter of Change Makers, we extend our congratulations to this year's graduates and organizers," says Dana Soucie, Executive Director, Four County Labour Market Planning Board. "We are excited to see what achievement these amazing young leaders accomplish in both their communities and careers."*

Over the past year, Change Makers have participated in a series of skills-building Learning Labs, in-person leadership sessions and hands-on, real-world application of skills through professional and rural development activities. Supported by mentors, partners and peers, participants conducted community and self-assessments, formed planning committees to guide the program, and created Action Plans for community economic development based on identified needs and goals. Many graduates have since applied their training to new or ongoing initiatives, stepped into new leadership roles and employment opportunities, and some have even developed plans for social enterprises and business start-ups.

*"We are grateful to our program sponsors and partners for supporting Change Makers and sharing their program journey," says Ellen Sinclair, ROI Executive Director. "Your contributions and support have equipped these young leaders from across rural and northern Ontario with the necessary tools to create bright futures and strong rural communities."*

*"Congratulations to the graduates of the Rural Ontario Institute's Rural Change Makers program," said Trevor Jones, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. "Our government is proud to support this program as it equips the next generation of leaders in rural and northern Ontario with essential skills to strengthen communities across our province."*

*"Strong leadership skills are essential to creating thriving rural communities," said Lisa Thompson, Ontario Minister of Rural Affairs. "The Rural Change Makers program is an incredible way to build the confidence of emerging leaders throughout Ontario, which will help*

*rural businesses and entire communities be their absolute best. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to the 2025 graduates of the Rural Change Makers program.”*

More than 20 regional partners and collectives have supported these leaders including: Opiikapawiin Services LP [▶^b<Δ·³ Δ·ŕ"Δ∇·Δ·α²](#) (OSLP) - representing a collective of 24 First Nations in northwestern Ontario, Community Futures Huron, Trenval Business Development Corporation, Minden Hills/Haliburton Collective - representing over 20 leaders, experts, business owners, CFDC's, educators, organizations and farmers, Four County Labour Market Planning Board and Renfrew County alongside Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation.

*“Rural Change Makers has been a truly transformative experience. It has helped me, along with many other changemakers, grow and evolve in ways that words can hardly capture. The program has not only shaped us to become great leaders, but also inspired us to serve communities selflessly, foster collective growth, and create a future where everyone thrives,”* said Chirag Parcha, Rural Change Maker graduate. *“I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made it possible for us to be part of Rural Change Makers.”*

*"Your vision, determination, and heart for rural Ontario are shaping stronger communities for generations to come — reminding us that rural doesn't mean small, it means strong, connected, and full of potential. Congratulations 2025 Change Makers!" ~ County of Renfrew and Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation*

### **Congratulations to the 2025 Rural Change Maker Graduates:**

- **Abbie Lakhan** (Petawawa) - Industrial Hygiene Technician at Canadian Nuclear Laboratories who is passionate about the environment and sustainability.
- **Bobbie McKay** (Thunder Bay) - Youth Amplifier for Feathers of Hope who is passionate about the work that she does, spending time with her family and in nature.
- **Chirag Parcha (Belleville)** - Entrepreneur, community volunteer, author, artist and founder of Official Humans of Canada. Chirag is passionate about creating real change, he empowers others through mentorship, writing, art, and community initiatives.
- **Christina Raddatz** (Douglas) - Christina lives in Renfrew County and is involved with her local crisis center. She has supported fundraising at the center, as well as at church and her children's school.
- **Davinder Singh** (Timmins) - Davinder is involved with Anti-Hunger Coalition Timmins, an organization that fights hunger and works for food security. He has been involved with meetings and discussions for the improvement of his community and always tries to bring new and creative ideas to both his community and his workplace to make it a better place. *Davinder is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Fund Development Committee as well as the Ignite Planning Committee.*



- **Elizabeth Edwards** (Trenton) - Economic Development Officer, Whitby. Outside of work Elizabeth volunteers on the Northumberland Fare Share Foodbank Board of Directors, is a Unit Leader Assistant for the Sparks (Girl Guides), is on the Board of Directors for the Ontario East Economic Development Commission, the Port Hope Environmental Advisory Committee, the Loyalist College Business Program PAC, the Bay of Quinte Film Office, and a mentor through the Small Business Centre. *Elizabeth is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Communications Committee.*
- **Francesca Solomon** (Guelph) - Francesca is a passionate advocate for leadership, public policy, and international development. Fun-loving and grounded in strong family values, she comes from a close-knit family of five and shares their life with a lively dog named Ragna. She lives in Guelph, Canada, where she is currently pursuing an MSc in Capacity Development & Extension with a focus on International Development Studies and Public Policy at the University of Guelph. *Francesca is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Fund Development Committee.*
- **Dr. Jessica Becking** (Bath) - Jessica is a passionate interdisciplinary researcher, artist and administrator. Jessica holds a PhD in Cultural Studies from Trent University and is currently the Research Coordinator for Loyalist College. She is actively involved in applied research and research creation, and she is a passionate place-poet. *Jessica is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Fund Development Committee.*
- **Josée Labelle** (Kapuskasing) - Network Support Specialist at College Boreal's Service System Manager (SSM). Josée is actively engaged in sustainable economic development for Northern Ontario and is dedicated to promoting and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. *Josée is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Ignite Planning Committee.*
- **Kasha Kakekagumick** (Wabigoon) - Kasha helps her family raise money for community members and events, as well as for her school and church. She is an environmental monitor and is a strong advocate for communication and the environment. Kasha wants to start an environmental team owned by the reserves and start up training services for students finishing high school. She advocates for the inherent rights of First Peoples.
- **Kiydan Zacariah** (Picton) - Youth advocate from Prince Edward County. Kiydan has worked closely with many non-profit organizations in their community to improve youth well-being and leadership and is now supporting youth engagement for various projects with their municipality. *Kiydan is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Ignite Planning Committee.*
- **Mina Bahador** (Richmond Hill) - Mina Bahador is a dedicated urban planner and is currently pursuing her Master's in Rural Planning and Development at the University of Guelph. She is passionate about contributing to community-driven, resilient planning initiatives that improve quality of life in rural areas.

- **Morgan Scott** (Brighton) - Community Engagement Officer for the Municipality of Brighton who is committed to making a positive impact in her community through her volunteerism. *Morgan Scott is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Communications Committee.*
- **Natalee Schors** (Hillsdale) - Recent graduate of the Bachelor of Health Sciences (Honours) program at Queen's University, currently working with the Rural Ontario Medical Program (ROMP), based out of Collingwood. Natalee is passionate about rural medicine and improving economic development in rural communities.
- **Rachel Richer** (Laurentian Hills) - Deputy Mayor at United Townships of Head, Clara & Maria. She volunteers her time to her local snowmobile club and library board and is passionate about lifelong learning and preserving the natural beauty of the area she calls home. *Rachel is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Ignite Planning Committee.*
- **Ropheka Adofo** (Thunder Bay) - Planner for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Ropheka is a dedicated mother and a wife who values quality time with her family and loves travelling, meeting new people and actively seeks to make positive impact in her community. *Ropheka is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Fund Development Committee.*
- **Samantha Loney** (Barrie) - Producer for Travelling Metis Podcast, filmmaker and journalist for Simcoe Community Media. Samantha is passionate about traveling around Turtle Island and sharing the stories of Metis people. *Samantha is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Communications Committee.*
- **Sarah Richer** (Eganville) - Community Development and Administration Assistant who is passionate about photography and the natural beauty of rural Ontario. *Sarah is a key member of this year's Rural Change Maker Fund Development Committee.*
- **Shay Hutchings** (Haliburton) - Shay is the Co-owner of Reform + Restore: Wellness Hub, a registered Massage Therapist and a certified Spins Instructor and is passionate about supporting youth in her community.
- **Skye Kakekagumic** (Sandy Lake) - Skye is a committed, determined Change Maker who is eager to participate in the Rural Change Makers experience and learn how to better support herself, her family, and her community.
- **Will Wellington** (Stratford) - Social Research and Planning Specialist at United Way Perth-Huron. Will is keenly interested in conflict transformation, housing affordability, public policy, and organizational development.
- **Zeel Parmer** (Windsor) - Zeel is an urban and regional planner. She completed her Master of Science degree in Italy and would like to contribute her innovative approaches to the program. Zeel has worked for a government smart village scheme designed to enhance community development and create a better life for residents.



Support for the 2024-25 Rural Change Maker Program has been generously provided in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, the RBC Foundation, Four Counties Labour Market Planning Board and Northern Credit Union.

## 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) and the Rural Change Makers (RCM) program, a leadership and rural development program working to creating meaningful change with communities. We provide data research and analysis on rural priorities, sharing information and equipping communities with tools through our Rural Community Wellbeing factsheets and accompanying dashboards, and Rural Housing Information System - addressing the housing and homelessness crisis faced by thousands of Canadians. RCM is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Agribusiness and is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs.

## ASSOCIATED LINKS

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

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