

2023 YOUTH ASSEMBLY ON DIGITAL RIGHTS AND SAFETY:

Recommendations to promote the
safety, well-being and flourishing
of Canadian youth online



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Chair’s Note

In June, we brought youth from across Canada together to serve their communities and their peers by participating in a national panel. The Youth Assembly on Digital Rights would have them engage with each other, academic experts, and policymakers on how to make online spaces safer for themselves and future generations.

The Assembly took place in June — exactly when most Canadian 18 year olds are attending graduation and proms. Quite a few of our members chose to miss theirs, because they believed this work was more important. Together, they represent Canada’s diverse regions and cultures. Despite their unique experiences, Assembly members share one unifying factor: they all grew up using — if not saturated with — online technologies. As a result, each member has experienced the benefits of finding their communities, accessing endless information and the global reach of the internet, but they have also felt the harms of the digital age such as bullying, diminished mental health, and exploitation.

This conversation comes at a critical moment. Almost all Canadian youth have seen hate on their social media feeds and experienced the effects of misinformation in their communities. However, unlike the United Kingdom and the United States, Canada lacks federal legislation to address the realities of online harm and protect youth. This comes with a growing call from caregivers, teachers, and youth themselves for more robust online protections. In order to hold platforms accountable and establish regulatory frameworks to address these concerns effectively, it is imperative that Canadian youth be directly involved in policy-making processes.

This need was taken as a call to action by the Assembly. Members were keenly aware of the impacts social media has had on the lives of young people and

were steadfast in their desire to see an internet that is safer, transparent, and more inclusive. To members, the harms of the digital age are not just unintended consequences but the result of direct action from platforms that repeatedly place profit over people. Obscure user agreements, extractive ed-tech software, and predatory algorithms are just some of the myriad issues identified by the Assembly.

In their recommendations, Assembly members describe a ‘Declaration of Digital Rights’. This declaration reflects their values and beliefs and deserves our attention. They demand greater transparency of platforms and regulations to hold them accountable, default privacy settings for minors, and enforcement of age assurance mechanisms. Underpinning it all is the requirement for more youth involvement in policy-making processes.

Their report, written in their own words and contained in the middle section of this document, spells out the measures they believe governments and industry should adopt in order to course-correct. Their recommendations are ambitious and far-reaching and fundamentally empower youth to have control over their online experience.

The Youth Assembly on Digital Rights and Safety is itself a unique process. It is among the first youth assemblies - in Canada and globally- and among the first aimed exclusively at digital rights. Their work builds upon the recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly on Democratic Expression¹ and adds a unique lens to the impact of digital technologies on society.

The members of the Youth Assembly should be commended for their diligence and service. They demonstrate the ways in which a group of diverse

individuals can come together and align on what matters most in addressing a vexing and complicated policy issue. Collectively, they have exemplified the importance of the youth voice in decision-making — an example they hope can be modelled for future assemblies and in future policy-making throughout Canada.

Sincerely,

Chim Alao,
Chair, Youth Assembly on
Digital Rights and Safety

¹ <https://www.commissioncanada.ca/>



What policy makers should know

The Youth Assembly on Digital Rights and Safety took place over one virtual session and four days in person in Winnipeg at the end of June, 2023.

35 diverse young people with a wide range of intersecting identities came together from across the country, representing rural, suburban, and urban communities.

THE ASSEMBLY WAS MANDATED TO:

- Learn about the impacts of digital technologies and platforms on Canadian youth, including how Canadian youth view their own online identities and experiences;
- Examine international governance frameworks for protecting youth online rights in order to understand global precedence on how youth considerations can be integrated into online safety regulation; and,
- Make recommendations to strengthen Canada’s response to the challenges that digital technologies pose to Canadian youth and uphold digital rights that promote youth flourishing online.

They heard from over a dozen speakers including Frances Haugen, notable advocate for accountability & transparency in social media and a Facebook whistleblower, Baroness Beeban Kidron, a Crossbench Peer in the UK House of Lords and Chair of 5Rights Foundation, and Maude Bonenfant, the Canada Research Chair in Gamer Communities and Big Data. Collectively, they spent well over a thousand hours learning, deliberating, and arriving at their consensus declarations and recommendations for policy-makers.

Through their sessions together they considered several important questions such as:

- How, and in what ways, can platforms better prioritize youth users’ digital rights?

- How, and in what ways, can governments support and/or regulate platforms to uphold digital rights for youth?
- How do you envision a thriving internet? What features could be added? What could be removed/changed?
- What might a Canadian Youth Code for Online Rights include?

Overwhelmingly, they felt that companies and platforms prioritize profit over people. They believe that youth in particular are experiencing significant and compounding negative impacts from these profit-driven practices including exploitation, diminished mental, physical and emotional wellbeing, and greater proclivity for addictive, risky and dangerous behaviours.

The Assembly identified nine values that should shape Canada’s approach to enhancing youth safety and promoting youth rights online. Among these are notions of transparency, accountability, safety, and notably a value they called “human-oriented” which encourages digital spaces that focus on the empowerment of communities and are guided by ethical decisions.

After considering the presentations from many experts in the field and their own experiences, the Assembly members unanimously endorsed 21 recommendations which they believe will help to promote the safety and flourishing of young people online. Furthermore, they shared a ‘Declaration of Digital Rights’ outlining areas where they believe Canadian youth ought to have explicit freedoms and protections.

Through their declaration of rights and their recommendations, they identify the issues they find most pressing for policy-makers to address.

The Assembly has a strong interest in seeing

regulation in place quickly that prioritizes the best interests of children and youth. Appreciating how essential and omnipresent online spaces are to their academic, social, professional and personal lives, they urge government to take actions that promote safety and privacy for youth while ensuring that they are able to fully participate in digital spaces and communities that are fundamental to their identities and self-expression.

They also ask policy-makers to enact regulations that take steps to reduce the addictiveness of online spaces and promote mandatory offline periods and time limits on apps.

Finally, acknowledging the outsized and evolving role that digital spaces play in the lives of youth, they advocate fiercely for the ongoing and embedded inclusion of youth voices in policy-making, content moderation and platform development and design.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THEIR DECLARATIONS INCLUDE:

Canadian youth ought to have the freedom to:

- equitable access to technology and the internet
- safe digital spaces and communities
- develop our identities and express ourselves online
- to know and control who sees our data and how it is used
- easily access effective and adaptive resources on digital literacy
- Canadian youth ought to have the freedom from:
- exploitation and predation from individuals, platforms, and corporations in digital spaces
- violations of privacy and the non-consensual and/or non-transparent use of our information and data
- being targeted by harmful, biased and manipulative algorithms as well as addicting mechanisms and systems that are designed to keep us online
- the societal pressure, need and expectation to ‘always be online’

HIGHLIGHTS OF THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Creation of an arms-length regulatory body, consisting of a diverse set of moderators, including youth, that compels platforms to publish plans on addressing the known harms they cause and ensure that they enact those plans
- Enforcement of strong and secure identification measures for age assurance with impactful repercussions for misuse or non-use
- A standard for terms and conditions to ensure they are clear, concise and barrier-free.
- Establishing mandated “offline periods” for academic settings
- Ensuring policies are staying up to date with the lived experience of youth by regularly incorporating youth recommendations and voices into policy-making.
- Provision and promotion of safe resources for youth on sexual health, mental health, and other sensitive subjects in order to assist youth in navigating digital spaces safely.
- Setting all youth accounts to private by default for anyone under 18.

Overwhelmingly, the Youth Assembly is extremely troubled by the ways in which unregulated online platforms and spaces are driven by exponential profit at the expense of the wellbeing and best interests of their users, and most importantly, children and youth.

Assembly overview

WHAT IS A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY?

A citizens’ assembly is a long-form deliberative process that typically involves 36 to 48 randomly selected residents who are chosen using a process called a civic lottery, a random selection method that prioritizes fairness and wide representation. The individuals selected for a citizens’ assembly come together to learn about, discuss and then advise public authorities on divisive and complex issues that typically involve trade-offs or compromises. The assembly members’ objective is to reach a consensus on a series of recommendations that can be directed to government, industry, and society at large.

WHAT IS A CIVIC LOTTERY?

A civic lottery is a balanced way of selecting the members of a citizens’ assembly. It is based on a form of sortition that uses the postal system and a randomized selection process to recruit panelists. The result is a group of volunteers that broadly match the demographics of the jurisdiction they represent. This stratified sampling methodology ensures that members of the Youth Assembly were selected at random, but in a way that broadly represented the demographics of Canada — balancing for gender, regional geographic representation from across the country, urban and rural, sexual orientation, racialization and Indigenous communities. In short, the Assembly was composed in such a way as to deliver good demographic diversity and to ensure that it was essentially representative of the 18-year-old residents of Canada.

2023 Youth Assembly profile



GENDER	MEMBERS PER REGION	MEMBERS PER COMMUNITY	MEMBERS WHO IDENTIFY AS
17 Woman	15 West (BC, AB)	5 Atlantic (NS, NB, PEI, NFL/LB)	24 Urban communities
15 Man	2 Prairie (SK, MB)	2 North (YK, NWT, NV)	11 Rural communities
3 Nonbinary	11 Central (ON, QC)		2 Indigenous
			20 Part of a racialized group



Meet the Assembly members

NATHAN ADAMS

I'm Nate, I love to give 100% effort all the time regardless of what it is I am doing. I have a wide variety of interests which makes it very easy for me to connect with all sorts of people. A few of my interests consist of sports, media, theatre and geography. Sports has played a huge role in my life and that is where I have met most of my life-long friends. I used to play every sport I could get my hands on but as I have become older with more important things on the go I have just narrowed it down to hockey and golf. This year I took a leap and auditioned for the musical at our school. We put on a production of Mamma Mia! I was given a lead role named "Eddie". This inspired me enough to take part in another play our school put on called "Small Actors". In my personal interest course this year I tried a variety of things and one was writing a play. (Which I thought I did a great job with!). Next year I am heading to Toronto Metropolitan University to study sports media in the fall. This goes to show I am very interested in media and everything that goes into it. I am very interested to learn lots this week and to learn how to stay safe on the internet!

QASSIM 'Q' AL-FAESLY

Born in 2005 in Libya to Iraqi parents, my name is Qassim. In 2007, my family embarked on a new adventure, moving to Ottawa, Canada. Growing up in a bustling household of seven, I developed a strong sense of family values and a deep appreciation for our shared experiences. Ever since I can remember, I have been captivated by cars. The intricate mechanisms and the stunning aesthetics never fail to fascinate me. I will also be starting my studies in the University of Ottawa in the upcoming fall. I wanted to join this Assembly because it is a chance to learn about important things that affect everyone. I also want to bring a unique perspective to the discussions as a person who has experienced a lot in the past 18 years.

IRENE BAYATI

I was born in Iran, and have lived on Vancouver Island since 2013. After receiving my dual diploma and working this summer as a city ambassador, I'm excited to begin my next journey studying business and chemistry at UBC in the fall. Some passions of mine include music, poetry, hiking, and snowboarding. I have recently contributed to my community through my student council position and my capstone project, Wellness Day (involving the formulation, planning, and coordination of four wildly successful wellness-themed events at my school). I chose to join this panel to further explore my inclination for politics and advocacy, as well as to speak up for an issue that affects all Canadians. I believe that digital rights are human rights, and it's an honour to be a part of this process.

LAETTITIAH BOMMIER

My name is Laettitiah, and I was born in 2005, in Queens, New York. I moved to Ottawa at the age of three and have lived here since. As an incoming post-secondary student, I have a bit of free time before starting my studies, and I plan on making the most of it by participating in acts that align with my own interests as well as exploring new opportunities to broaden my horizon and discover new passions. I decided to join this panel for the same reason—because I believe that youth perspectives are invaluable in shaping discussion and decisions that impact our generation and the future. Moreover, this also seems like a great learning experience for myself!

MADDIE CABLE

My name is Maddie Cable, I am originally from Edomonton, but moved to Lacombe Alberta a little over two years ago. I love the community Lacombe has and how connected everyone is. I just graduated high school from Ponoka Secondary Campus. I am hoping to attend U of C to get my bachelor of science to be a

Gynecologist. I am currently working two jobs. One of my jobs is at the local hospital as an environmental service worker, which is really just housekeeping. I also work at an insurance brokerage dealing with claims, and lots of paperwork. I enjoy snowboarding, soccer, and just really any adventure, even if they seem silly. I volunteered on the panel to try and make a change in the youth community. Our youth community has been struggling lately and I want to try and do something about it and make a change.

EVELYN FALLAH

I was originally born in California but moved to Toronto before my first birthday where I have lived ever since. I have grown up surrounded by technology, programming ever since I was seven years old and playing video games. Additionally, I have had a long-standing interest in governmental policy which led to my participating in Model United Nations for six years so far and running a Model United Nations conference for 450+ high school students in the Greater Toronto Area, Quebec, and Calgary. Ultimately, these two combined passions of technology and policy drew me to volunteer for this Assembly. I look forward to fall 2023 when I begin the Engineering Science program at the University of Toronto.

ETHAN FUKUHARA

I was born and raised in Metro Vancouver and recently graduated from Riverside Secondary School with a double dogwood diploma. I am an active member in my community, working with youth climate activism and Sustainabiliteens, Metro Vancouver Youth4Action teams, PoCo Youth Leadership and working for the City of Port Coquitlam as a skating instructor following my years of minor hockey. My passions include urban and regional planning, environmentalism, nature, running, and social justice more generally. I joined the Citizens' Assembly because I believe that as the internet becomes ingrained into our everyday lives, it is vital that the proper regulations are in

place to assure that digital spaces are safe, mentally healthy, and vibrant communities for everyone who uses them.

ISAAC HIERLIHY

I'm a well rounded individual that puts forth 100% in everything I do. I love playing sports, working out, everything entrepreneurship, and even took a dive into musical theatre at my school this year with Mamma Mia! I currently work at the KV Atlantic Superstore as a front-end supervisor and am working at KaleidoScope Social Impact in the summer as an entrepreneurship facilitator for underprivileged young people. I am pursuing commerce at STFX next year and plan to major in finance or accounting. Like a lot of other adolescents, I actively use various social media platforms and am eager to assemble together as 18 year olds to learn more about it and how to stay safe on the internet.

KAITLIN INGRAM

Graduating Grade 12, I am excited to begin my journey at UBC's Sauder School of Business. My passion for digital rights and safety stems from witnessing mental health challenges due to the lack of awareness of the risks associated with unregulated media access. To advocate for change, I produced a short film documentary, Imperfect, and interviewed 10 young women who shared how social media triggered their eating disorders, anxiety, and depression. I created a podcast, Amend, to educate young women to be critical consumers of social media. In my personal life, I enjoy volleyball, ultimate, painting and baking. I am grateful for this opportunity to learn and advocate for a safer media landscape for teenagers.

AUSTIN KEANE

My name is Austin, I was born in Ottawa, and have lived here my entire life. I like my community as it's the only place I know, all my friends live here, same with most family. Currently, I am attending All Saints High School and will be taking a gap year

once the fall comes around. My favourite sports are hockey, mixed martial arts, and football. Some of my hobbies are video games and firearms. The reason I volunteered for the panel is I wanted to be able to bring a different perspective than most of the people my age. As well as have the opportunity to see what it's like travelling by myself, and get a better idea of what independence is like.

RAAFEY KHAN

My name is Raafey. I was born in Dubai and lived there for about 11 years. In 2016, I moved to Ontario. Later on, I moved to a small town in New Brunswick for my first year of high school. Soon, I'll be starting my aerospace engineering studies at Toronto Metropolitan University. I have a strong passion for the space industry and dream of going to space one day. When I have free time, I enjoy playing video games or trading cryptocurrencies, depending on the market conditions. I volunteered for this panel because I believe it's important to protect young people from digital threats and ensure their safety so they grow mentally healthy.

JESSICA KIABANZAWOKO

My name is Jessica, I am 18 years old. I am originally from Quebec so French is my native language but I moved to Edmonton, Alberta almost a year ago. I just graduated high school this year and I'm looking forward to pursuing my studies in nursing. I have always been into sports: I've played basketball, soccer, flag-football and did a little bit of cheerleading and I want to get into swimming really soon. My French teacher recommended me to volunteer at the Assembly and surprisingly, I got selected to participate which is very exciting. I am looking forward to learning from all the speakers and all my peers as we discuss all the challenges concerning digital safety and how it impacts the youth. As a person that was born in the early 2000s, I have been witnessing the rapid expansion of the digital world and want to offer the best environment for the generation of my little siblings and the generations after them.

KAIA LEE

My name is Kaia Lee and I was born in the Okanogan before my family moved to Vancouver Island, but due to my Dads job I've since been all over BC. I've been a student at Kwalikum Secondary School for the past five years where I participated heavily in the music program and school newspaper. This year I will be starting at Vancouver Island University pursuing a bachelor's degree in creative writing and journalism. I like to think I'm a lot of things (a musician, an artist, a friend, absolutely terrible at board games) but I've been writing and speaking about the world around me for as long as I can remember, and there's nothing in the world I want to keep doing more than that.

KEIRA MACDUFF

My name is Keira MacDuff, and I was born in St. John's, Newfoundland, and moved to Antigonish, Nova Scotia when I was two. I am graduating with an IB certificate this year, and will be doing a music degree next year as a voice student. I have worked in a kitchen for the last year, and in my free time enjoy participating in musical events in my area. I also avidly participated in martial arts for over 10 years, traveling across the country to compete. I joined this panel as I enjoy discussing the effects of social media on my generation, especially as a LGBTQ+ teen.

KEITH BAYBAYON

My name is Keith Baybayon, a student at McGill University, studying political science and religion. I joined this panel because I am passionate about youth involvement and education.

My passion for digital rights and safety began with my involvement with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario. I was asked to be a panelist by the Commissioner for their 2022 Privacy Day Webcast, where I got to share the youth perspective on digital rights and privacy. Afterwards, I was appointed by the Commissioner to join the IPC Strategic Advisory Council. I advise the Commissioner on policies and projects related to youth.

I worked with the IPC to establish the first-ever IPC Youth Advisory Council. I currently lead the council on projects that aim to educate youth on their digital and privacy rights. I hope to continue my work in protecting the privacy of youth and to enhance education on digital rights.

KAYLA MALCOLM

My name is Kayla Malcolm, and I was born in Pickering, Ontario, in 2004. I have lived in this city my entire life and am now entering my second year at the University of Guelph for Marketing Management. I have been working in the world of business for the past three years, switching between marketing and HR positions. I have always wanted to use my voice to help those who couldn't use theirs. In high school I was elected as the regional Student Trustee where I helped represent over 75,000 students at a board level, fighting for their voices to be heard at the table. I wanted to join this panel because it is an opportunity to create a large amount of change that could help the lives of many individuals.

EMILY MCMILLAN

My name is Emily McMillan, I was born and raised in a small town in Central Alberta called Ponoka. It is known for its community nature, and pro rodeo during the summer. I grew up with two older brothers, mom, dad, and pet cat. For the last six years I have played boys tackle football, that has been the most important part of my life. The football community has been a big part of shaping me. I am active in my school, and helped gain involvement and participation back into our school culture. I joined the panel to gain a better understanding of different perspectives, and ways of life. Being from a small town it's hard to experience diversity of opinions and people, I'm excited to learn, and meet new people!

DEVYANI RAI

My name is Devyani Rai and I was born in India in 2005, and moved around ever since I was five. Additionally, I have lived in the United Arab Emirates

for four years before moving to Ottawa, Canada in June of 2023. I am planning on pursuing a Bachelors in PPE (Political Science, Philosophy and Economics) at Western University next year with the intention of getting involved with law and policy making in the future. I have been involved in activism and upliftment of marginalized communities through my active work with organizations such as GirlUp and TribesForGood. I believe the rapidly changing digital and online landscape requires greater involvement of its most vulnerable user base: the youth, which is what prompted my interest in this Assembly.

ENZO RODRIGUES

My name is Enzo (he/they). I was born in Brazil in 2005 and emigrated to Canada in 2016 at the age of 11, and I've been living here ever since. I wanted to volunteer for the Assembly because I believe that internet safety is an extremely important and sensitive issue, and also being involved in the community in general is important. Also it sounded like a fun experience! Some of my hobbies include technology, music, and science.

TIRA SCHAFFER

I am an athlete and a daughter with a kind heart. Recently, I graduated from Wadena Composite High School located in Saskatchewan. I have lived in Wadena all my life and enjoy the gravel roads and rolling hills of canola surrounding me. My occupations include teaching gymnastics and serving at a restaurant. I am an older sister to three siblings. Volleyball and track and field are my hobbies. I also love nature, traveling, and self care. Our generation was the first to be raised with electronics and social media. Cell phones brought easy communication, internet searching, and long lasting photographs. However, most people do not know the effects of being addicted to a screen, mercurial beauty standards, procrastination, and misinformation. I need to do my part in spreading awareness of the harmful effects of social media to our generation, as well as the future ones to come.

RAAGINI SHARMA

My name is Raagini and I was born in 2005, in Bangkok, Thailand. I immigrated to BC when I was three years old and have been living in Coquitlam ever since. I am a future student of Political Science at the University of Ottawa. I am hoping to become a diplomat in the future. The reason that I volunteered for this Assembly was because I was recommended for it by a teacher, and found it interesting. I also enjoy discussing different problems we face in our modern age of technology, political crises and other topics. Canoeing, kayaking, walks and eating different foods are also things I enjoy.

DANIEL SINZÉ

My name is Jean-Daniel Sinzé (Daniel), I am an 18 year old Canadian born in Ivory Coast currently living in Alberta. I graduated high school this year and am currently planning on attending the University Of Alberta next September. In my free time I enjoy 3D modeling online and programming. I originally applied to the Youth Assembly on Digital Rights after being recommended to do so by my French teacher. The reason why it interested me is because I am very present online. I also have a younger brother who also uses the internet regularly. I believe it's very important to not only educate people on online safety but also actively work towards improving it. By participating in the Youth Assembly I hope to make a small impact in making digital safety better.

JOSHUA SU

I was born and raised in Calgary, and have lived here my whole life. Being an outdoors person I love having the mountains in my backyard and being able to participate in a variety of activities with the diverse weather. Currently, I work at the YMCA where I share my passion for sports, teaching kids from all age groups how to play badminton. I chose to volunteer for this panel not only for my interest but also due to its relevance in my generation. The internet is something I use a lot but know very little about. This panel would help me dive deeper into this

complicated subject while allowing me to be one of many voices in the youth today.

SOPHIA SUN

I was born in Gatineau, Quebec, and I lived there for seven years before I moved to British Columbia. I now live in Coquitlam with my parents, my grandparents, my brother, and my cat, Timmy. I am a student in high school, but I graduate at the end of the school year. I am committed to UBC and will be attending there in the fall in the Faculty of Arts. The best part about living here in Coquitlam is the amazing environment and nature right here in my neighborhood. In my free time, I go on hikes with my family and visit new places in the Lower Mainland with my friends. Some of my other hobbies include skiing in the winter, finding new places to eat, shopping, visiting markets, making artsy things, and collecting trinkets that I think are cute. I joined the panel because it sounded like an amazing opportunity to meet youth from all over Canada and make a difference in the future of Canada's policies.

EMILIA SWARTZ

I am from Warburg, which is a small village located in Alberta. From what I've seen and experienced, social media is a mess of targeted hate speech and propaganda. Protecting children and youth from these influences should be one of Canada's priorities. I volunteered for the Assembly because it seemed like a great opportunity to make a difference. I plan on achieving a bachelor of arts in Criminology and working as a crime analyst. In my free time, I am usually reading or scrolling through TikTok, although I want to move to the big city, where I can expand on my hobbies and find a job.

AZ'EL THOMPSON

I tend to go by a lot of names but for this you can call me Az'el or simply Az. I was born and raised in Calgary AB until I was 11 when we moved to Ontario in order to support my aging grandparents. While in

Ontario I have participated in multiple events, such as being a student panelist for University of Toronto's FLOURISH- Supporting Queer Youth in Schools through Research and Practice twice. My interests include reading, drawing, hand embroidery and Video games such as Final Fantasy XIV and Hollow knight. I volunteered for this panel because it is exactly the type of work I want to be doing in the future.

ADRIANO PANDOLFO

My name is Adriano Luca Pandolfo. I was born and raised in Coquitlam, British Columbia, where I still live to this day. Currently, I'm attending Douglas College to pursue a career in history, and I'm hoping to eventually be hired as a history teacher to help create a more concise understanding about the past.

I chose to volunteer for the Assembly because it allows me to converse with my fellow Canadians in a healthy and diverse discussion about the current effects of social media & digital security, which has become fundamental to contemporary society. In a social era so encompassed by the virtual world, I believe it's crucial for the Canadian government to adapt the current legislature in order to further preserve the rights and freedoms of their citizens in the digital world.

STEPHANIE WANDOU

My name is Stephanie; born in Douala, Cameroon on January 24th, 2004, and the oldest sibling. I grew up in Cameroon and later relocated to Canada in 2019 to meet my family. I live in Iqaluit, Nunavut and study at the Inuksuk High School, Iqaluit, NU, in grade 11 English School, but I am bilingual (I speak and write English and French).

I am a full-time student and will graduate from high school in 2024 with plans of studying Psychology; I work part-time at the Iqaluit supermarket, North Mart as a retail personnel and customer service agent. I completed a Nunavut Youth Ambassador's Program (NYAP) through which I could volunteer at the Arctic Winter Games along with other youth ambassadors and volunteered at

the Alianait Festival. I am part of the Inuksuk Drum Dancers (choir group) and Inuksuk Concert Band, where I play the flute. I love cooking as I use that as my therapy whenever I am stressed out or bored.

MAILE YAMAGUCHI

Hi! My name is Maile (she/her) I live in Vancouver. I just graduated high school and will be at the University of Waterloo in the fall. In my free time, I volunteer with a conservation group, read, go for hikes, and thrift. Being a part of this assembly is an exciting way to be involved. I'm also excited to be in Manitoba for the first time, I'm originally from California and haven't ever been to any province other than BC before!

WILLEM ZHANG

My name is Willem Zhang, and I am from Toronto, Ontario. I work full-time at McDonald's in a leadership position, while also working at another part-time job. Besides my work and studies, I enjoy challenging myself and fostering a growth mindset, as evidenced by my continuous participation in various leadership and challenging opportunities. I am an ambitious individual who loves to grow in personal, academic, and professional areas. I joined the Winnipeg Assembly fueled by a desire to help contribute and hopefully make a difference in society. A fun fact about myself is my multifaceted involvement in various extracurricular activities, from youth councils to educational content creation for a health organization to leadership positions. My aspiration is to make a positive, lasting impact on the world.

ADDITIONAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

Miikka Dumas-Paul

Lily McCombe

Logan Saikali

Raymonde Lonla

Jacob Wood





Understanding the Citizens’ Assembly process

THE ISSUE AND BACKGROUND

As found in a study from MediaSmarts, Canada’s Centre for Digital and Media Literacy, 100% of Canadian youth who use Facebook have seen hate on their feeds, and 80% of those users believe that people are more likely to engage in prejudiced speech online rather than offline. Yet, unlike in the U.K. and U.S., Canada lacks federal legislation to address the realities of online harm and protect children and youth from it, despite a growing number of calls from caregivers, teachers, and youth themselves for better online protections. In order for regulatory frameworks to effectively address the online concerns of youth and for platforms to be accountable to address them, Canadian youth ought to be directly involved in the policymaking process for a safer internet.

The Youth Assembly on Online Safety and Digital Rights was an initiative of McGill University’s Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy. The aim of the project was to directly engage a diverse group of Canadian youth in dialogue with each other, academic experts and policy makers. This project centres the lived online experiences of the members in an effort to determine how young people understand digital rights, consider best practices around the world to better inform Canadian legislation, and produce made-in-Canada recommendations to policy-makers that reflect the current and evolving needs of Canadian youth.

YOUTH ASSEMBLY PROGRAM AND PROCESS

Online Session: June 17, 2023

The first and only online session was hosted by Assembly Chair Chim Alao in English and co-host Amélie Pelletier-Lavack in French. The session also made use of French and English translation captions

for increased accessibility.

Members were briefed about the mandate and program schedule, and learned more about the project team, the elements of a citizens’ assembly, and who else was “in the room”.

Members were then greeted by **Laura McPhie**, member of Pikwakanagan First Nation, who shared some framing and perspectives from Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Laura discussed insights about working in community, developing consensus, and considering the seven generations principle to be mindful of what future generations deserve.

Laura shared the following quote from “Peace, power, righteousness: an Indigenous manifesto” by Taiaiake Alfred which beautifully set the importance of centering the youth voice in the conversation about online rights and safety:

Communities cannot do what is right for the next generation without involving [youth] ... where the link between the young people and leaders is broken, a future negotiated only by politicians and elders will last only as long as the people stay in control. Then who will lead the communities?

Members were then split into small groups to introduce themselves. They each indicated where they were from and addressed two linked questions:

Why did you decide to volunteer? What is one thing you want to learn/talk about?

- Consistent answers to these questions focused on personal experiences of online harm and a desire to see more done by the government to protect young people.
- Several members also expressed an interest in hearing and learning from the perspectives of others.
- A few indicated their desire to travel and the encouragement of their teachers as motivation to participate.

Following the introductions, the Assembly heard from **Rys Farthing**, an Australian researcher working in the UK who focuses on children's rights, especially around technology and disadvantage. Rys helped decode the term "digital rights" and suggested that what is meant by this term are the traditional rights enjoyed by young people in the context of online environments.

She went on to talk about the 3Ps of rights: provision, protection and participation. Provision entails the right to have the things you need to survive including internet access, hardware and software. Protection concerns the right to be protected from harms, especially sexual exploitation and the right to privacy. And participation relates to the freedom of thought and to be an active and engaged member of society, including the ways in which the digital world can open up experiences and opportunities for young people.

Rys concluded by sharing some context on the regulatory frameworks in place and being developed in the UK, Europe, Australia and the US. She helped frame the difference between a takedown approach that is focused on removing harmful content and a duty of care approach that aims to use a risk assessment strategy to preemptively keep harmful content off of the internet.

Rys' presentation was followed by a lively q&a session with the Assembly members.

Following a short break, the members heard from **Sonja Solomun**, Deputy Director of the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy. Sonja discussed how the concerns of youth online are not the same as the concerns of their parents. She helped contextualize the current state of online regulation in Canada and how there are no comprehensive kids-specific regulations on how kids can be targeted online, what data can be collected about them, what ads can run to them, and who is accountable if youth are harmed by social media and digital technologies.

Sonja shared how the three principles of transparency, accountability, and human rights are guiding legislation and regulation around the world and how Canada is now aiming to focus on a 'systems' approach that is centred on the duty platforms have to act responsibly and protect users from the inherent risks of their products and services, which is

more aligned with current global thinking.

Members asked questions following Sonja's presentation to clarify the status of Canadian regulation and expand on some of the ideas that she presented.

The Assembly then broke into small groups once again to discuss what they had heard.

Group Discussion Questions:

What was one thing from Rys or Sonja's presentation that surprised you?

- Members were surprised that corporations have no existing responsibility to protect their users and that the government has remained mostly hands off on regulating these companies.
- Members were also surprised that legislation is being developed separately in so many jurisdictions at the same time, since there are no real borders to the internet.
- Some members were intrigued by the level of personal awareness and protection that each individual must maintain in the absence of general protections from the government or by platforms themselves.

Why is the youth voice important on this issue? Why is it important for policy-makers to hear from you?

- Members were aligned that the lived experience that they, having grown up online, have is significantly different from those of the people currently in positions of power in government and that the youth perspective represents a different online reality than the one that people in their 40s, 50s, or 60s may be experiencing.
- The experience of being desensitized to content and the inexperience of policy-makers to the reality of cyberbullying are issues that came up often in conversation.
- Members shared how the internet is evolving so quickly and that policy must be able to adapt to the changes in order to be effective.
- "You can't properly regulate what you don't fully understand"

Finally, in conclusion hosts Chim and Amélie shared details about travelling to Winnipeg and ensured members were able to ask questions about logistics and details of the in-person sessions.

Session 2: Tuesday, June 27, 2023

All members met in person in the Garden of Contemplation at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Assembly Chair and host Chim Alao began by acknowledging the land where we gather and setting the scene for the next several days.

He reminded members that the task of this Assembly was to work together to provide guidance on what matters from the youth perspective when it comes to online safety and digital rights.

Members were then greeted by **Helen Hayes**, Research Manager, from the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy, who offered her gratitude to the members for their participation in this project. The members were then welcomed by **Isha Khan**, CEO of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, who shared the vision of the Museum to be a place for dialogue and contribution to the evolution of rights.

Members then enjoyed dinner while re-introducing themselves and sharing any words of advice they received from family and friends before they left home. As the meal concluded, the Assembly was honoured to hear from **Elder Barbara Nepinak**, a member of Pine Creek First Nation. Elder Nepinak shared some of her experiences of racism and systemic discrimination and encouraged members to find and build their communities and to use those connections in order to create effective change in whatever capacity they can.

To continue the evening, each member of the Assembly took the microphone and introduced themselves to the whole group. They each shared what they would like to contribute to the conversation and what they are hoping that, collectively, the Assembly can achieve. Members were eager to share their personal perspectives informed by their individual lived experiences and were hopeful that the Assembly would produce thoughtful and actionable recommendations that would help to inform policy-makers about the real concerns and challenges faced by young people navigating

increasingly essential online spaces.

The session concluded with an exercise. Each Assembly member was given a small notecard. On this card they were asked to write one thing that they believe all young people ought to have the freedom to and one thing that all young people ought to have the freedom from, in relation to the rights of young people online.

Session 3: Wednesday, June 28, 2023

The first full day of working sessions began with a presentation and lively q&a about the Kid Economy. **Josh Golin**, the Associate Director of Fairplay, one of the world's leading watchdogs of children's media and marketing industries, joined the Assembly virtually to talk about the ways in which young people are the targets of advertising in online spaces. Josh commented on how platforms are designed for commercial interests and how they create and exacerbate compounding problems around body image, materialism, and an amplification of consumer culture.

Josh was followed by **Rys Farthing** who joined the Assembly for a second time, this time in person. Rys shared insights on some of the considerations for platforms' duties of care including content that is illegal, does not respect privacy, and/or limits expression. She also framed some of the concerns around data collection, especially for young people and the challenges of regulation without effective enforcement mechanisms. Finally, Rys identified an interesting trade-off around parental consent rules and whether they truly protect youth.

This session was immediately followed by two more virtual presentations on the topic of Online Gaming, Marginalization and Content Moderation. First **Maude Bonenfant**, Canada Research Chair in Gamer Communities and Big Data, addressed the members in French. She explained how many online games are designed to keep users online, harvest personal data, and encourage in-game purchases. She enumerated the persuasive mechanisms that are employed to increase sales such as timing the placement of microtransactions in moments of tension when users are least discerning. She also illuminated some of the ways in which games fail to comply with advertising laws by promoting gambling

and other inappropriate content to young kids. Maude pointed to the challenges that arise from the self-government of video games and the meaningless ratings that are used by the self-governing body.

Then **Hibby Thach**, a PhD student at the University of Michigan's School of Information, studying identity, content moderation, and digital cultures, shared their perspectives on the world of gaming culture. Hibby discussed the ways in which online games can build community and belonging, especially for people who are marginalized. But, on the flip side, they highlighted how existing offline systems of dominance, privilege and oppression are amplified in online, anonymous, spaces. Hibby discussed the importance of, and challenges with, content moderation (especially one size fits all approaches) in online game spaces and the unevenness with which the policies are followed and enforced.

Following a break where the members were able to explore the incredible surroundings of the museum, they entered into a discussion to consider the values that should guide the government's approach to enhancing youth safety and rights online, and which the Assembly itself holds most important in creating a safe and inclusive internet.

After lunch, the Assembly reconvened with two virtual presenters speaking on Indigeneity and Tech. **Riley Yesno**, a queer Anishinaabe scholar, writer, and commentator from Eabametoong First Nation, talked about the inequities of access to technology and the concerns about data sovereignty experienced by Indigenous communities. She discussed the view of data as a means of control and the importance of both what is collected and what isn't collected in terms of whose stories are being told and whose interests are protected. Riley shared an Indigenous perspective on digital spaces that sees the internet as territory that can be governed with the same ethics with which we can govern land. Echoing back to Laura's guiding remarks in our online session, Riley encouraged a viewpoint that centres communal responsibility rather than rugged individualism when it comes to building and controlling online spaces.

Riley was followed by **Danielle Paradis**, an Indigenous (Métis) magazine writer, journalist, editor, educator, and podcaster, who shared insights on decolonizing digital spaces by promoting

inclusivity and diversity. She reflected on the value of keeping community involved in the design and maintenance of online spaces and the centring of safety. She asked how we might disrupt the prioritization of profit and focus on community-centred design that moves away from a focus on ownership, extraction and colonialist principles. She encouraged the members to consider the connection between rights and responsibilities and to examine how to create space for more expansive voices.

The next session featured **Christelle Tessono**, a researcher at Princeton University's Center for Information Technology Policy, in person to speak in French about the use of technology in educational environments. Again, the focus was on the data collection from online education tools and how students' data can be used to create more dynamic learning opportunities, allow teachers to better understand the challenges students encounter, and make learning more accessible. On the other hand, this data collection can be an invasion of privacy that reduces the student's sense of security in the learning process, increases systemic forms of discrimination, and reduces teacher autonomy and discretion. She pointed to the important trade-offs and questions to be considered such as who is responsible for choosing and evaluating the online education tools and are they accountable for how they use student data.

Luke Stark, Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) at the University of Western Ontario, wrapped up the afternoon's presentations with his perspective on the use of facial recognition technology. He identified many of the known ways in which facial recognition technology, inherent in so many of the online tools that are used by youth, replicate and exacerbate stereotypes and racial profiling.

Following a break, the members reconvened for a discussion focused on the major issues that they want to identify for policy-makers to address. In small groups they had facilitated dialogues about their most pressing concerns and the challenges they saw as most significant.

After dinner, **Frances Haugen**, notable advocate for accountability & transparency in social media and a Facebook whistleblower, joined the Assembly in person to share her thoughts and perspectives

on the importance of pushing for major change and embracing a collective action approach. She promoted a message of optimism that we have the capacity to address seemingly insurmountable challenges (like regulating social media) and the importance of self-care when fighting for change.

Session 4: Thursday, June 29, 2023

After a brief recap from the previous day, members of the Assembly were addressed by **Val Steeves**, a Professor at the University of Ottawa who researches and teaches about the impact of new technologies on human rights. She focused on the deleterious mental health impacts of social media and the way in which platforms make use of addictive strategies to supply their attention economy. Val addressed the ways in which our online lives are leading to weakened social bonds and a marketplace of content/self driven by branding and emotional reactions.

Baroness Beeban Kidron, a Crossbench Peer in the UK House of Lords, the Chair of 5Rights Foundation, and the Co-Founder and Deputy Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Digital Regulation and Responsibility, was the next expert presenter speaking primarily about the UK's Age-Appropriate Design Code (AADC). She named a few of the key factors that went into the AADC's design: higher barriers to malicious content, lower barriers to safe and nourishing content, more privacy for young people, and stronger defaults to privilege the interests of children. She indicated that both public education and youth advocacy are important components of effective solutions.

The rest of the morning was spent in small groups defining the values and issues that were identified the previous day. Groups aimed to address what the issues were about, why they matter and how young people, specifically, are affected by the issue.

After lunch the Assembly heard from their final presenter, **Sophie Bishop**, a Lecturer at the University of Sheffield who researches influencer ecologies and practices. Sophie spoke about the culture of influencers (often called creators) and the way in which they present as normal everyday people but are promoting products or ideas. She also shared how important influencers/creators are to drive traffic to social media sites and the ways in which they can be

paid through profit-sharing schemes with platforms. Sophie suggested that taking influencer work seriously is important for influencers, regulators and audiences to support everyone and create a healthy media environment for the future.

Members spent the rest of the afternoon in dialogue and deliberation. They began by continuing to define the issues. They then revisited the "freedom to" and "freedom from" statements that they wrote on the first evening. Having been through a substantial learning program, they were offered the opportunity to amend or revise their initial thoughts. They then worked in groups to align on their declaration of rights. Finally, they began crafting recommendations, considering the actions they want policy-makers to take to promote the safety and wellbeing of youth online.

Following a break and dinner, **Sonja Solomun** and **Helen Hayes** from the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy opened up the floor for an "Ask Me Anything" to help the members test their recommendations and get clarification on issues raised by other speakers and in their discussions.

Session 5: Friday, June 30, 2023

Friday morning was devoted to refining the values, issues, declaration of rights and recommendations in small groups. Some of the groups also worked on crafting the report's preamble text sharing the context of who the Assembly members are, why they volunteered, what they learned, and why the youth voice matters.

After lunch the members welcomed a number of guests in person and on Zoom to hear the presentation of their work. Attendees included representatives from Privacy Commission offices, the Office of the Minister of Public Safety, the Office of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Senator Mary McPhedran, and other civil society organizations. Standing at the front of the room, the members took turns reading out sections of their report. Following the presentation both **Senator McPhedran** and **Tara Denham**, Director General, Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion offered words of appreciation and gratitude. Attendees asked questions of the members and entered into a short discussion before each member was presented with a certificate of public service.



The Members' Report of the Youth Assembly on Digital Rights and Safety

WHO WE ARE & WHY WE VOLUNTEERED

We are a group of young adults with a wide range of intersecting identities. We come from across the country, representing rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Like our identities, our reasons for volunteering are diverse. Some main commonalities include a desire to learn, educate, and drive change.

Understanding that knowledge is the first step towards progress, we volunteered with the intention of gaining insight into the complexities and dangers of digital platforms and spaces that prioritize profit over people.

Being able to bring a variety of perspectives, we volunteered to educate not only ourselves, but also our peers.

This is all in service of creating recommendations to improve policies that contribute to a safer and more secure digital world for current and future generations.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Through this Assembly we have had the opportunity to learn all about digital rights and safety through the various informative presentations and our group discussions with diverse individuals. We realized that one of the main issues brought up was the collection, use and distribution of data as well as the lack of user control over this data. This data collection quickly funnels into algorithms and targeted ads. Divisive and triggering content and opportunities for gambling are served to youth, along with the use of persuasive mechanisms, in order to create more engagement and keep users online. All in all, companies and platforms prioritize profit over people, and youth deserve better.

As we discussed the policies developed and in

place in other countries, we learned that Canada is in a unique spot regarding its digital policy. We can learn about promising practices and how we may want to approach change from other jurisdictions. We have found that everyone in the Assembly has had different experiences regarding social media and technology, however we have been able to reach the same recommendations and highlight the same issues. After these four days, we are prepared to give educated recommendations in order to promote the rights and safety of youth.

WHY THE YOUTH VOICE MATTERS

The voices of youth are crucial to making policy decisions that represent the full spectrum of societal needs. We, as youth, have a firsthand understanding of the practical ways in which modern forms of communication affect our mental health, privacy and safety. We have experienced the effects of the digital world through the earliest phases of our development, using social media platforms as a central mode of communication. This equips us well to understand the landscape and advocate for reforms to digital spaces.

Youth have a vested interest in the outcomes regarding the online world because they will have a major effect on our lives in the future, and the lives of future generations. Without proper safeguards, tech companies are freely able to prioritize profits at the expense of ethics, so it is important for youth to advocate for our well-being.

In our currently unregulated data economy, youth are the primary targets of exploitative business practices. For policy to properly protect both current and future generations from these practices, it must factor in the experiences of those most affected: youth.

VALUES

Values are the guiding principles that shape behavior and decision making. They indicate what is important to us and are the basic and fundamental beliefs that guide or motivate attitudes or actions.

The following are the values that we, the Youth Assembly, hold most important in considering how to approach creating a safe internet where all children and youth can flourish.

1. Human-Oriented

Community-informed decision-making that values people over profit and considers long term benefits and consequences over short-term gratification.

The design of technology is made with little consideration of, and consultation with, youth. This means digital spaces are created to prioritize monetary gain over long term well-being of users. Digital spaces should focus on the empowerment of communities and should be guided by ethical decisions that the decision-makers and those they affect can continue to be proud of.

2. Autonomy of Users

An individual's ability to control what they engage with and how they experience the online world.

Autonomy can mitigate the harm done by platforms that de-prioritize the wellbeing of users. Increased user agency would allow people to protect themselves from the content served by outrage-driven algorithms. Having greater control over our engagement, data, and time, allows users to be treated as people rather than a commodity.

3. Safety

Youth must have access to online spaces where they can be comfortable as themselves, have access to help when they need it and are protected from abuse and predators. Furthermore, youth should not be exposed to addictive, inappropriate and extreme content.

Safety is critical to the well-being of youth as a vulnerable group. Having access to safe online spaces promotes healthy lifestyle choices, increases personal confidence and helps youth find community that nurtures social development. Safe spaces allow for

the flourishing of mental health and strengthening of community.

4. Security

Security means that digital design always prioritizes privacy by default, centering youth and keeping them safe from algorithmic manipulation, and non-consensual data mining.

Security is important because it provides safety, privacy, and autonomy to online users.

5. Transparency

Transparency means making business practices, algorithms and information available to the public in a way that is clear, succinct, accessible to all, and in plain language. This includes openly stating harmful, data collection, and marketing practices.

Transparency creates an accessible understanding of how corporations wield social influence and political power. Transparent practices improve our ability to hold companies accountable, create trust, promote honesty and allow users to make informed decisions which also helps promote user agency.

6. Accountability

Accountability entails having actual, meaningful, real consequences for malicious users and for companies that profit off of unethical business practices. It means providing a consistent standard of good service/moderation and being proactive for the best interests of users; incorporating realistic, reasonable, and proportional enforcement measures, developed with engagement from diverse communities.

Accountability can help promote more ethical practices and set precedent for better behaviour. Accountability places limits on corporate power and influence and provides the opportunity for recourse for those who are harmed by the companies' practices. Furthermore, enforceable consequences for bad actors will promote improved online experiences for everyone..

7. Adaptability

Being flexible, ready, and open to compromise in order to respond to the constantly evolving nature of digital technologies is essential.

This matters because we need to have the foresight to recognize problems early and be proactive, not reactive in our response.

8. Inclusivity

Ensuring that digital spaces are developed to be safe, diverse, and promote empathy for all individuals. This matters because equity-deserving youth are disproportionately affected by the harms associated with digital platforms, including cyberbullying, triggering content, rage-bait content, bigotry and hate speech.

9. Accessibility

Accessibility is equal opportunity to use digital resources regardless of social, economic or situational barriers. Technology is essential to modern life, therefore it ought to be accessible equitably by all.

DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

Canadian youth ought to have the freedom to:

- equitable access to technology and the internet
- safe digital spaces and communities
- develop our identities and express ourselves online
- have sovereignty over our data, and to know and control who sees it, how it is used, whom it is shared with, and for how long it is kept
- freely access truthful information online that helps us learn, access new opportunities, have fun, and enhance our mental and physical health
- easily access effective and adaptive resources on digital literacy

Canadian youth ought to have the freedom from:

- exploitation and predation from individuals, platforms, and corporations in digital spaces
- violations of privacy and the non-consensual and/or non-transparent use of our information and data
- being targeted by harmful, biased and manipulative algorithms as well as addicting

mechanisms and systems that are designed to keep us online

- exposure to material and behaviour that is abusive, unsolicited, and inappropriate
- the societal pressure, need and expectation to 'always be online'

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue 1:
Lack of Oversight and Exploitative Practices

The continued allowance of corporate self-governance without effective oversight places Canadian youth at risk in the digital world. Youth in Canada are exploited by predatory algorithms, face commercial and sexual exploitation, and whether consensually or not, whether sought out or not, are frequently exposed to harmful, triggering, graphic and/or explicit content.

This means youth are confronted with inappropriate, abusive, and dangerous materials. They are negatively influenced by corporations' use of algorithms that employ harmful and manipulative techniques such as preying on insecurities, mis/disinformation, outrage farming, and echo chambers to keep users online in order to generate profit. Furthermore, commercial exploitation translates to child labour in digital spaces, often without their consent and not in their best interests. With regards to sexual exploitation, digital spaces without regulation make youth vulnerable to predatory behaviour and they are more likely to be compelled into sexual behaviour or acts that are harmful to their wellbeing. Commercial exploitation commodifies and dehumanizes youth allowing corporations and those who post content to profit off of them while exposing them to hate. Sexual exploitation exposes youth to increased short and long term risks of mental, physical and emotional harm.

The lack of oversight from lawmakers and lack of accountability of corporations allow companies to operate without prioritizing the best interests of vulnerable young users. Canadian youth are highly susceptible to exploitation, as they are still learning, gaining life experience, developing mentally and

physically, and discovering their identity. They also face social, societal and financial pressures to perform such as striving for likes, aspiring to internet fame, and fitting into idealized portrayals that are manufactured online. Sexual exploitation of youth in digital spaces clearly prioritizes profits over the protection of children. Furthermore, exposure to harmful and explicit content has been proven to have long term psychological and psychosocial effects on youth and creates a distorted perception of reality. It can also produce dangerous effects in their offline lives.

Platforms are not incentivized to create safe spaces online, as they may not be as profitable.

Recommendations:

In order to promote the safety, wellbeing and flourishing of youth online:

- A. Government ought to:
 - a. create a third-party, arms-length regulatory body, consisting of a diverse set of moderators, including youth, that:
 - i. conducts algorithmic audits to ensure the best interests of youth are top of mind;
 - ii. ensures the self-imposed ratings of platforms and apps are age appropriate, based on their content;
 - iii. ensures that the assessed age rating also applies to the advertisements seen on a platform/app to reduce inappropriate advertisement content;
 - iv. enforces strong and secure identification measures for age assurance with impactful repercussions for misuse or non-use.
 - b. more strictly regulate the collection and usage of youth data;
 - c. compel platforms to publish plans on addressing the known and foreseeable harms they cause and ensure that they enact those plans;
 - d. create and enforce whistleblower laws to protect advocates.
- B. Platforms must:
 - a. consistently hold all users accountable to the same standards (i.e. everyday users and celebrities must abide by the same codes of conduct).

**Issue 2:
Lack of Transparency**

Young people are frustrated by the lack of transparency in online platforms and the continued perpetuation of a harmful status quo.

Without transparency on practices and policies, youth cannot make informed decisions especially because explanatory documents such as terms of service are unnecessarily complicated and not inclusive.

This matters because youth deserve to know what they are getting into and the risks of navigating digital spaces.

Recommendations:

In order to promote the safety, well-being and flourishing of youth online:

- A. Government must require transparency from companies in regard to the harms caused by their products, their algorithms, and their data collection, distribution and usage practices.
- B. Government must set and enforce a standard for terms and conditions to ensure they are clear, concise and barrier-free.

**Issue 3:
Diminishing Wellbeing**

Youth in Canada are experiencing a drastic decline in mental, physical, and emotional health due to use of unregulated digital platforms.

This means lowered attention spans, poor sleep habits, increased rates of anxiety, depression, ADHD, eating disorders, and lack of motivation to tackle meaningful things, among other things, because youth are targeted at a time of vulnerability by profit-driven corporations.

This matters because it produces feelings of isolation, addictive habits, disconnection from in-person interactions, susceptibility to risky and/or dangerous behaviour and perhaps most significantly, a mental health crisis.

Recommendations:

In order to address and redress the mental health problems social media and other digital platforms

are known to cause, government and regulators ought to:

- A. Enable access to timely, low-barrier mental health resources.
- B. Enforce time-limits as a default setting upon downloading apps.
- C. Establish offline periods for academic settings.
- D. Create incentives for companies to make platforms less addictive.

**Issue 4:
Under-Representation of Youth in Online Policy and Decision Making**

Youth in Canada are underrepresented in online policy and decision making, resulting in policies that are embedded with biases and lack diverse inputs.

Without youth and diverse perspectives incorporated into policy-making processes, policies do not adequately represent the needs of diverse communities and of youth, who are particularly vulnerable to the developmental impacts of their digital experiences.

Recommendations:

In order to promote the safety, well-being and flourishing of youth online:

- A. Government ought to ensure policies are staying up to date with the lived experience of youth by regularly incorporating youth recommendations and voices into policy-making.
- B. Platforms should employ children and youth to participate in product design and decision-making to ensure their diverse interests are protected.
- C. Government must mandate the creation of specific safe spaces and actively involve child and youth experts to curate/moderate the experiences in these spaces.

**Issue 5:
Abundance of low-quality information**

Youth in Canada are exposed to significant amounts of low-quality information online, and have less access to high-quality information. The abundance of

misinformation and disinformation can overpower their limited access to free, well-sourced quality information.

This matters because continuous exposure to low-quality information/misinformation/disinformation has tangible, negative effects on people's mental health, physical health and worldview. The abundance of mis/disinformation can lead to apathy or further ideological entrenchment for youth.

Recommendations:

In order to promote the safety, wellbeing and flourishing of youth online:

- A. Government must proactively and decisively mitigate the spread and effect of mis/disinformation, working in collaboration with platforms.
- B. Government ought to provide and promote safe resources for youth on sexual health, mental health, and other sensitive subjects in order to assist youth in navigating digital spaces safely.

**Issue 6:
Lack of User Control and Privacy Protections**

Youth in Canada are denied the ability to fully control their online experience. They do not have sufficient privacy protections and are often not adequately equipped to give informed consent when accessing digital platforms.

This includes being subject to the unwanted collection, distribution and use of their data and being fed algorithmically determined content designed for engagement, not wellbeing. This means that they are more vulnerable to contact with, or exposure to, high risk situations, unregulated surveillance and non-consensual use of personal data.

This is particularly harmful for youth, especially equity-deserving youth, because youth are the most susceptible to exploitation when companies know their particular vulnerabilities and develop profiles based on their data.

Recommendations:

In order to promote the safety, wellbeing and flourishing of youth online:

- A. Platforms should provide a simple option to “opt-out” of algorithmic content.
- B. Governments should mandate platforms to limit excessive notifications and respect user choices without aggressive pressure tactics.
- C. Government must mandate companies to set all youth accounts to private by default for anyone under 18.
- D. Governments should acknowledge that there are very young children accessing digital spaces. Given this, governments should protect the privacy of children and youth to the utmost of their abilities.
- E. Government must impel platforms to:
 - a. reveal how user data is used, shared, stored, and sold;
 - b. share how user data is used to design persuasive algorithms and shape their digital environments;
 - c. give users the ability to withdraw consent and permanently delete stored data.

Issue 7: Oppression of Equity-Deserving Communities

Equity-deserving youth in Canada are disproportionately affected by oppression in digital spaces. They are targeted by hate groups and hurt by biased algorithms that reinforce existing systems of oppression. Furthermore, many youth in Canada have inequitable access to technology and online spaces. Consequently, young people in remote and low income communities may find themselves at a disadvantage in an increasingly digital era.

These issues of inequity are especially important to address because equity-deserving youth face financial exploitation, targeted hate, a continuous cycle of poverty, lack of opportunities, barriers to mental and physical health services, and diminished wellbeing.

The issues that affect everybody’s online well-being disproportionately affect equity-deserving communities.

Recommendations:

In order to promote the safety, well-being and flourishing of youth online who are from equity-deserving communities,

- A. Government ought to:

- a. develop and enforce regulations on hate speech in online spaces that are consistent with the regulations that exist offline;
- b. create a third-party auditing body to address hate speech online, with a focus on that which is directed to equity-deserving communities;
- c. outreach to, and engage in meaningful consultation with, equity-deserving groups on the subject of their own online experiences and action their recommendations;
- d. improve digital infrastructure, with a particular focus on equity-deserving, remote, and low-income communities.
- B. Platforms ought to:
 - a. create and enforce standards that stop the artificial and algorithmic suppression of content created by creators of colour, queer creators, disabled creators, and those from other equity-deserving groups;
 - b. ensure the consistent visibility of those who are repressed by biased algorithms.

Issue 8: Insufficient Digital Literacy Education

Youth and their communities in Canada are lacking appropriate and timely digital literacy education. This means that educational institutions and workplaces lack the proper frameworks to equip youth and their communities with the necessary tools to safely navigate digital spaces. In a world where actions taken online can affect people’s mental, physical and emotional health, it is important for individuals to be able to understand how to safely navigate digital spaces and protect themselves and their communities from harm.

Recommendations:

In order to promote the safety, wellbeing and flourishing of youth online

- A. Government ought to:
 - a. create accessible digital literacy education resources;
 - b. implement a mandatory, up-to-date national digital literacy program in school curricula, starting at the primary levels, which is regularly reviewed and refreshed.





Appendix

MINORITY REPORTS

Members were encouraged to share all points of view throughout the Assembly process. Discussion remained lively but respectful throughout the proceedings, and while some minor differences in opinion remained, every member of the Assembly endorsed the recommendations in this final report. However, members also were given the opportunity to write a minority report if they wished to highlight any points of agreement or disagreement, or to include their own commentary.

From Tira Schafer:

Chronic illnesses: a health condition or disease that is persistent or otherwise long-lasting in its effects or a disease that comes with time.

Both rare and versatile, chronic illnesses can affect any individual at any age. Patients can be left with stress, anxiety, and depression surrounding their illness. They can affect your physical health, leave marks on the body, and give the feeling of hopelessness. You must put yourself first, track medications, and continue your day-to-day life.

Support can be found online that link you to other individuals who have a similar or same condition. Patients can lean on online support groups to share their experiences and relate to other patients with similar circumstances. Medical websites and apps can also be used to track symptoms, thoughts, recovery, and further steps alongside your condition.

Creating a safe environment for both youth and adults to express their emotions towards their chronic illness will lessen the depression rate that they bring. Individuals also can learn about their chronic illness, as well as others, through support groups. However, if online groups begin to use derogatory language and online hate, similar to video games and gaming websites, patients will lose

a support system and their mental health will decline rapidly. There is little security surrounding these groups, making online hate common. Why would a patient look for support in a negative environment?

It is important to look at all aspects of online safety. Individuals can be targeted for reasons they cannot control. There is a stigma behind individuals who are “different” compared to society’s standards. Everyone should have the right and freedom to be themselves and feel accepted in an online environment. That is why it is crucial to create an online safety guard surrounding youth self-expression.

From Az’El Thompson, Evelyn Fallah and Keira MacDuff

The digital world is particularly important for physically disabled youth. For many, online is the only place where they’re safe from discrimination as it allows them to have the same (or less visibly different) experience to their peers. Every child wants an opportunity to fit in and feel like they belong, and while some can have that in person, for most physically or visibly disabled youth, online spaces are their only opportunity to do so. Due to this, it is of our utmost concern that the heightened stakes felt by disabled youth online are acknowledged and considered in policy making. Physically disabled youth are less likely to heed warnings of danger online because they do not want to lose the freedom they feel online. It is our duty, and the duty of those in power to make online spaces safer for them so that they don’t have to make that hard decision between fitting in or security. Protecting disabled youth online manifests itself in the form of having accessible and safe communities online for connecting with others, along with preserving and protecting already existing communities.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Algorithm: In computer programming, a set of instructions designed to perform a specific task. Digital platforms and search engines use proprietary algorithms to organize and display content and search results to users, based on input that may include user data and past activity on the platform.

Bots: Bot is a contraction of the word robot. In computing, a bot is a software program that can interact with systems or users, and execute commands or perform routine tasks, such as answer messages or carry out searches, either automatically or with minimal human intervention.

Digital platform: An internet company and/or service on which registered users post information and communicate digitally, including popular social media sites/companies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and more.

Digital Service Provider: The term “digital service provider” applies to companies or other organizations which provide or substantially enable online services to users. These can include but are not limited to search engines, digital communications platforms, social media platforms, as well as digital gaming, entertainment, commerce and news sites.

Disinformation: Intentionally false or misleading information shared to make money, have political influence, or maliciously cause trouble, harm, or sow distrust.

Duty to act responsibly: The obligation to answer for an act done, and to repair any injury it may have caused. This obligation arises without any contract, either on the part of the party bound to repair the injury, or of the party injured.

Equity-Deserving: Groups of people who have been historically disadvantaged and underrepresented. These groups include but are not limited to: women, visible minorities, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, and people in the LGTBQ2+ community/people with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Equity-seeking groups identify barriers and unequal access, and actively seek social justice and reparation.

Internet (or digital) literacy: The knowledge, skills, and behaviours required to access and use internet services and tools, social media and digital platforms, devices that connect to the internet, and related technology. This includes the ability to appropriately judge the nature and truthfulness of content.

Misinformation: False information that one does not realize is false or misleading, often shared because one is trying to help, is afraid, is trying to protect people, for fun, or as a display of their identity.

GUEST PRESENTERS

16 individuals generously gave their time and shared their knowledge with the Youth Assembly on Digital Rights and Safety. The Assembly extends its sincerest thanks to each of them.

Sophie Bishop is a Lecturer at the University of Sheffield who researches influencer ecologies and practices. She is also a co-author of the 2022 report [‘The impact of influencers on advertising and consumer protection in the Single Market’](#) for EU Parliament. She is currently the Specialist Advisor for the UK Department of Digital Media, Culture and Sport’s parliamentary inquiry into “influencer culture.”

Maude Bonenfant is the Canada Research Chair in Gamer Communities and Big Data, researching issues surrounding the use of big data in video gaming. She is a professor in the Department of Social and Public Communication at [Université du Québec à Montréal](#) (UQÀM) and the director of the Groupe de recherche Homo Ludens sur les pratiques de jeu et la communication dans les mondes numériques.

Rys Farthing is a researcher who focuses on children’s rights, especially around technology and disadvantage. She holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford and a MSc from the London School of Economics. Rys has also held policy roles at civil society orgs including [Reset](#) (Australia & US), [5Rights Foundation](#) (UK), [Fairplay](#) (US), and the [APPG on Poverty](#).

Josh Golin is the Associate Director of [Fairplay](#), one of the world’s leading watchdogs of children’s media

and marketing industries. Josh has appeared on Today, NPR, and Fox & Friends and he’s been quoted in publications including The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Frances Haugen is a notable advocate for accountability & transparency in social media and a [Facebook whistleblower](#) who has recently joined McGill’s Centre for Media, Technology & Democracy as a Senior-Fellow-in-Residence. She holds a degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Olin College and an MBA from Harvard University, and has worked in algorithmic product management at Google, Pinterest, Yelp and Facebook.

Helen A. Hayes is a PhD Candidate at McGill University where she examines the political, environmental, and regulatory implications of AI. As the Research Manager at [The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy](#), Helen’s work focuses on platform governance, Canadian technology policy, and climate justice. Her work has been published in the Harvard Journal of Law & Technology, Interfaces: Essays on Computing & Culture, and Lecture Notes in Computer Science, amongst others.

Baroness Beeban Kidron is a Crossbench Peer in the UK House of Lords, the Chair of [5Rights Foundation](#), and the Co-Founder and Deputy Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Digital Regulation and Responsibility. In effect since 2021, Kidron led the drafting of the UK’s [Age Appropriate Design Code](#), which gives under 18’s a high bar of data protection online.

Laura McPhie (she/her/kwe) is a member of Pikwakanagan First Nation and of mixed Indigenous and colonial descent. She speaks from lived experience of being a Two-Spirit/Queer urban Indigenous person who is a trauma survivor and neuro-divergent. Currently, she uses her lived experience to design interactive trainings, education frameworks, and DEI policy advice for organizations. Laura believes strongly that we are each on a learning path and our roles are to help those on the path around us.

Barbara Nepinak, a member of Pine Creek First Nation is retired after serving 35 years of federal public service. Barbara is active in the Urban and

surrounding areas serving on Advisory Councils and Boards as Elder and Cultural Advisor. Presently, Barbara serves on the Standing Indigenous Advisory Council to the Canadian Human Rights Museum, and several boards.

Danielle Paradis is an Indigenous (Métis) magazine writer, journalist, editor, educator, and podcaster who lives in Treaty 6 (Edmonton, Alberta). Her work on politics, arts and culture, and Indigenous issues has been featured on Aboriginal Peoples Television, Canadaland, The Sprawl, and the Canadian True Crime Podcast, and in Chatelaine, Toronto Star (Edmonton), Gig City, and BUSTLE.

Sonja Solomun is a Faculty Associate at the Max Bell School of Public Policy, and the Deputy Director of [The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy](#). She is currently completing her PhD at McGill University, where she works on platform governance, climate justice and the environmental implications of AI and emerging technology. She has published on these and other topics in the Harvard Journal of Law and Technology, among others.

Luke Stark is an Assistant Professor in the [Faculty of Information and Media Studies](#) (FIMS) at the University of Western Ontario. His work interrogates the historical, social, and ethical impacts of computing and AI technologies. Prior to joining FIMS, he was a Postdoctoral Researcher in the [Fairness, Accountability, Transparency and Ethics \(FATE\) Group](#) at Microsoft Research and a Fellow and Affiliate of the [Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University](#).

Val Steeves is a Professor at the [University of Ottawa](#) where she researches and teaches about the impact of new technologies on human rights. As the lead researcher for MediaSmart’s [Young Canadians in a Wired World](#) research project, she has tracked young people’s use of new media since 1999. She also co-leads the [eQuality Project](#) that examines the impact of online commercial profiling on children’s identities and social relationships.

Christelle Tessono is a graduate of McGill University and a researcher at Princeton University’s [Center for Information Technology Policy](#) where she examines the relationship between racial inequality and

digital technology. She has previously served as a parliamentary intern at the House of Commons of Canada, where she supported the legislative work of both opposition and government Members of Parliament.

Hibby Thach is a PhD student at the [University of Michigan's School of Information](#), studying identity, content moderation, and digital cultures. She has published in Press Start and New Media and Society and is a co-founder of [D/ARC](#), the Discord Academic Research Community.

Riley Yesno is a queer Anishinaabe scholar, writer, and commentator from Eabametoong First Nation, completing her Ph.D. at the [University of Toronto](#). Her work has been published in the New York Times, BBC World News, The Globe & Mail, and CBC National News and she has spoken at the UN Climate Negotiations and Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality, amongst other international events.

CURRICULUM ADVISORY

We convened a small advisory group to review the curriculum and approach for the Youth Assembly. This body was not meant to contribute to or endorse the Assembly's recommendations, but rather to review the curriculum to ensure Assembly members are able to effectively complete their task having heard from a range of representative views. The advisory is also asked to help the Assembly organizers ensure that the information that is being presented to the members is sound and the presenters selected are people who are well-respected and in good standing in their fields.

Sam Andrey

As Managing Director of the Dais, Sam is responsible for coordinating its policy, leadership development and operations teams. He also teaches public policy and leadership at Toronto Metropolitan University and George Brown College. Before joining TMU as the Leadership Lab's Director of Policy and Research, Sam held a number of roles advancing equity in education. He was the Chief of Staff and Director

of Policy to Ontario's Minister of Education, the policy manager for the Ontario Student Assistance Program, and the Executive Director of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

Amira Elghawaby

Amira Elghawaby is a journalist and human rights advocate. In January 2023, she was appointed as Canada's Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia. As Canada's Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia, Ms. Elghawaby serves as a champion, advisor, expert, and representative to support and enhance the federal government's efforts in the fight against Islamophobia, systemic racism, racial discrimination, and religious intolerance. She promotes awareness of the diverse and intersectional identities of Muslims in Canada and provides advice to the government in the development of inclusive policies, legislative proposals, programs, and regulations that reflect their realities.

Keith Jansa

Keith Jansa is the Executive Director of the Digital Governance Council. He works with Canada's technology C-suite to collectively accelerate the pace of digital transformation and advance Canada's position in the global digital economy. In his previous role as Vice President of Standards and Innovation at the Council, Keith provided executive leadership in the design and successful accreditation of the Council's standards-setting process to drive the creation of national standards to advance Canada's digital economy. Keith is Chair of Innovate Cities, an appointed member of Ontario's Health Data Council, and chair of its Strategic Working Group on Data Stewardship.

Suzanne Kite

Suzanne Kite is an Oglala Lakota performance artist, visual artist, and composer raised in Southern California, with a BFA from CalArts in music composition, an MFA from Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School, and is a PhD student at Concordia University. Her research is concerned with contemporary Lakota mythologies and epistemologies and investigates the contemporary

storytelling of the Lakota through research-creation, computational media, and performance practice.

Trevor Massey

For more than three decades Trevor Massey was a senior manager at Centennial College in Toronto, where as college registrar he managed the full range of student services. He also served on a number of provincial agencies and committees given to the overall stewardship of the Ontario college system, and was part of the registrars' initiative that conceived and introduced the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS). He served as director in the start-up years of the Tropicana Community Services Organization; as vice-president of Jamaica 50 Celebration Inc.; and as chair of the National Scholarship Fund (Black Business and Professional Association).

Sam Reusch

Sam is the Executive Director of Apathy is Boring. Since 2017, she has served on the leadership team at Apathy is Boring, contributing to the strategic development of programs, content, and activities through her work as the head of Impact and Development before transitioning to Executive Director in August 2020.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy: Project Lead

Housed at McGill's Max Bell School of Public Policy, The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy is an interdisciplinary research centre dedicated to understanding and responding to the social, political and policy challenges posed by our evolving information ecosystem and digital technologies.

MASS LBP: Project Partner

MASS LBP is Canada's recognized leader in the design of deliberative processes that bridge the distance between citizens, stakeholders, and government. For a decade and a half, MASS has been designing

and executing innovative deliberative processes that help governments develop more effective policies by working together with their partners and communities.

CIVIX: Project Recruitment Assistance

Since 2003, CIVIX has provided authentic learning opportunities to help millions of school-aged youth develop the habits of active and informed citizenship. Our approach to civic education is about providing opportunities for students to experience their democracy first-hand rather than by reading about it in a textbook.

Canadian Museum for Human Rights: Project Venue Partner

As the world's first museum dedicated to human rights, we are centred around the idea that respect and understanding of human rights can serve as a positive force for change in the world. Our mandate is to explore the subject of human rights, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, in order to enhance the public's understanding of human rights, to promote respect for others, and to encourage reflection and dialogue.

PROJECT FUNDERS

CIRA

The Canadian Internet Registry Authority (CIRA) holds the registry of .CA domains. By nurturing the development of .CA as a go-to public resource, CIRA pushes to protect its integrity for .CA domain holders and build a better internet across Canada and around the world.

The Gordon Foundation

The Gordon Foundation is a charitable organization that seeks opportunities to amplify underrepresented voices, elevate emerging issues, and collaborate with like-minded organizations to drive powerful, sustainable outcomes.

ASSEMBLY DEVELOPMENT AND FACILITATION

The Citizens’ Assembly on Democratic Expression was designed and facilitated by MASS LBP. MASS is Canada’s leader in the use of long-form deliberative and participatory processes to shape public policy.

Since 2007, MASS LBP has led some of Canada’s most original and ambitious efforts to engage citizens in tackling tough policy options while pioneering the use of Civic Lotteries and Citizens’ Reference Panels. As of 2023, approximately 1 in 32 Canadian households have received invitations from MASS on behalf of our public sector clients to serve in deliberative processes. We have completed more than 50 civic lotteries and citizens’ assemblies and reference panels to address a wide range of issues.

Assembly Team:

Chim Alao, Assembly Chair
Sarah Yaffe, Project Director

Facilitators:

Rahul Joseph
Kayte McKnight
Amélie Pelletier-Lavack (and French co-host)
Eric Rae
Thea Wortley
Sarah Yaffe

Emotional Support:

Dorit Kosmin

To learn more about their work, please visit masslbp.com

To follow developments on this project, please visit www.digitalassembly.ca





digitalassembly.ca
www.mediatechdemocracy.com
masslbp.com



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