
PHILANTHROPY AND NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP

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OLAYINKA ADEMUYIWA

Born in Ikeja, Nigeria, Yinka Ademuyiwa brings a vibrant, global perspective and an analytical background in Cell Biology and Genetics to Carleton's MPNL program. A dedicated public servant, Yinka has worked internationally and across all three levels of Canadian government. She currently serves as a Case Manager for the City of Ottawa and is the Founding Director of BSL, a nonprofit providing settlement services to Ontario's Afro-Caribbean immigrant community. Her exceptional community service earned her the Ottawa West-Nepean Good Neighbour Award, making her the first Black recipient.

Yinka's hands-on work with BSL inspired her to join the MPNL's fourteenth cohort to acquire the strategic tools needed to scale her nonprofit's impact and bridge the gap between policy and grassroots action. Outside of her professional endeavors, she is a devoted wife and mother to two creative boys. As a passionate Yoruba language enthusiast, she has also authored a children's book in Yoruba to celebrate her heritage. She looks forward to connecting with her peers!



JESSICA AUERBACH

Jessica Auerbach is a Resource Development Coordinator at Blue Door, a registered charity that offers innovative housing, health, and employment programs aimed at addressing the root causes of homelessness. In her role, she leads the planning and execution of key initiatives, including Blue Door's Signature event, Coldest Night of the Year. Jessica also oversees the organization's volunteer program where she recruits, onboards, and supports volunteers who meaningfully contribute to Blue Door's mission.

Prior to entering the nonprofit sector, Jessica was an Ontario Certified Teacher

working with elementary students. During her years as an educator throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, she witnessed firsthand the challenges that many families were facing. This experience sparked a desire to create more impact, ultimately guiding her transition into the nonprofit sector where she continues to be driven by a deep commitment to strengthening communities and supporting those in need.

In her free time, Jessica can be found hanging out with her dog Penny, whether that means going for a walk in the sun or unwinding with a good book.

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MANJIT BASI

Born in India, raised in Vancouver, and having spent most of her adult life in Ottawa, Manjit Basi's work has long been shaped by questions of people, place, belonging and contribution. Across business, philanthropy, civic engagement and leadership development, she has spent more than four decades exploring what helps communities become more connected, resilient and alive.

Manjit is a founder of Synapcity, a nonprofit focused on civic literacy and dialogue, and spent 21 years building and leading four Ottawa The Body Shop franchises that became third spaces where commerce and community intertwined. She has also served on numerous nonprofit and philanthropic

boards, including the TELUS Ottawa & Eastern Ontario Community Board, Immigrant Women Services Ottawa and the Ottawa Community Foundation.

Now living in rural Ontario, Manjit sees the MPNL program as both a continuation of lifelong learning and a threshold into the next chapter of contribution. She hopes to deepen the academic grounding beneath decades of lived practice while contributing to evolving conversations about philanthropy, governance, civic participation and community wellbeing. She is particularly interested in how communities create the conditions for people to belong, contribute and care for one another across generations.



HEATHER BENJAMIN

Heather Benjamin joins the MPNL program with a diverse background in entrepreneurship, operations, marketing, and community leadership. Over the past 25 years, she has launched multiple businesses, worked within not-for-profit organizations, managed a retreat and conference centre, and most recently contributed to the thrift and social impact sector. She is passionate about building organizations that care well for people while also creating sustainable and effective operations behind the scenes.

Outside of work, Heather is an avid gardener, vintage market enthusiast, and creative thinker who is usually dreaming up her next project. Deeply rooted in her community and faith, she was drawn to the MPNL program because of its blend of practical leadership, strategy, and purpose-driven impact. She hopes to gain deeper knowledge in nonprofit leadership, governance, philanthropy, and organizational sustainability, while also learning from the experiences and perspectives of others in the cohort.



RACHEL BERNHOLTZ

Working at Hamilton Jewish Family Services for 6 years, after a 2-year term on their board of directors, Rachel Bernholtz (she/her) is passionate about helping people and her community. She began as the food bank lead, providing food to clients during the Covid-19 pandemic, and now does grant writing, program development and communications for the organization as well as being the food bank manager.

Rachel's passion is food security and the ways it intersects with financial security, social policy, and the nonprofit sector. Rachel recently completed the Food Security Certificate at Toronto Metropolitan University and is eager to continue to expand her academic knowledge through the MPNL.

The MPNL program aligns strongly with her desire to broaden her academic exposure beyond food security alone and to engage with a wider range of nonprofit challenges, and to think critically about how nonprofits operate within and sometimes inadvertently reinforce existing systems. She is also eager to learn alongside and from others working in the nonprofit and philanthropic fields.

Outside of work, Rachel is a novice equestrian, a fantastic cook and loves to spend time outside with her family.

DAVID BING

David Bing (he/him) is a nonprofit professional with twelve years of experience in development operations and over twenty years of combined experience in fundraising, project management, operations, and leadership. He most recently worked for the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank in Washington, DC, as its Senior Director of Development Operations. As the leader of this unit, he managed projects that empowered colleagues become more efficient and effective in their roles.

He supports causes that advance justice and equity for all, that protect the world's

environment and climate for this generation and those to come; that build liberal democracies and their civil societies; and that promote evidence-based education, science, and health. David believes that serving in the philanthropic sector is the most effective means through which he can further these values and help others.

David has joined the MPNL program's 14th cohort to develop a more rigorous and extensive understanding of how he can best lead and support nonprofit organizations. He is excited about the opportunity to engage with both educators and colleagues, and to gain an international perspective on the philanthropic sector and community.

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KENDRA CLARKE

Kendra Clarke, CFRE is the Director of Philanthropy at the North Bay Regional Health Centre Foundation. Over the last 16 years, Kendra has worked closely with her colleagues, hospital leadership, volunteers and community leaders to provide strategic leadership and advance her organization's mission: inspiring investment in exceptional healthcare, close to home.

Kendra holds a BSCh in Biology & Anthropology from Trent University and a Graduate Certificate in Fundraising & Resource Development from Georgian College. In 2016, she earned the Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) designation.

Passionately involved with the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy,

she was honoured as one of AHP's 40 Under 40 professionals in 2022. She's served as Co-Chair for Convene Canada (2025), taught at the Madison Institute in Wisconsin (2025), and co-taught the CFRE prep course at Convene Canada (2026). In 2026 she joined the AHP Foundation Board of Directors.

Locally, Kendra has served on several nonprofit boards including, the North Bay Curling & Athletic Corporation and the Low-Income People Involvement of Nipissing.

With a passion and commitment to the philanthropic sector, Kendra plans to use the knowledge and skills gained through the MPNL to further advance her organization's mission through data informed decision making.



NATALIE CRAWFORD COX

Natalie Crawford Cox (she/her) is a Professional Human Ecologist and nonprofit leader with a background in child and family well-being systems, cross-cultural and international development, and family ecology. Rooted in an ecological framework, Natalie believes that it's our responsibility to approach healing work from a social justice lens (putting the "social" back in "social work"). For over 13 years, Natalie has worked at The Family Centre of Northern Alberta, where she currently manages a trauma-informed foster care program, based in Indigenous teachings.

Natalie is a firm believer that healing happens within genuine relationships and

that empathy for adults whose actions have harmed children is a prerequisite for transformative work within child protection. She brings a data-informed perspective to her leadership and strives to ensure that outcomes metrics enhance the heart of the work and not detract from it.

Natalie has 25+ years of volunteer experience, ranging from governance boards to two years of work in Sub-Saharan Africa. She lives in Edmonton, Alberta in a converted hardware store with her partner, John, and their two dogs, Faith and Arbie. Natalie is a hobbyist of all sorts and prefers to do many things casually, rather than to excel in one.



DEAN DEWAR

Dean Dewar's work is grounded in dignity, equity, and community care. He currently serves as the Director of Consumption and Treatment Services and Communications Lead at Sandy Hill Community Health Centre in Ottawa. Through his work in harm reduction, he works alongside clients, organizations, and the broader community to address complex and evolving needs. He leads interdisciplinary teams focused on empowering people with lived and living experience, strengthening community partnerships, and communicating organizational impact.

For over a decade, Dean has played a key leadership role in opening supportive housing residences and developing community programming, including a soup kitchen and low-barrier drop-in

centre. He has dedicated his career to supporting people experiencing homelessness, substance use, and mental health challenges through person-centred and community-based care.

Beyond his work in health and social services, Dean has served as a leader within Ottawa's 2SLGBTQ+ community, chairing the Board of Directors for Pride Capital Volleyball. He is an active volunteer and advocates for community-led approaches that strengthen social connection, inclusion, and wellbeing.

Through the MPNL program, Dean hopes to build on his leadership experience and impact by advancing social innovation, amplifying community voices, and supporting meaningful systems change within Ottawa's health and social service sectors.



SHAUNDEL DOTTIN-AGIM

Shaundel Dottin-Agim, originally from Georgetown, Guyana, currently lives in Ottawa, Ontario, on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. She is an experienced higher education professional with over 25 years in event planning, specializing in the design, coordination, and execution of large-scale recruitment and engagement events that support thousands of prospective students and their families each year. Her work is grounded in strong project management, team leadership, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Shaundel holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts in English and Law, as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Religion. She is also a Certified Quality Event Planner (CQEP).

Her academic background in legal studies, cultural understanding, and communication has equipped her to navigate diverse organizational environments with confidence. In complex settings, she has developed a leadership approach that focuses on motivating and empowering others while prioritizing equity, inclusion, and mental health advocacy.

Currently, Shaundel is pursuing a Master's degree in Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership to enhance her expertise in community engagement and collaborative leadership. This next step reflects her ongoing commitment to fostering positive, people-centred change in communities and institutions.



MITCHELL FOLEY

Born into a remote rural community in Nova Scotia, Mitchell grew up working in both the fishing and farming industries. He took some education in basic electronics but began to pursue training for religious ministry. He graduated with a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies and a Master of Theology. He was ordained as clergy within the Baptist denomination.

Mitchell has volunteered in several nonprofits, such as the local fire department, school advisory council, an education society for African Nova Scotia students, and in various ways throughout his denomination. It was his involvement at the denominational level and seeing

the work done in areas such as international relief and development, affordable seniors housing in Atlantic Canada, and private foundation work that gave him a desire to learn more about nonprofit management.

His main areas of interest include governance and policy, board structure and responsibilities, and what the future of fundraising may look like for smaller nonprofits. He looks forward to what he will learn from both the class and his peer group.

To relax, Mitchell enjoys walking his dog, science fiction shows and sitting by the ocean.



ELENI GIOVANOPOULOS

Eleni Giovanopoulos brings over a decade of experience in the nonprofit sector, with a versatile skill set spanning project management, event management, communications, operations, and stakeholder engagement. Her career has taken her across international development, domestic educational programming, and the design of movements and legacy projects in partnership with companies, foundations, and individuals focused on creating meaningful, lasting impact.

Eleni is drawn to the relational side of the sector: the human dynamics that shape philanthropy, and the trust and collaboration required to turn good intentions into real outcomes. Through the Master of Philanthropy and Nonprofit

Leadership, she hopes to build a stronger, more holistic foundation in how nonprofits operate and are managed, and to deepen her understanding of the people and relationships behind charitable giving.

Eleni hopes to remain involved in the sector both professionally and as a volunteer, contributing to and strengthening the charitable work happening in her communities. Her volunteer experience reflects this commitment, spanning childcare, blood donor care, emergency response, and community initiatives. With an undergraduate degree in Theatre, Eleni has a deep respect and appreciation for the arts, and outside of work she is an avid traveler who enjoys participating in sports and fitness.

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LESLIE HOOK

Leslie Hook is a nonprofit strategist, community mobilizer and cross-sector impact partner with over a decade of experience in operational leadership, executive governance and advisory systems.

She is the Agency Director of Urban Runaway, an Ottawa Valley-based consultancy specializing in ethical leadership, systems advocacy and program design that responds to rural community needs. Leslie is the Publisher of Arnprior Pulse Magazine, a hyperlocal storytelling platform for independent voices with an editorial section dedicated exclusively to nonprofit organizations.

Leslie served on a municipal advisory board supporting the Arnprior Town Council during the 2022–2026 term on matters of cultural planning, diversity and

accessibility. In 2026, she was appointed Chair of CDAC, the municipal advisory committee supporting the Arnprior and District Museum through strategic planning, program oversight and community engagement.

Prior to pursuing the Master of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership, Leslie studied Law and Human Rights at Carleton University. She is certified in collaborative problem solving with extensive facilitation experience aligning peer systems with community-led development.

Leslie is thrilled to join the MPNL program and plans to expand her knowledge of organizational development and advanced topics in philanthropy to strengthen regional impact planning and develop new tools for her agency toolkit.



MELANIE KLODT WONG

Melanie Klodt Wong is a nonprofit leader, community builder, and connector who believes strong relationships are at the heart of meaningful change. She has spent her career in the nonprofit sector, beginning in theatre and event production, where she developed a strong work ethic, a collaborative leadership style, and a passion for creating experiences that bring people together and make life better for others.

With experience spanning philanthropy, communications, stakeholder engagement, and healthcare fundraising, Melanie builds partnerships and creates momentum for community impact. As a leader in rural healthcare philanthropy, she has helped grow donor engagement, strengthen community connections, and

champion initiatives that improve access to care close to home.

Growing up in rural Niagara instilled in Melanie a deep appreciation for nature, community life, and the power of neighbours helping neighbours. She brings an optimistic, empathetic, people-first approach to leadership and is passionate about storytelling, volunteerism, and creating opportunities for others to engage in meaningful ways.

Melanie is excited to learn alongside fellow nonprofit professionals, gain new perspectives from others across the sector, and continue building resilient, compassionate communities through collaborative leadership.



CHERISH LALIBERTE

Cherish is a grant writing consultant for Amity Foundation, a nonprofit that improves outcomes for individuals impacted by the justice system through substance use disorder treatment, workforce development, housing navigation, and wraparound services. Her professional experience has ignited a deep appreciation for the power of community-based organizations to bring about meaningful change — for the individual and for society.

With more than 20 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, Cherish enjoys the challenge of understanding what funders are looking for and using the power of storytelling, data, and strong program design to secure funding for programs and capital projects. Her experiences

have also created curiosity about emerging nonprofits and the conditions that lead to long-term sustainability.

Cherish was drawn to the Master of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership program for its emphasis on leadership development, practical applications for organizational development, and a desire to grow with excellence in the philanthropic sector. She is eager to deepen her knowledge alongside peers and subject matter experts, contribute insights from her own experience, and explore innovative frameworks for community transformation.

Outside of work, she enjoys reading, volunteering, and spending time with her family and friends.



AIDEN LAMB

Aiden Lamb (he/him) is an Edmonton-based nonprofit leader, aerial artist, and avid community-builder who somehow finds time to also be a labour doula, craft enthusiast, and dad to a very energetic toddler. He currently serves as Executive Director of a nonprofit camp and conference centre in Alberta, and is the founder of Elevate Acro Association, a nonprofit AcroYoga festival, and Rainbow Threads Gathering, a 2SLGBTQ+ family-friendly retreat.

Aiden came to the MPNL program after years of learning nonprofit leadership the hard way: by doing it. He is passionate

about building organizations that are financially sustainable and rooted in social justice and care. He believes the charitable sector deserves better infrastructure, creative new approaches, and a lot more funding.

When he is not spreadsheet-deep in a grant application or building yet another community event, you can find him hunting, thrifting for art supplies, or hosting grief circles. He joined the MPNL program to sharpen his skills, find new language for ideas he has long held, and connect with leaders who share his vision for a stronger, more equitable sector.



SHONA MCCULLOCH- TROJAN

Shona McCulloch-Trojan (she/her), holds a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology, with a minor in Nutrition from the University of Washington (Seattle, WA); a Master's degree in Public Health (MPH) from Syracuse University (Syracuse, NY); and is currently working in the nonprofit sector in Edina (Minneapolis, MN) as a Grants and Development Specialist.

While relatively early in her career, in under 2.5 years, McCulloch-Trojan has raised over 1.5 million dollars for mission driven causes—in grant funding alone—across both her professional and volunteer endeavors.

Born and raised in Ottawa, McCulloch-Trojan represented Canada three-times in

international cross country and track and field competitions and was a D1 athlete in the U.S. for six years. She continues her training in Minnesota, as a training partner with Minnesota Distance Elite (MDE) alongside her husband. During her spare time, she takes additional courses and walks her cats, Moose and Bunny.

McCulloch-Trojan is excited to return home to pursue the Masters of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership (MPNL) degree. She looks forward to learning alongside an accomplished cohort and distinguished faculty at Carleton University—with particular interest in advanced fundraising systems, social entrepreneurship and digital communications.



TRICIA MCGEE

Tricia McGee is a Registered Social Worker, a doula with the Ottawa Abortion Doula Collective, and Community Outreach and Communications Coordinator at the Olde Forge, where they lead community engagement, fundraising, and partnership development. They serve as a board member at Amethyst Centre Ottawa, contributing through active governance, strategic direction, and operations.

With over a decade of experience across nonprofit and grassroots sectors, Tricia's work reflects a progression from frontline practice to systems-level leadership. They have led development of sustainable, community-informed programs and contribute to decision-making shaped by funding structures, public policy, and evolving community needs. Their experience spans program development, financial sustainability, cross-sector collaboration, and organizational accountability.

Their practice is grounded in equity, accessibility, and collective care, with a focus on reproductive justice and improving health access for migrant communities. They are committed to collective, non-hierarchical leadership that emphasizes shared decision-making and community accountability.

A Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher, ceramicist, and parent, Tricia believes that joy, creativity, and care are essential to sustaining community work. Drawn to the program's focus on leadership within complex nonprofit systems, they aim to strengthen their capacity to lead in constrained policy and funding environments and advance equitable, responsive, and sustainable organizations.



IFEOMA OKONJI

Ifeoma Okonji is the Founder and Executive Director of Emerging Lives Initiative (ELI), a federally registered Canadian charity based in Ottawa focused on strengthening community wellbeing through intergenerational connection, leadership development, and mental resilience. Since its inception in 2024, ELI has reached over 500 beneficiaries through innovative platforms that connect youth, seniors, and women to mentorship, skills development, and inclusive opportunities.

Ifeoma serves as Education Chair of the Association of Fundraising Professionals Ottawa Chapter, advancing professional development within the Fundraising sector. She is also Co-Founder of The Nonprofit Connect, a collaborative

community of Black nonprofit leaders committed to peer support and collective impact.

In her professional role as a Harm Reduction Specialist, she works directly with individuals navigating complex life challenges, an experience that informs her commitment to integrating mental resilience into community-based programming.

She was drawn to the Master of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership (MPNL) program at Carleton University to deepen her strategic leadership and strengthen the nonprofit ecosystem in Canada.



BREANNA PALLANTE

Breanna Pallante (she/her) graduated from Concordia University with a Bachelor's degree in Human Relations with a concentration in Community Development and also holds a Technical DEC in Community Recreation and Leadership Training from Dawson College.

Breanna has gained experience in the nonprofit and community sector through her work in outreach, fundraising, program planning, and community development. She currently works for two Montreal-based charities: the Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities as Community Outreach Coordinator, and Carolyn's Community as Community

Impact Assistant. Most recently, Breanna received the Volunteer Recognition Award from Concordia University for her community involvement and has also been awarded two \$5,000 micro-grants through Canada Service Corps for her community impact projects. She is also one of the co-founders and facilitators of the LD+ADHD Club, a support group for CEGEP students with learning disabilities.

She is excited to be part of the 14th cohort and to continue developing her leadership and fundraising skills while learning from others working across the nonprofit sector. In her free time, Breanna enjoys volunteering, walking and going to local cafés.



HANNAH THIESSEN

Hannah is a queer gardener, textile artist and writer. She grew up in a modern Mennonite family, in the land of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples.

She has worked for a women's shelter and harm-reduction agency in various capacities for the past 5 years. What we call "social work" and its kin are some of few lifelines that people who are most oppressed have to rely on. As we are currently structured, it can be crumbling work. It can be the work of dissociation, desensitization, of tearing oneself in two or more.

She is left asking; what is community work without healthy land to live on? What is environmental justice without Indigenous sovereignty? How can we ask ourselves to work tirelessly to create change if we do not have the space to rest, laugh, create, cry, relate, nourish, to share power, to be included in the decision-making process?

Hannah is not the first to ask these questions. Inspired by many diverse advocates and change-makers, she loves to imagine and learn about less hierarchical power structures. One day, she hopes to experience shared leadership in a way that feels invigorating and caring for all involved.



KARLEE THOMAS

Karlee Thomas (she/her) graduated from McGill University with a Bachelor of Arts in International Development Studies. As the Coordinator of Stewardship and Donor Relations at the Jewish General Hospital Foundation, she brings two years of experience in healthcare philanthropy. Karlee is born and raised in Montreal and is very passionate about health equity and improving access to education.

As an early-career professional, she was inspired to pursue the MPNL program at Carleton University because she wanted to connect with mission-driven professionals.

She looks forward to continuing her studies and broadening her understanding of philanthropy and the nonprofit sector through this program. In her free time, Karlee enjoys working out, watching movies, and spending quality time with family and friends.



MACY THORNE

Macy Thorne (she/they) is a passionate social services worker specialising in work with neurodivergent young adults. She is currently based out of Montreal where she completed a Bachelor of Arts and Science in Cognitive Science (2022) as well as a graduate certificate in Public Administration and Governance (2025) at McGill University.

Macy is proud to say that she is a born and raised Newfoundlander and credits the province's reputation of hospitality for her drive when it comes to philanthropy and non-profit work. Another source of inspiration for Macy's love of helping others comes through her various volunteer endeavours with Canadian Blood Services, the Canadian Cancer Society, and her sorority, Alpha Omicron Pi.

In Macy's free time, she enjoys all things creative – frequently switching between different crafting mediums such as beading, diamond art, painting, pottery, and pyrography. She also loves visiting cafés, going to concerts, or having a nice movie night in with her cat, Lavender.

She is incredibly excited for the opportunities to come through the MPNL program and looks forward to expanding her knowledge and skills in nonprofit leadership. With this, Macy aspires to create social change through fundraising, sector policy, and governance.



VANESSA WALLACE

Vanessa (she/her) is a nonprofit generalist whose experience in the sector was founded by direct service delivery in sport for development. Born and raised in Ottawa, she has called Toronto home since 2012 when she began studying humanities and competing for the University of Toronto Varsity Bules women's basketball team.

Since graduating, she has held various roles at nonprofits including practicing different forms of philanthropy from issue-specific micro granting to multi-year outcomes-based funding. One experience in 2023 was pivotal to Vanessa's understanding of formalized

resource sharing when she supported the delivery of a participatory grantmaking circle. The circle aimed to offset the power imbalance held by the funding agency by placing allocation decisions in the hands of the nonprofit recipients. Inspired by this experience, Vanessa strives to enhance her knowledge of the philanthropic ecosystem with the foundational curriculum offered by the MPNL Program to further disrupt philanthropy in the emerging Canadian professional women's sport industry.

In her spare time, Vanessa is a youth girls basketball coach.

