

2021

YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AWARDEES

Recognizing young women for their commitment to volunteerism, volunteer leadership achievements and dedication to empowering women worldwide



ZONTA
INTERNATIONAL



Because Zonta International believes that young women are the key to women's advancement in the field of public service, it offers the Young Women in Public Affairs (YWPA) Award to young women, ages 16-19.

Established in 1990 by Past International President Leneen Forde, Zonta has given 971 awards, totaling US\$1,207,250, to 851 young women from 58 countries.

Read on to learn about Zonta International's 2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardees.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Rachel Lim



District 4

Citizenship: Canada

Rachel Lim is passionate about human rights activism. As head of external affairs at Amnesty International uOttawa, she acts as a liaison between the campus club and Amnesty International Canada (AIC) staff. She helps plan events, including one that spotlighted climate crusaders and featured Lakota and Mohawk water rights activist Makaša Looking Horse, and another where Indigenous activists and educators discussed their leadership in climate justice, language revitalization, systemic racism in academia and treaty rights. Rachel also welcomed Lana Verran, president of AIC's board of directors, to speak at the club's Write for Rights 2021 webinar, where members wrote letters and signed petitions, demanding justice for human rights violations. Additionally, Rachel volunteers on the philanthropy committee of the Conflict Studies and Human Rights Association, where she helps organize charity events dedicated to Black Women in Motion and the Odawa Native Friendship Centre.

In her community, Rachel coordinates meetings on devising campaigns, solidarity actions and hosting events as the chairperson for the Amnesty Toronto Business and Human Rights + Indigenous Rights Specialized Team. She is also a visual arts editor for The Matchstick, AIC's "arts & lit magazine dedicated to raising awareness of human rights issues through the creative imagination of young activists across the world." Rachel is a member of Amnesty International's youth advisory board for a multimedia film on human rights educators, partnered with the UN OHCHR and Soka Gakkai International and has served on MP Ruby Sahota's Brampton North Youth Council for four terms, advising her and other politicians on Indigenous treaty rights, eliminating boil water advisories, the detrimental impact of pipelines, and racial inequality in education. As a high school student, Rachel was a two-time president of the North Park Z Club, where she spearheaded the club's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. Under her guidance, the club received an Emma L. Conlon Service Award.

Rachel is in her second year of the Honours BSocSc in Sociology program for conflict studies and human rights at the University of Ottawa in Ottawa, Ontario. She plans to attend law school with a specialty in Indigenous law with the goal to pursue a career in non-governmental and grass-roots work.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Morgan Guess



District 5

Citizenship: United States

Morgan Guess has been an activist since she was 8 years old. After a bullying incident that caused stomach spasms, panic attacks and clinical depression, she started the Guess Anti-Bullying Foundation. As the leader of the organization, Rachel has coordinated multiple speakers at schools, organized six annual kindness walks, hosted four Scarves in the Park events to provide thousands of people with a gift of warmth on Christmas Eve and helped create four kindness murals.

For three years, Morgan lobbied Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear to appoint a statewide task force to study bullying; she was then the only student appointed to the Kentucky Youth Bully Prevention Task Force. She was chair of the legislative committee and testified to the Kentucky General Assembly for a bill to define bullying—which passed and now protects the state’s 640,000 public school students. Last year, Morgan appeared before the Kentucky Special License Committee for approval of a Be Kind license plate, which will be available for drivers in early 2022. Proceeds will be donated to 16 youth mental health drop-in centers. If just 10% of drivers purchase the license plates, US\$1.7 million will be donated over the next 10 years. She is also an Ashoka Changemaker, working with young people from around the world to empower youth to make a difference.

Morgan is a freshman public policy student at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. She plans to get a kindness license plate there as well. She aims to have a career as a diplomat.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Devangana Rana



District 6

Citizenship: India

Devangana Rana has been an active volunteer at her school and community. As her high school's Key Club president, she led 30 students in volunteering at various community organizations. She also organized schoolwide fundraisers for the Thirst Project, which builds wells in countries experiencing droughts; SwaTaleem NGO, which helps girls in rural India who are at risk of child marriage and abuse get access to education; and the Children's Miracle Hospital. Devangana was also an elected student representative for her senior class in the Student Senate, where she had the opportunity to present ideas to the school board for school improvement and organized an annual Thanksgiving dinner for community members. As the founder and president of her school's Model United Nations chapter, she created a space for students to develop skills in debate, diplomacy and public speaking. This experience helped her gain valuable leadership and communication skills.

As an intern for the City of Urbana's Community Development Services Department, Devangana helped secure youth engagement in the creation of Imagine Urbana, a 20-year plan that lays out the city's vision for transportation, economic development and community engagement efforts for underrepresented communities. She is also a FEMA National Youth Preparedness Council member, advocating for disaster-preparedness and distributing pamphlets, interactive games and flyers, and a teen mentor for the Champaign-Urbana Dream Girls Academy, a nonprofit that aims to guide young women academically and emotionally into becoming the best versions of themselves.

Devangana is a freshman at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she studies international relations with a focus in macroeconomics. She is intrigued by how global perspectives can be used to frame policies in the realm of social justice and culture. While attending university, Devangana will remain deeply committed to community service by continuing to advocate for female empowerment, poverty alleviation and cross-cultural understanding. She is interested in working for UN Women or the World Bank to advocate for women's empowerment and economic equality in India while also ensuring active participation of women in global development.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Sejal Gupta



District 10

Citizenship: United States

Sejal Gupta demonstrated leadership through a variety of activities at her high school. As student body president, she used her influence to promote students' needs and desires to faculty and the administration. The role taught her how to lead effectively as well as communication and persuasion skills. Sejal founded her school's Asian culture club and served as president, where she researched culture for weekly meetings, organized presenters to teach students about their cultures, led schoolwide events that celebrated Asian traditions and promoted cultural awareness. She also served as the public relations officer for her school's multicultural club and Social Studies Honor Society.

As a volunteer for a local congressional campaign, Sejal registered voters in minority communities, led phone banks in more than 20 languages, conducted more than 1,000 calls, contributed to record-breaking fundraising efforts, and researched and promoted policy interests for immigration reform. She has also assisted youth with ADHD in managing virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, served as a student teacher for an elementary school, provided moral support to patients at a medical center, and oversaw 25 volunteers for a community service program that builds positive relations and teaching environments.

Sejal graduated high school with an associate degree from Lone Star College. She is currently a freshman political science student at Rice University in Houston, Texas. She plans to volunteer with environmental nonprofits, lead voter registration drives for college students and mentor young girls of color to pursue government service. She wants to pursue a career in law or public service—perhaps implementing environmental policy to enhance her hometown's water systems or proposing health care initiatives for at-risk constituents.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Leila Johnson



District 12

Citizenship: United States

Leila Johnson participated in a variety of activities in school. A four-year member of the Laramie High School Z Club, she served as vice president and president—experiences that helped further develop her communications skills, ability to work with others and confidence in her leadership capabilities. She led service projects, planned school functions and built lasting connections with classmates as a member of Key Club and student council. Leila was also a member of the Spanish Honors Society and National Honors Society, where she planned and participated in cultural projects and celebrations, community cleanup events and fundraising. Additionally, she played tennis for her high school's team.

Passionate about ending gun violence in her state and across the country, Leila volunteers as Wyoming state director for March For Our Lives, an organization born out of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. In her position, Leila has led lobbying efforts at the state capitol, proposed bills and testified to her school board. She served as treasurer for the Laramie Youth Council, an extension of the city council and the school board that focuses on youth issues locally, where she lobbied and testified at the state capitol, filmed videos and became a registered lobbyist. Leila worked as a student page for the Wyoming House of Representatives, which changed her perspective on how government runs and inspired her to continue involvement in politics, and has also organized climate strikes and rallies.

Leila is a freshman at Macalester College, a liberal arts college in Saint Paul, Minnesota. She hopes to study political science and plans to further her service and leadership activities.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Nikoline Prehn



District 13

Citizenship: Denmark

Despite 70% of her school's students being female, Nikoline Prehn was once the only female on her student council. She went on to chair the executive committee and serve as vice president and president, acting as a liaison between the school's management and its nearly 1,000 students. In her tenure on the student council, the group worked to include more girls and has achieved a better gender balance. They also worked on a policy about school-related sexual abuse.

Before high school, Nikoline was president of Aalborg Youth City Council, which met with the city council and represented the youth in their city, as well as other youth councils from Scandinavia in Trondheim, Norway, and Brussels, Belgium. Now, she is active in the Danish student organization DGS (The Union of Danish Upper Secondary School Students) as president of the regional department of Northern Jutland, where she also serves as a cashier. She has organized demonstrations, arranged school attendance, met with all the student councils of the region and represented students from Northern Jutland in the media. She is also a member of the DGS national board, executive committee and climate task force, and participates in writing their working program. In addition, Nikoline is a member of the Green Student Movement, where she helps arrange climate strikes and events that focus on environmental issues and solutions. In 2019, she attended a Caretakers of the Environment International conference in Istanbul, Turkey, as a delegate.

Nikoline is in her first year of studying political science at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. She has considered careers in Danish politics, the United Nations or a non-governmental organization. The most important thing to her is the ability to contribute to a community and help create change.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Olivia O'Connell



District 15

Citizenship: United States

Throughout her time in high school, Olivia O'Connell has learned what it means to be a leader, grown in her ability to communicate with others, enjoyed collaborating with her teachers and peers, and come to appreciate the importance of service and activism. She was involved in a variety of school activities, including founder and president of the political science club, founder and editor-in-chief of the literary magazine, member of the forensics team, vice president of the social justice club, elected representative of her class council, secretary of the Spanish Honors Society, chair of the National Honors Society's mentor committee, and more.

Olivia also gained valuable experience within the political arena through her work with two campaigns and volunteering for She Votes, a nonprofit organization that works to register young women to vote. As vice president of Michigan High School Students for Biden, Olivia hosted and organized virtual campaign events, presentations and meetings, ran social media accounts, and conducted community outreach throughout Michigan. She was an intern for a congressional campaign, where she worked with campaign officials and fellow interns to host events, volunteer, conduct research, and manage campaign projects and activities. As a 2020 ambassador for She Votes, Olivia worked with the organization's leaders and other ambassadors to spread information about voting, register new young, female voters, and share political education via social media and the internet. She has also had her writing published in *Albinism Insight*, the National Organization of Albinism and Hypopigmentation's magazine.

Olivia is a freshman studying public policy, international studies and history at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. As a legally blind woman, Olivia has experienced ableist discrimination and is passionate about activism, advocacy, education and social justice. Her dream career involves activism and service to her country. She wants to eventually live in Washington, D.C. as a policy adviser and advocate for disability rights and hopes to support organizations such as the ACLU, the League of Women Voters and an organization that delivers glasses and eye care to underdeveloped countries.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Eloise Amirtharajah



District 23

Citizenship: Australia

Eloise Amirtharajah served as her school's 2020 Senior Community Service Leader and on the Senior School Sustainability Committee. Both experiences were valuable to her personal growth and helped her develop compassion and empathy through a deeper understanding of others' situations. In the first role, Eloise actively volunteered as a tutor for students from culturally diverse backgrounds, planning a bushfire relief fundraising concert, gardening at Food Is Free, and with Walk Off the War Within, a movement that raises awareness of mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder. These roles gave her opportunities to speak at school assemblies, prepare presentations for the school board and principal, contribute to the school's blog, and galvanize students and teachers into action to increase recycling and change behaviors to align with more sustainable practices.

Eloise also volunteered for the City of Ballarat Youth Council, actively participating in the development and implementation of many youth-led activities that aimed to support social inclusion and the mental health of local youth. She led a team of volunteers to plan, promote and deliver a sustainable fashion event, The Green Wardrobe, which was nominated for a Keep Victoria Beautiful Sustainable Cities Award and a 2020 Youth Award. Eloise also participated in the YMCA Stand Up Youth Summit on mental health, promoted the international charity Aussie Action Abroad at school assemblies and youth council events, and volunteered at Parkrun and promotional events for the Heart Foundation and Ballarat Mental Health Week Group.

Eloise is in her first year of earning a bachelor's degree in international/global studies—with a focus on global politics, gender studies and environmental policy—at RMIT University in Melbourne, Victoria. She will continue to help people in her local community, especially working to support initiatives that dismantle the inequities that confront marginalized women in our society. Eloise plans to work in areas of politics and policy development, ensuring that she can help influence decision-making and lead the changes required to remove the structural injustices that impact women.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Tehani Chandrasena Perera



District 25

Citizenship: Sri Lanka and United States

Throughout her school career, some of Tehani Chandrasena Perera's most significant leadership experiences were being a school prefect, house captain and vice president of the Model United Nations (MUN) chapter. Each activity built her character and helped her understand what type of leader she wants to be. MUN allowed her to participate in several conferences and learn about pressing issues while playing an active role in solving them and simultaneously creating long-lasting friendships with individuals outside of school. It was also a platform that helped make her opinions heard as a future change maker. As a house captain, Tehani had a quarter of her school's study body counting on her to lead, teach and be there for them.

Tehani is most passionate about environmental justice and justice for women and children. When she was 15, she was appointed the president of the Z Club of Colombo, which had more than 65 members. Tehani initiated 13 projects in her time as president, including assisting the Liya Diriya Project, a community-based women's association that works for environmental sustainability and the betterment of society by producing reusable bags from unbleached cotton and upcycled fabrics. She participates in as many beach cleanups as she can and was also vice president of the Interact Club of Colombo. One of her favorite club projects was a girl's empowerment project that consisted of panelists speaking to a gathering of teenagers. The money raised was donated to the National Institute of Mental Health to provide sanitary napkins to female patients.

A freshman at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, Tehani is studying international relations and affairs. She will be as active as she can in terms of volunteering and being part of organizations, particularly related to service, the environment, Greek life and journalism. Tehani plans to pursue a graduate degree in either public policy, law or social sciences and eventually become an advocate for victims of domestic violence and hate crimes, while also working for nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations.



2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Carolyn Huang



District 28

Citizenship: Canada

Carolyn Huang, who grew up in a low-income, patriarchal family, is passionate about eliminating poverty and gender inequality. She served as president of the Feminist Team to address the unsafe campus/school culture after learning about cases of sexual assault, which taught her how to effectively lead a 10-member team in organizing fundraising and information campaigns while successfully engaging formerly ambivalent peers. After noticing unaddressed cases of racial inequality in her school, Carolyn helped found the Equality Task Force with the principal. As a student representative, she learned how to represent around 200 peers' voices while creating a 10-year plan to minimize future students' experiences with inequality. Carolyn was also co-leader of the Model United Nations team, where she organized a 200-participant conference, which taught her time management skills and about other perspectives through representing different countries. Additionally, she worked at her regional legislature and aided elected officials, where she developed communications and time management skills, gained firsthand knowledge about politicians' busy schedules, and saw just how much impact governments can have.

Carolyn is also an activist outside of school. She led six people in organizing a fundraising gala, attended by local politicians, to provide thousands of bus tickets to benefit a local shelter. After noticing anti-minority attitudes in her community, she co-created Sardashti Camp Fundraising, where she co-leads a group of 10 people in creating documentaries to humanize minorities and raising nearly CA\$5,000 (US\$3,789) for necessities for impoverished Yazidi people in Iraq. A national youth advisor for Girl Guides, Carolyn led a cross-country team, wrote a socioeconomic bridging proposal so all girls can access Girl Guides' safe spaces and presented it to the board of directors. She helps lead a local unit and participates in national task forces where she proposed bylaw changes. She aids UNICEF and the Students Commission of Canada on dating violence information campaigns and served as the youth counselor for her region's Ministry of Education, where she represented 700,000 students while leading community consultations and providing feedback for curriculum changes.

Carolyn plans to study political science and sociology before attending law school. She wants to work in public policy, specifically targeting poverty rates or gender inequality, and she hopes to continue working with Girl Guides to create safe spaces for women while volunteering for awareness campaigns about issues like female genital mutilation. Carolyn wants to support low-income community members through pro-bono work with her law degree, and her ultimate goal is to work at the United Nations.