



2012

Annual Report

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About Us



What began in 2006 as an employment-based pilot project with twelve youth has evolved into DESTA Black Youth Network. The six-month pilot project was launched to address the high unemployment rate amongst English-speaking Black youth. Since then, DESTA has served over 200 different youth from around the island of Montréal, mentoring and supporting them in the areas of education, health, personal development, and employment. They are at-risk youth who come from low income settings and experience marginalization on a great scale. To improve their life chances DESTA provides interventions that address their interrelated needs in a holistic and integrated way. Through our programs and services, we create opportunities for young adults to access resources, build relationships with their peers, and develop the skills needed to overcome the wide range of socio-economic barriers that they face.

My work at DESTA started with a dream to improve the lives of young adults living on the margins of society. Since its inception in 2006, this organization continues to thrive. Currently, we serve over 130 youth in their efforts to complete their high school education, gain employability skills, and obtain the social support necessary for personal and professional success. Along with my role as Director of DESTA, I work closely with both staff and the youth whom we serve. It has been during these interactions that I derive the most pride and satisfaction in the work that we do. I have seen first-hand the personal growth and concrete changes made in the lives of our participants, and aspire to continue to provide these necessary services in the years to come. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I present you with this year's annual report, so that you may get a glimpse of the work we do at DESTA.

Frances Waithe
Executive Director

Our Mission

Our mission is to mentor marginalized youth in the areas of education, health & personal development, and employment. Through our programs and services, DESTA aims to support the process of empowerment, strengthen authentic identity, and promote excellence.

Our Strategy

Partnering with the Community

As a community-driven organization, our work is rooted firmly in the strength and vitality of our partnerships and on the richness of the expertise that our volunteers offer us. We work with a large and diverse range of community actors: educators who are championing new thinking in teaching and learning models; dedicated health and social service workers who support the wellbeing of youth and their families; and lawyers who help young people mired in the criminal justice system. We work with researchers investigating the obstacles faced by inner city youth and their root causes; and business leaders who are giving back to our communities a big way. By combining the talents and resources of these partners, we are able to deliver solutions that are holistic and effective.

For the Youth. By the Youth

The youth programs and services at DESTA are shaped by the youth. This is achieved by ensuring that the voice of youth, representing the interests of our target population, is heard at all levels of programming. In 2012, a participant of DESTA's programs joined the Board of Directors as a Youth Representative. Through the Emploi Québec Subvention Salaires program, DESTA has been able to hire a number of youth in different support staff positions. They serve as a strong voice for the youth, offering valuable perspectives for the interventions we put forth. In addition to being youth-driven, leadership projects at DESTA empower youth to become agents of change in their communities.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

President

Linda Leus

Treasurer

Nicholas Schnitzer

Secretary

Scott Simons

Directors

Imaan Browne

Nicholas Martire

Brenda Paris

Gale Seiler

Executive Director

Frances Waithe

Continued Learning Coordinator

Kelly Thompson

Administrative Assistant

Louise Barbeau

Youth Worker

Chantal Marulaz

Fund Development Coordinator

Abi Balakrishnan

Advocacy

One of the ways in which DESTA supports youth is through advocacy and accompaniment. To find appropriate solutions to the problems faced by each individual, DESTA identifies and works with relevant resources and advocates on behalf of the youth. In parallel to this individualized support, DESTA represents its target population at key community organizations and associations. By holding positions on various committees and governing boards, we aim to help inform and shape the policies that affect the wellbeing of the youth.

Social Entrepreneurship

Over the past two years, DESTA has been exploring the potential of social enterprise as a viable solution to both the economic struggles of our youth and the financial uncertainty that non-profits like DESTA face. This arm of programming is under development and is currently being spearheaded by the DESTA Café project. The latter, which is currently a pre-employability and personal development training program, will be developed into a youth-led social enterprise in the long-term. While our core programs and activities will still require support from charitable organizations and government grants, innovative social enterprise strategies will no doubt help to create a sustainable environment from which to operate and function. They will also produce concrete employment and learning opportunities, income generation, and direct services to youth. Indeed, several of our participants have been able to successfully combine the community and business models to start socially responsible businesses of their own. This has only reinforced our decision to make this part of our overall strategy.

Building Support Networks

At DESTA, we devote much of our focus to enabling the creation of new social support networks for youth. Our services go beyond linking youth to the appropriate networks and resources. While our programs and activities are intended primarily for the youth, they encourage participation from everyone in the community, from the very young to the very old. We have seen the positive impact that this has had in bringing the community together and changing the way that the youth are viewed by others. By becoming engaged in our activities alongside DESTA's participants, many are recognizing the limitless potential and contributing role of these young people within the community.



Continued Learning

96 youth had dropped out from high school

46 youth were enrolled in the Lion Wolf School

They spent a total of 1547 hours tutoring at DESTA

12 students were successfully re-integrated into traditional educational institutions.

4 students graduated high school

26 students sat Ministry wide exams. Of these, 16 passed and earned credits towards High School completion

10 students already enrolled in formal high schools and CEGEP programs received supplementary tutoring services

A total of \$1,071 in educational subsidies were awarded to students of the Lion Wolf School

Health & Personal Development

58 youth lived in precarious housing conditions, suffered from health issues including mental health, experienced unhealthy personal relationships; faced immigration issues; or were implicated in the justice system

8 received housing support

11 received support in the form of information and referrals, accompaniment, advocacy, and informal psychosocial counseling related to health problems

23 were assisted in negotiating boundaries within relationships, reconciling and re-uniting with family members, knowing their rights, and coping with loss and grief

16 received support with legal issues

Employability

32 youth were unemployed

22 secured jobs

24 received individual support with job search endeavors, were connected to employers and mentors, and supported with their small business initiatives

4 were supported with operating small businesses

“Distance learning offers new route to success – DESTA tries to change destinies” – The Gazette, March 07, 2012

In 2012 the Continued Learning Pillar aimed to:

1. Provide academic and practical hands-on support for marginalized and disadvantaged students needing to complete their high school and/or further their education
2. Offer a personalized support system to students
3. Create innovative learning experiences that helped to develop participants' knowledge base and increase their personal capacities
4. Provide access to financial support to subsidize students' education



Lien Wolf School

STRENGTHENING BEST-PRACTICE MODELS

To address challenges related to student commitment and motivation we put in place policies and procedures for attendance, a student-created study plan, and a student-tutor communication log for both on-site and phone tutors. In the summer, we conducted an evaluation of the student-tutor communication log. The evaluation allowed us to gauge the tool's effectiveness in facilitating communication between all players and supporting the academic goals of the students. Modifications were made based on feedback, and the tool has been instrumental in supporting communication. DESTA also connected with several adult-learning focused organizations to identify best practice models that could be applied at DESTA. To support our students' learning, we began to provide healthy meals for students on a regular basis; and acquired new furniture and equipment as well as creative visuals to stimulate the classroom environment

In This Together

The “In This Together” project provided opportunities for participants to form positive associations with learning and build supportive relationships with their peers. The project constitutes modules and outings to enhance learning in core subject areas such as Science, Mathematics, French, and English. In 2012, study groups of 2-3 students studying the same subject at the same level were formed and matched with a tutor. An intergenerational outing to the Montreal Science Centre allowed youth to explore fun and interactive science exhibits while sharing the experience with their children.

Despite limited financial resources, DESTA has continued to expand in response to increasing demand for their services, especially among young mothers” – The Suburban. June 26. 2012

ENSEMBLE EN FRANÇAIS

Over the course of 8 weeks, **15** youth participated in the “Ensemble en Français” project to improve their French conversation skills. Over delectable meals such as « fondue au chocolat » and « sauté de légumes au hoisin », participants worked improved their French conversation skills while preparing easy and affordable meals. While the project received a lot of positive feedback from participants, with requests to continue the program throughout the year, it was not continued due to a lack of funding

MARCH FOR EDUCATION

In collaboration with NSBE (National Society of Black Engineers), DESTA held a “March for Education”. **Ten youth**, staff, and volunteers distributed information and brought awareness to residents of the Little Burgundy community about the educational opportunities and resources available to students.

Digital Arts and Literacy

Thirty-three youth attended Concordia’s Digital Arts class in 2012. In addition to attending the class, **4** of the youth participated in a film-making workshop. In the Digital Arts program, youth learned how to utilize software such as Photoshop and Illustrator to edit and merge images, design logos, create collages, and even make their own business cards. Participants were also supported in their personal projects, which included song recording and editing, printing logos on clothing, making personal websites, and designing cd covers.

FILM-MAKING WORKSHOP

Faculty Lecturer, Israel Dupuis, and two film students from Concordia University’s Department of Design and Computation Arts worked collaboratively with **4** young men to create a film depicting their experiences, entitled “Getting through the Struggle”. Throughout the workshop the participants learned how to make a film from the ground up. Some skills that the participants acquired include story-boarding, the basic functioning of a digital camera, how to make sure a camera is focused, how to take high quality pictures, and video-editing. The level of investment and dedication that the participants demonstrated was truly outstanding.



In 2012 Personal Development Pillar:

1. Improved physical and mental health
2. Provide information and referrals; and offer informal counselling and accompaniment.
3. Engaged youth in civic participation
4. Increased cross cultural awareness and fostered acceptance of diversity amongst peers

The Youth Worker

In 2012, DESTA welcomed a new Youth Worker to the team in direct response to the numerous unmet needs of youth underscored in our 2011 research study. The Youth Worker is a licensed counselor who provides frontline, culturally-sensitive, one-on-one support to youth. She works closely with youth to help them navigate housing, family, health, and legal issues. This is done through informal psycho-social counselling, information & referrals, accompaniment, advocacy, and follow-up. One challenge we encounter is supporting our students' academic and employment needs when their basic needs related to housing, family, and health are not being met. Thus the one-on-one support services that the Youth worker provides are critical to maximizing the positive impact of our programs under the Continued Learning and Employability pillars.

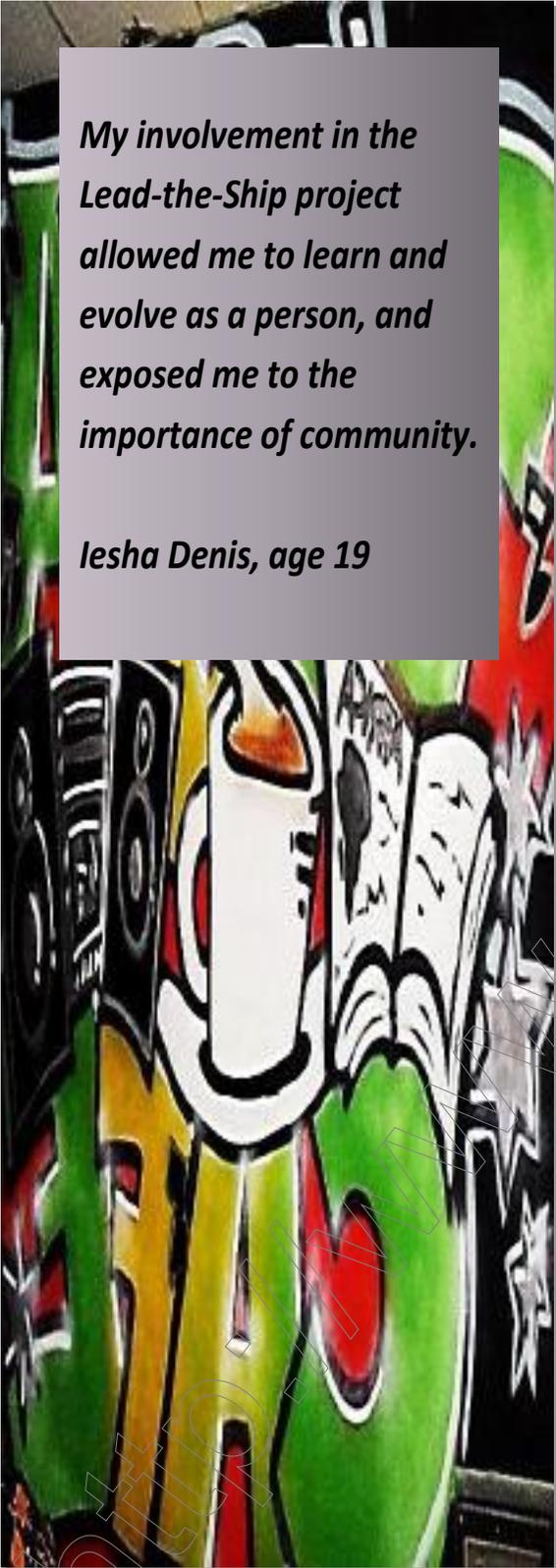
The Lead-the-Ship Project

The Lead-the-Ship project responded to the findings of the aforementioned research project to help at-risk youth:

- Identify and develop their capacity for leadership
- Reflect critically about the issues affecting them and their communities as well as their current coping strategies
- Mobilize to develop and participate in concrete social actions that will begin the process of change in their lives and in their communities

Activities of the project spanned 4 key areas, identified by participants as being most relevant to their goals included the following: Leadership Training, Civic Participation & Advocacy, Team Building, and Fundraising. While the targeted population was marginalized youth between the ages of 18 and 25, the project reached a wide cross-section of the community's population, including elders, and the children of our participants. Through the **16 events** that were held, we reached **522 people**.





My involvement in the Lead-the-Ship project allowed me to learn and evolve as a person, and exposed me to the importance of community.

Ilesha Denis, age 19

Lead-the-Ship Launch 2012

Little Burgundy Annual Awards

Press Conference on Racial Profiling

Movie Screening of "The Help"

Insertion Program Information Session

Documentary Screening: Black Power Mixtape

Karaoke & Dominoes Night

Youth Discussion Forum: What success looks like for Black youth in Montreal

Health & Wellness Day

Documentary Screening: Revolution Underground

Movie & Discussion

Lead-the-Ship Dinner

"Harlem Duet" (play)

Affordable Housing Workshop

[DESTA Gets Fit](#)

In partnership with Concordia University's EV Fitness Centre, "**DESTA Gets Fit**" promotes physical fitness as a means of achieving overall health (mental and physical). Led by DESTA's Youth Worker, participants attend weekly sessions at the Gym. In 2012, 45- minute yoga classes were introduced to the program, and have been appreciated by participants. Participants have also been motivated to go to the gym on their own time to work out independently, or with their peers, showing initiative and a heightened awareness of the importance of regular physical activity.

In 2012 the Employability Pillar aimed to:

1. Increase employment skills, and knowledge of the work environment
2. Provide opportunities and access to job experiences
 3. Increase financial literacy
4. Connect youth to employers and existing resources
5. Facilitate entrepreneurial training

Individual Support Services

DESTA linked youth to employers while providing them with consistent support throughout their period of employment. Youth were provided with individual assistance in job search activities (ex: interview preparation, CV and cover letter creation, navigation of employment centres and online job banks), and mentorship in their small business endeavours. DESTA also provided one-on-one coaching on workplace etiquette and connected participants to programs that increase job skills and provide pre-employability training. In particular, DESTA connected **five** participants to an employment reinsertion program offered by Emploi Québec. The program was targeted to English-speaking youth who faced barriers to employment. Youth were immersed in French workplace settings, participated in an intensive French language course, and developed concrete skills in a specific trade. The five youth received continuous support from DESTA throughout the program. Four out of the five successfully completed the program.

DESTA Café

In 2012, the DESTA Café project provided learning and recreation opportunities, a safe space to study and socialize, and skill training in the areas of employment and personal development.

COMMUNITY EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

To celebrate the summer, we held **two BBQ and Dominoes Nights**, in which participants helped to create an opportunity for their peers, families and the community to have two fun-filled evenings together. **“Family Day at St. Zotique Beach”** was dedicated to providing the youth and their families with an opportunity to escape the city and enjoy a day of fun and bonding on the beach. DESTA Café took part in the **Annual Little Burgundy Festival** to celebrate the community and showcase its delicious home-made foods. Before closing for the holidays DESTA Café treated all participants and volunteers to a **holiday party**, DESTA style.



“In my search for employment, DESTA was with me every step of the way. Through their one-on-one support, I was linked to a full-time pre-employment training program. I was able to continue my studies at DESTA at night while participating in this program. I’m on my way to achieving both my academic and professional goals.” - Kami Noel, age 22

SKILL TRAINING: EMPLOYMENT, ENTREPRENEURIAL, AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the latter part of 2012, DESTA joined forces with IBIS (International Benevolent Initiatives), an international non-profit organization that aims to provide underprivileged youth with the solid infrastructure they need to optimize their potential. The partnership focused on sharing best practice models and pooling resources to develop the employment, entrepreneurial, and personal development training component of the DESTA Café project. In addition, information/outreach sessions were held to assess interest in the employment, entrepreneurial and personal development training component.

HEALTHY MEALS AND NUTRITION WORKSHOPS

In March 2012, DESTA hired a DESTA Café project participant as its new Nutrition Coordinator. This was made possible through the Emploi Québec Subventions Salaires grant. The recruitment of a Nutrition Coordinator allowed the DESTA Café project to begin offering free and nutritious meals twice a week to all DESTA participants. The Coordinator also provided 2 educational workshops on nutrition-related topics such as “Healthy Cooking on a Budget”.



In 2012 the Fundraising Department aimed to:

1. Secure Adequate Funding to ensure the sustainability of the organization
2. Increase volunteer support to ensure maximum support for the fundraising department
 3. Increase DESTA's visibility and reach
4. Create a range of fundraising tools to support the above goals and all fundraising activities

Communication and Reach

In 2012, we continued to sustain, strengthen, and form new relationships with Funders and supporters. Through the distribution of quarterly newsletters and program reports, we were able to keep our funders informed about programming. Both our website, which is regularly updated and official Facebook page were revamped and shared with Funders. All publications such as our Annual Report, quarterly newsletters, and research study were made more easily accessible on our website to increase accountability

DESTA Fest



DESTA kicked off the summer by hosting its 3RD annual gala at Les Entrepots Dominion. The event, aptly titled DESTA FEST this year, saw over 350 guests and raised \$70,000. Proceeds from this annual benefit go towards DESTA's programs and services for youth. DESTA would like to extend a heart-felt thanks to the DESTA FEST Committee, without whom this spectacular night would not have been possible. The committee consisted of a group of extraordinary volunteers who worked tirelessly for months to make this event

a success. This annual event engages community, business, and government and embodies the importance of social responsibility. The event is also an opportunity for the youth to play the role of DESTA ambassadors, networking with guests and demonstrating their leadership skills.

ALDO Makeover

Every year, the ALDO group gives back to its community by furnishing, beautifying and greening local community centers and groups around the world. In 2012, ALDO's "Extreme Makeover" team came to DESTA. Forty ALDO employees teamed up to revamp DESTA's spaces in less than 8 hours. The end results were a re-energized DESTA Café space, community kitchen, meeting room, and tutoring room. The youth who worked alongside the ALDO team to renovate the spaces were able to see an example of giving back. The initiative also validated to youth that people care.

Holiday Appeal

In 2012, DESTA launched its first-ever Holiday Giving Campaign. The campaign which was executed through direct mail, raised over \$12,958 surpassing our target of \$10,000.

Visibility

"BLACK YOUTH FIND SUPPORT IN LITTLE BURGUNDY'S DESTA NETWORK"

In February, DESTA was featured on the CTV Montréal News. The short segment looked at how DESTA came to be, and how youth who came to DESTA hoping for a new start have been successful in making positive changes in their lives.

"DISTANCE LEARNING OFFERS NEW ROUTE TO SUCCESS"

In March, DESTA's Lion Wolf School was featured in the Montréal Gazette. The article follows two students of the Lion Wolf School and the great strides they've made in achieving their academic goals.

"DESTA BLACK YOUTH NETWORK HOSTS THIRD ANNUAL GALA"

In June 2012, DESTA's Annual Fundraising Gala, DESTA Fest, was covered by an article in the Suburban. The article highlights of success of the fundraiser, as well individual accomplishments of DESTA youth, like our newest Board Member and Youth Representative, Imaan Browne.

"A PLACE TO BELONG"

In November 2012, the McGill Daily published an inspirational article about DESTA. The article takes the reader through the challenges and milestones that DESTA has passed and speaks of the importance of organizations like DESTA in the community.

Volunteer Development

In 2012, we engaged volunteers through volunteer fairs, community events, our partnerships with volunteer networks and youth groups, and through our promotional tools. **Forty-nine** volunteers invested **1701 hours** over the course of our fiscal year in direct program-based support. **Twenty** volunteers invested over **200 hours** in Fundraising and Board Directorship. Volunteers were oriented through a series of volunteer orientation sessions. Tutors, who constitute the majority of our volunteer base, were also equipped with tutor orientation guides.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS IN 2012

African Canadian Development and Prevention Network
African Students Association of Concordia
Ami Québec
Apathy is Boring
Batshaw Youth and Family Services
Carrefour jeunesse-emploi Sud Ouest
Centre de santé et de services sociaux du Sud-Ouest-Verdun
Community Health and Social Services Network
Concordia University's Dans la rue project, Concordia University
Eastern Townships School Board
Eco-Quartier Sud-Ouest
Lester B. Pearson School Board
Liikio (online tutoring platform)
Montréal Diet Dispensary
Montréal Jewish General Psychiatry Department
Organik
Pavillon Foster
SEDE (Social Equity and Diversity Education Office), McGill University
SPVM
The Word Project
University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Ville de Montréal

High School Completion

One challenge over the past year has been student commitment and motivation. To address this, we have implemented policies and procedures for attendance, a student-created study plan, and a student/ volunteer tutoring session log. These tools, in conjunction with providing students with nutritious snacks and bus tickets when needed, have made a difference. However, the length of time needed for students to successfully complete a course can be daunting, with some students taking 5 to 9 months per course. This challenge is both individual and structural; many of our students begin their courses lacking the basic pedagogical skills needed to succeed. This fact, coupled with the challenge of needing 52 credits to graduate - with many having achieved less than 15 credits - makes the process difficult. In addition, many of our students arrive with learning difficulties that have not been previously identified or addressed in the conventional education system. Without the necessary resources needed to assess their learning abilities, many continue to struggle with the curriculum despite the individualized support offered at DESTA.

Another major challenge continues to be supporting our students' academic needs when their basic daily needs are not being met. To mitigate this challenge, our Youth worker has played a key role by providing students with informal psycho-social support, information, advocacy, and referrals.

Core Government Funding

Over 2011 and 2012, DESTA has been working to secure government funding to sustain core programs. One obstacle remains the requirement to create new projects and alter existing models to apply for certain government grants. As community workers who work on the frontlines, we are able to shape our interventions according to our growing understanding of the direct needs of the youth. We are thus faced with the difficult choice of making changes to existing interventions that have had positive impact with the youth, or seeking alternative sources of funding. The requirement to create new projects for grant opportunities also mean re-allocating limited resources from current projects into new ones. We continue to collaborate with government to explore ways in which we can mitigate these challenges and access important funding opportunities.

Human Resources

DESTA continues to be understaffed. Our top priority is to find the financial resources that will allow us to increase our human resources. In keeping with the recommendations from the 2011 Operational Review and Assessment of our organization, we initiated the development of sub-committees under the Board to oversee Programming and Fundraising. Establishing committees to head different areas of the organization is a significant step forward. However, one challenge will be the shortage of staff to carry out the directives and plans laid out by the committees. Thus far, we have been able to offset this problem by building and maintaining a significant and skilled volunteer base.

Looking Forward



DESTA is a place for positive engagement, where youth experience healthy and constructive relationships; are introduced to new and creative forms of learning; and get a chance to re-connect with their communities and with their dreams. For many, DESTA is a place where for the first time, they feel that they belong.

Since its inception, DESTA has successfully carried out numerous community-based projects aimed at bettering the lives of these young people. The organization's strength lies in the close ties that it has built with the youth; for many, DESTA is a second home. It is also well-recognized within the community and by the many families of youth. Consequently, it has the capacity to mobilize, energize, and bring diverse groups of people together around this important cause, all while reshaping the way in which "troubled" youth are viewed by our society.

The work of supporting youth who are struggling to find a meaningful place within society is so crucial to the healthy development of our communities. By steering youth away from self-defeating and high-risk behaviours, and towards educational attainment, workplace readiness, and civic leadership, DESTA is helping to create safer, stronger, and more interconnected communities.

We firmly believe that we can achieve success through DESTA's overall strategy, outlined at the beginning of this report. That is, working through partnerships with community stakeholders; engaging youth in community development planning and programming; increasing youth advocacy within the public sphere; and looking to new and creative social enterprise solutions.