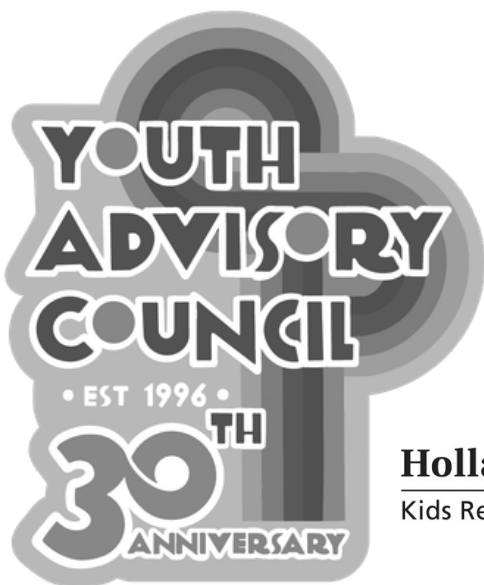


# THIS IS OUR HILL







**Holland Bloorview**  
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

Holland Bloorview's Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is a coming together of youth who have experienced health care at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto, Canada.

Our zine series highlights the history and present-day experiences of YAC members. We are creating our zines through community, collaboration, virtual work, interviews, and in-person art making. This is a way to celebrate 30 years of YAC's accomplishments and to inspire youth for years to come.

Our project is for Holland Bloorview and the broader disability community.

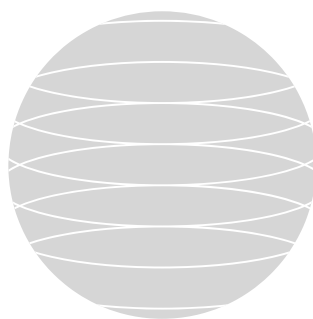
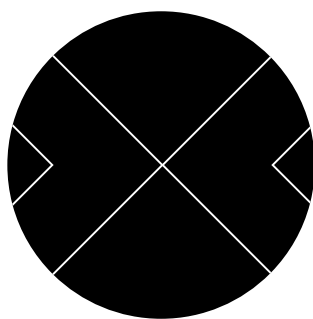
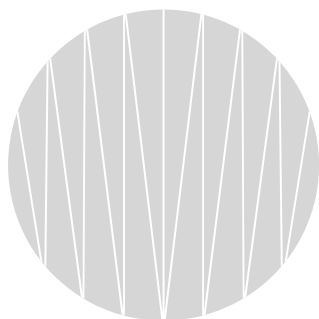


Current and former Youth Leaders of Holland Bloorview embarked on this project to visually express and document lived experiences within the disability community to celebrate 30 years of Youth Advisory Council.

As a team aspiring to be leaders, our zine collection showcases YAC's milestones and progress through creative works, stories, and reflections in four issues: Art, Advocacy, Community & Time.

This is the Advocacy issue. We hope you enjoy it!





AAFIYA

ALANNA

ALEX

DESIREE

DOLLY

EFFIE

ETHAN

JESSICA

JILLIAN

JULIA

LEXIN

MIKAYLA

NETHULYA

SAM

SINÉAD

ZOE G.

PROJECT LEAD: DOLLY MENNA-DACK

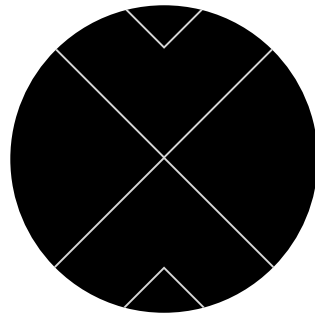
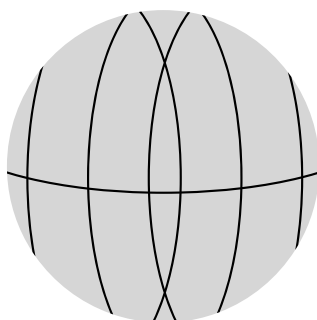
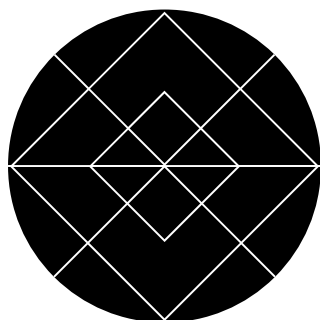
PROJECT COORDINATOR: JULIA KOWAL

ARTIST FACILITATOR & ZINEMAKER: MARY ANDERSON

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital is proud to create space where Youth Leaders may express their views and acknowledges that these views do not necessarily represent those of the organization.

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WHY JOIN YAC?

- I first joined YAC to gain volunteer hours. I then stayed as a member so my voice and experience could make real change.
- I was looking for community and a way to get involved.
- To learn from the staff at Holland Bloorview and other youth.
- To further my advocacy skills and find community.
- I joined YAC to give back and to give a voice to those who can't advocate for themselves.
- I joined YAC to share my lived experiences of navigating pediatric to adult healthcare. To be a positive role model and a sense of hope for those navigating that journey.
- I joined YAC to help.
- To give back to Holland Bloorview, a community that has given me so much.
- I joined YAC to find community and make a difference.
- To engage with and learn about future steps of the hospital and how service can be improved for youth and families alike.

- I wanted an accessible way to get back into youth leadership positions that I was either unable to access or were too difficult to manage following my injury.
- I wanted to learn more and share my experiences within the disability and healthcare environments.
- I joined the Youth Advisory Council to be a part of the team that shaped my future.
- YAC reminds us that we are all just human, and we need and want to be accepting and understanding to a variety of abilities and levels.
- To feel confidence, see other youth, find work, and discover new opportunities that I may not be able to outside of Holland Bloorview.



# INTERVIEW WITH ZOE G., BY MIKAYLA

**Mikayla:** Hi Zoe, thanks so much for being here with me.

**Zoe G:** Hi Mikayla. Thank you very much for taking the time to interview me. I really appreciate it, and I'm excited to be here.

**Mikayla:** I'm excited to interview you. We'll just dive right in. So I'm wondering, what first motivated you to get involved with Youth Advisory?

**Zoe G:** I first found out about Youth Advisory when I was coming to Holland Bloorview as a client, and I think I saw a poster on the 2nd floor, in the waiting room, or maybe it was online. There was something in the waiting room that triggered me to go online to look. And then I found out about Youth Advisory Council (YAC). After my injury, there were a lot of things that I couldn't do anymore, and a lot of friends that I kind of lost, and a lot of experiences that I used to be able to have, but then couldn't. I had lost out on a lot of the community that I once had. So what I was looking for was community and friendships. And I was looking for a place where I felt like I belonged again.

**Mikayla:** Wow, that's really meaningful. Thank you for sharing that with me. And do you feel like you have gotten that so far?

**Zoe G:** It's why I keep coming back, for sure. I feel like I've made such good friends.

**Mikayla:** Amazing. What would you say your first impressions were when you became a new member?

**Zoe G:** I think I was nervous at first. I didn't really know what I was getting myself into. I was just like, "Oh, I hope this works out, and I hope I can find some people who may have similar or different experiences than me, and maybe they'll want to be my friend. Maybe we'll like the same things and we'll get to do things together." But I don't think I expected what it is. It turned out to be more. We work towards projects and goals, and I think that's really cool, and that's what I have come to really appreciate and love. Everyone was welcomed in my first meeting. I felt really good.

**Mikayla:** How has your relationship with YAC changed as Chair?

**Zoe G:** I think there's something to be said about an organization where as a general member, you don't feel that there's a hierarchy, and you don't feel like you're excluded. When I was a general member and I didn't have an executive role, I never felt any different. And I think that's really important. It's about making people feel like this is a place for them and they're wanted. As the leader, I want to be somebody that's approachable and helps others feel like they're in community. That's the way I felt when I was a general member. When there's more contribution and we get new voices and we get new people involved, I think that's what success feels like. When we have those meetings where we're able to engage the whole group and everyone's interested and involved, that feels really good to me because it feels like I've made community.

**Mikayla:** That's amazing. And I think those are such important values that you bring and they always shine through. What do you consider to be the most meaningful thing about being the current YAC Chair?

**Zoe G:** When I'm able to start those conversations and try to bring new people in. There's always room for improvement. I'm sure there are things that I could be doing better, but that's my favourite part of the role. It's about offering different ways to engage the wider community. Big projects like the zine project are really cool, but for me, I think the wins are the monthly ones, you know? It's hearing from individuals, it's when people feel comfortable to come up and approach me and talk to me, and engage in meetings. It's the more everyday stuff that I think is more impactful.

**Mikayla:** That's great. What do you think is one question you would ask a former YAC Chair if you could ask anything?

**Zoe G:** I'd want to know what their goals for the year were. What made them feel most successful in achieving their goals. And then maybe if they had any advice for me, I'd really appreciate feedback. One thing about me is I like feedback, and I would even go as far as I like critical feedback.

**Mikayla:** What piece of advice would you give a future YAC Chair?

**Zoe G:** To not be afraid to ask people if you want their opinions or engagement – offering different ways for people to get involved and then ultimately just asking, and if they're not interested, that's okay too. But just giving the option, inviting people into the conversation.

**Mikayla:** What do you think about looking ahead? What do you hope lies ahead for Youth Advisory Council?

**Zoe G:** Continued growth. I hope that Youth Advisory is able to engage more youth. I hope that we are able to adapt and change and get better at broadening our scope and offering more diverse ways to connect with different people so that we can accommodate a greater community. And that could be outside of Holland Bloorview too.

**Mikayla:** What is your fondest memory of YAC to date?

**Zoe G:** My two favourite meetings of the year are always our final celebration meeting and our Capes for Kids meeting. Every year we decide what we're going to propose and what we're going to do for our fundraising contribution. The highlights for me are honestly the little moments, though – when I hear from somebody new and they share something that I didn't know before. I think it's so nice that we are able to create a space where they feel safe enough to contribute those things. Sometimes they're real truths about being a young person who's disabled, and I think that's amazing that they feel that safety in our community.

**Mikayla:** As YAC Chair, what do you think you're most proud of right now?

**Zoe G:** I am one of those people that doesn't tend to self acknowledge as much as I should. If there's one thing that I hope that people feel that I've done well is that I hope people feel seen.

**Mikayla:** Yeah, I think that comes across in how you communicate with people.

**Zoe G:** Thanks.

**Mikayla:** You're welcome. Is there one anecdote or memory that you think best highlights why YAC is so impactful and special to you?

**Zoe G:** There are so many. I'm trying to think of one. I'll start with something that is special to me. At the most recent YAC meeting, which was our Capes for Kids meeting – those moments where everybody's in the chat, sharing ideas, unmuting their mic, so eager to participate. That feels like YAC. When I think of YAC, I think of a community of people where everybody's sharing ideas. That's what's most special to me – those little moments with my peers.

Something that I think of when I think of YAC's impact, is a couple of years back, we had a group come in for a consult and what ended up happening is by the end, I remember their leader said, "Wow, we're gonna have to go back to the drawing board entirely, this was such great feedback." And that's what I think YAC does. I think good research starts with primary research. And for groups, individuals, researchers, or clinicians – whoever it is that's coming in for a consult – to come in and realize, oh my gosh, what I've spent all this time on did not include the end user at all. It didn't include their perspectives, it didn't include their voices. Or maybe they realized that it did, and they're right on, they're on the right track and that's awesome.

YAC does a great job of advocating for us – making sure that programs or research that goes out into the future is reflective of our experiences, which is so valuable. So that the next generation has it a little bit better. That's what I think it's about. It's about using our experiences to ensure that somebody else has a smoother transition or a little bit of an easier time.

**Mikayla:** Well, it's been a pleasure to hear your perspectives on Youth Advisory as a whole, and your experiences as Chair. Before we wrap up, I was wondering if there's anything I haven't asked you that you wanted to highlight today?

**Zoe G:** No, I don't think that you've missed anything. Thanks so much for an amazing interview. I really appreciate the time you put in to formulate these questions. And thank you for listening to my responses. Thank you for being such a great friend.

**Mikayla:** Oh, you're so welcome. It was a pleasure. Thank you!



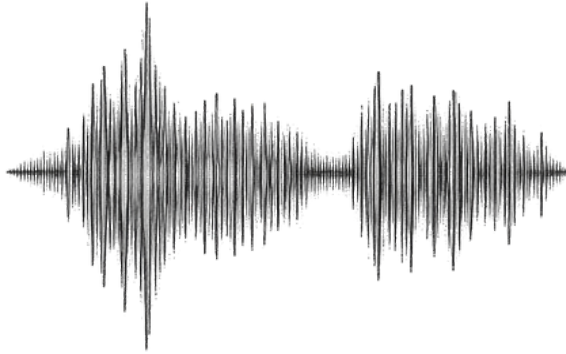
ART WORK BY LEXIN ZHANG

# MANIFESTO RECORDINGS

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What does disability advocacy mean to you?  
What accomplishments are you most proud of?  
What are your dreams for the future?

# AAFIYA

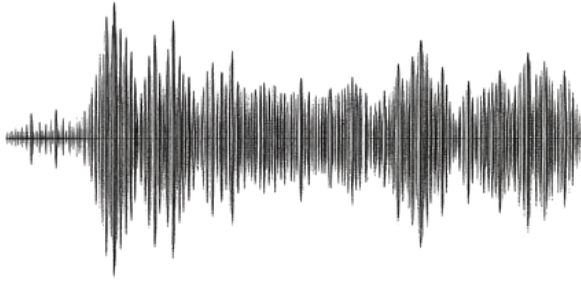


Disability advocacy means speaking up for people who can't. It's a chance to give back and show my support for my community. This means standing up for not only what you believe in, but what others who might not be able to project their voice be heard and seen.

For me, the layout change on the second floor near the fishtank was the most meaningful to me. As a child, I spent countless hours in that area and being a part of the layout change felt outstanding.

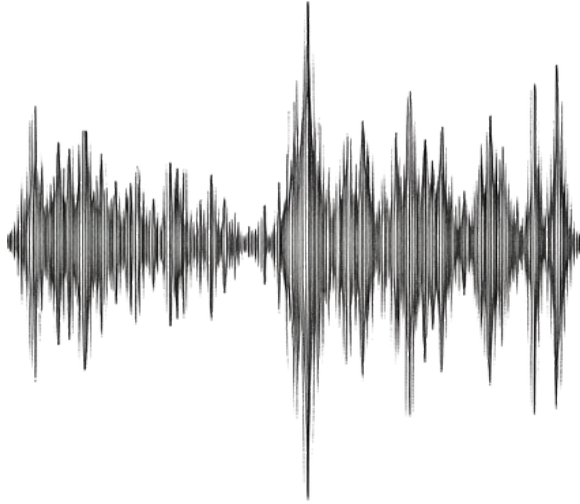
One big advocacy dream I have is to personally lead younger youth to becoming advocates themselves. I would love to have workshop-led classes to direct youth to becoming advocates for whatever they want to stand up for.

# ALANNA



I feel like advocacy means to me is when you use your voice to speak out against the government who has wronged basic human rights. And you help create an understanding between opposing parties and opposing opinions.

# ALEX

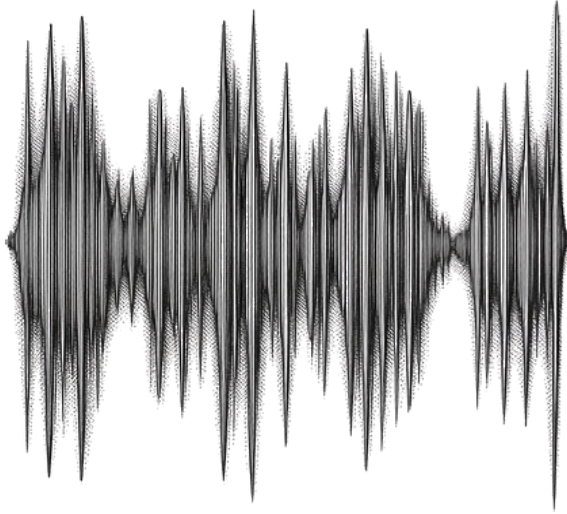


To me, disability advocacy is advocating for the wider disability community. It also includes that people with disabilities get what they need and want in order to live a fulfilling life.

The accomplishment that I am most proud of when it comes to YAC is becoming a better advocate – not only for YAC itself, but for people outside of YAC, as well. I believe my time at YAC has helped me to pursue professional opportunities for advocacy work, but also YAC has been helpful with my ability to feel confident as an advocate.

In the future, I am hoping to do some more work in sexuality and disability, which is the area I am passionate about – not only with advocacy work, but also by educating others.

# ETHAN

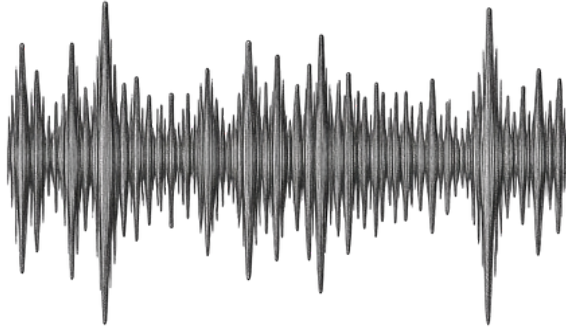


Disability advocacy means making it clear that one can still succeed even with a disability. It can come in many forms, such as making zines, speaking at events, having YAC discussions, and voting on bills and laws. Doing what others say you cannot can be a form of disability advocacy. Competing in an athletic competition or the like can be a form of this for some.

As a YAC member, I am very proud of making a video recording for schools to help with disability accommodations, and also being interviewed on several occasions for news articles. I have met many new people here I am glad to know.

I hope to continue to advocate for autism with YAC and elsewhere after I leave it. I will continue to study at university and look to obtain jobs where I can demonstrate my skills.

# JESSICA

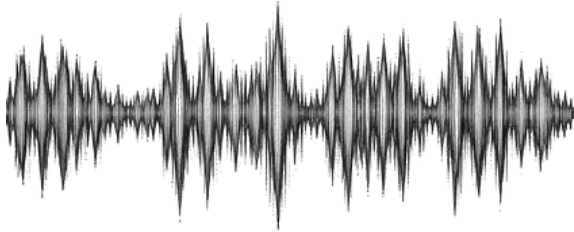


To me, disability advocacy means promoting the idea that the thoughts of all individuals should be equally considered regardless of the methods they need to be able to support them in getting these perspectives out in the world. In disability advocacy, we strive to request accessibility in physical, psychological, and social domains to ensure individuals are not restricted.

In YAC, I am most proud of the information sharing to future Youth Advisory Councils with YAC being the standard of how positive healthcare and hospital Youth Advisory Councils can be and what they can mean for people. I am so proud that Holland Bloorview's Youth Advisory Council is an innovator and standard for giving disabled youth a voice and a place for all of us to find community and share our knowledge to help others.

My advocacy dream is that all individuals have a way to participate, learn, and share in education, healthcare, and social activism in whatever ways they need. The goal is for everyone to be able to provide their thoughts with supports, resources, time, and energy to give back and to take it all in that they are able to, and in all of the ways they want to be able to contribute back, as well.

# JILLIAN

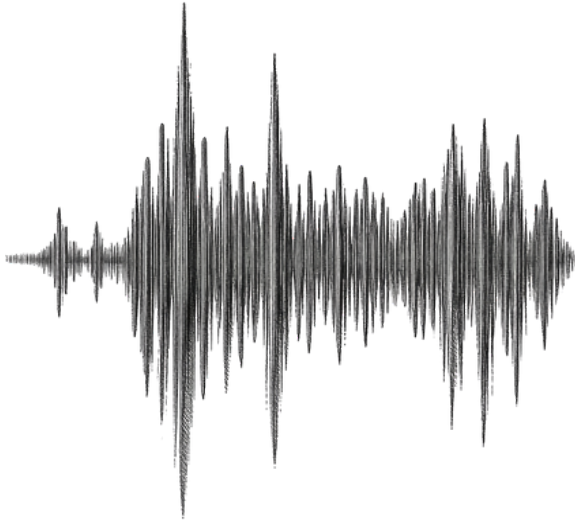


Disability advocacy is my life raft. Without knowing how to advocate for my needs, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere in life.

Disability advocacy is survival. It is paving your own way in a world not built with you in mind.

For the future of advocacy, I hope that disabled individuals will be considered in major issues alongside others, instead of as an afterthought.

# LEXIN

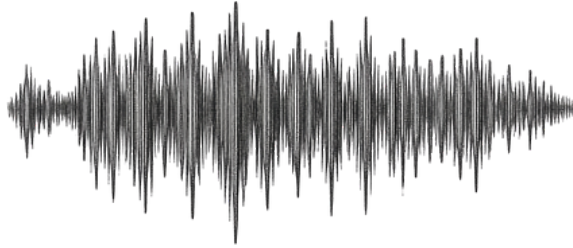


Disability advocacy is making space for people with disabilities in a society that doesn't give that space.

Being able to use art to build awareness around youth with disabilities, share stories which allows them to have a voice.

Make disability artwork that gets exposure from the general public.

# MIKAYLA

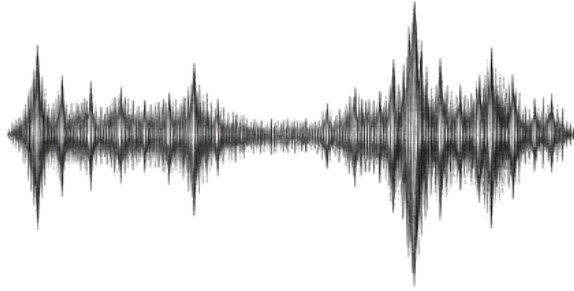


Disability advocacy means harnessing my voice and perspectives to highlight my lived experience and in turn, influence positive change. It means working within a community and striving to not only alter perspectives broadly, but also learn from those within my community. The goal with my advocacy is to disrupt the status quo perspectives that uphold ableist structures within a society.

I am most proud of building community within YAC and seeing new members flourish and develop their voices. I have also enjoyed and find satisfaction with contributing to the language used across various campaigns. I found my contributions to the sexuality and disability project particularly impactful in addressing a taboo subject that isn't often discussed.

I want to see my advocacy and my work as an OT blend more seamlessly and see how both lived experience and a health care background can contribute to new pathways for my advocacy. I would also like to see the blending of advocacy with other marginalized lived experiences and identities.

# NETHULYA

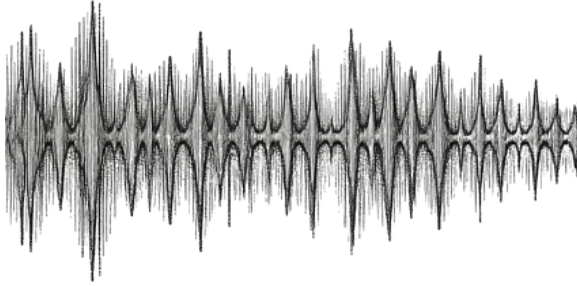


Access to accessibility supports and services.

Advocating for accessibility and supports for people with disabilities.

My dream is to become a role model for other children and youth with disabilities to achieve their goals and dreams, as well.

# SAM



Disability advocacy means to use my experience to improve the experiences of others. Advocacy also means speaking up for what I need in order to live day to day. For example, if a door is too heavy and I can't open it or I need furniture to be moved in a room.

One of the accomplishments that I am most proud of is being a part of the door accessibility project. A lot of the doors at the hospital are heavy and I was able to consult on the doors that should have a wave button. And then one of the other accomplishments in general was that I was able to find a community here and learn how to trust my voice.

One of my advocacy dreams is to continue to use my voice and tell my stories in ways that can help others. I'm interested in – if I can find ways to teach others about how to treat people with disabilities.

# ALL ABOUT ME AND CEREBRAL PALSY



A BOOK BY DESIREE  
DA COSTA

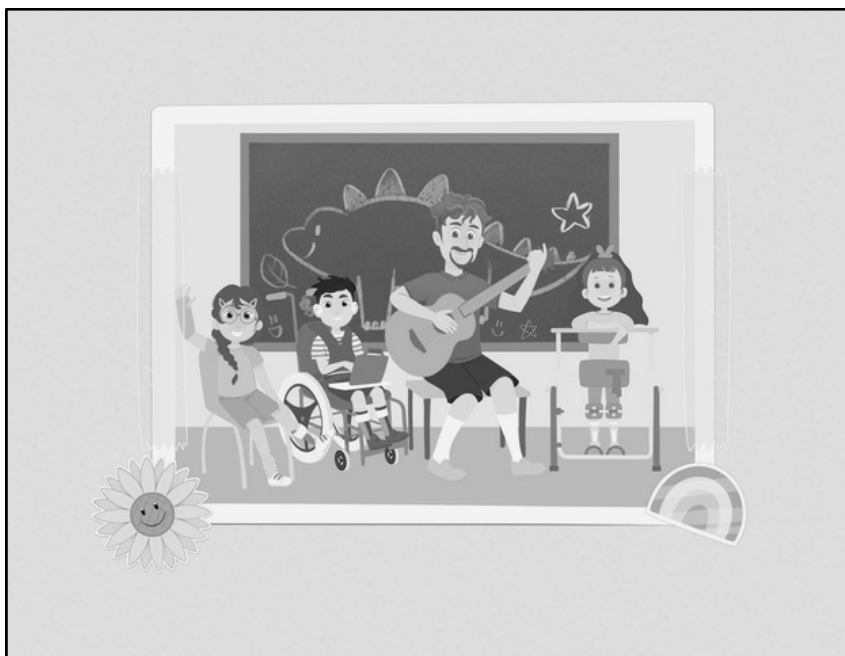
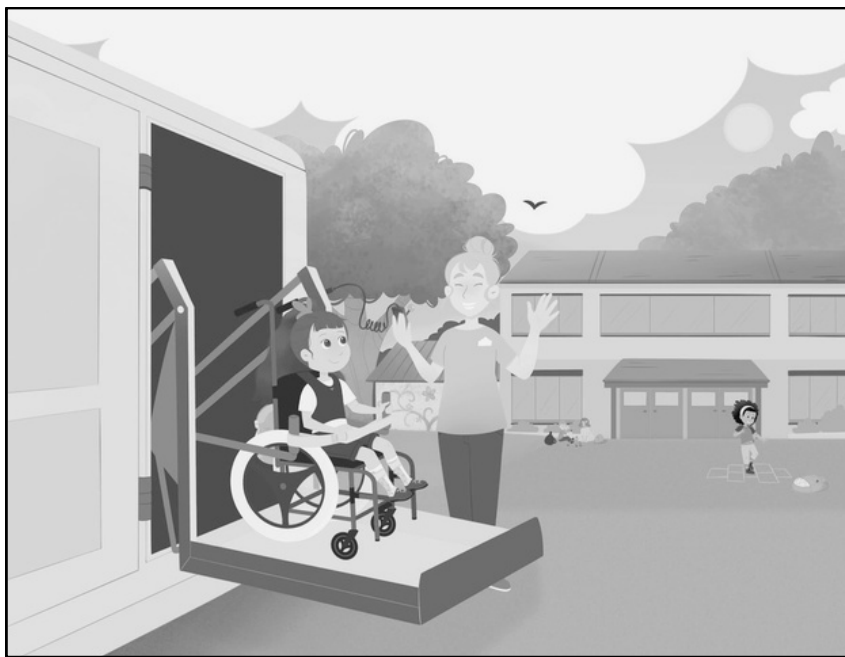
The idea of this book came about during the pandemic. I was bored one day and said I'm going to write a children's book. I decided on the topic of cerebral palsy because there aren't enough children's books that represent kids with disabilities. The whole writing took about 2-3 hours, saved on a word document. As I've never published a book before, I just saved it and set it aside with hopes that maybe I could publish it one day with no rush or pressure.

A year later a friend of mine suggested I read an autobiography written by an adult with CP, who she used to babysit as a child. I was able to contact the author and he connected me with the publishing company he used for his book. The publishing process took about 10 months.

My favourite part was the creative process of developing the illustrations. I had to describe each character and every scene in great detail so the illustrator could bring my vision to life, and she sure did!

My best hope is that kids with cerebral palsy can identify with this book and others can learn from it.

-Desiree



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELEANOR MABER

**All About Me and Cerebral Palsy** is a children's book written by a former YAC member and current Holland Bloorview staff member, Desiree Da Costa.

The book is based on Da Costa's own lived experience with cerebral palsy while attending a specialized school for children with disabilities from junior kindergarten to Grade 1. With the help of her teacher, educational assistants, an occupational therapist, and a physiotherapist, Da Costa's Grade 1 classroom project involved each student creating their own version of an All About Me book to share with students at their new schools.

During her time at her new school, in Grade 2, Desiree was the only student with a physical disability. Her hope for **All About Me and Cerebral Palsy** is that other children with cerebral palsy can identify with it and use it as a teaching tool for those with and without cerebral palsy.

**All About Me and Cerebral Palsy** can be purchased on Amazon or Indigo.

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Desiree Da Costa is an accomplished developmental service worker with a keen interest in pediatric healthcare and rehabilitation. In Desiree's free time she enjoys watching hockey, baking cookies, and spending time with her dog.

Follow Desiree online @allaboutmeandcerebralpalsy.

# INTERVIEW WITH KIM JONES-GALLEY, BY AAFIYA

**Aafiya:** Hi Kim, can you tell me a little bit about yourself, and how you first came to be staff support for Youth Advisory Council (YAC)?

**Kim Jones-Galley:** A little bit about myself...I started at Holland Bloorview in 1989. I began working in what was then the recreation department. In March 1996, we first gathered to discuss creating a Youth Advisory Council. We brought a group of young people together to explore the idea, and it felt like a natural fit with the life skills work I was already doing and the youth I was supporting.

It was really about bringing youth together – I think that's sort of the strength behind it, that the youth drove it and the organization supported it. I think the first meeting was held later that May.

**Aafiya:** May I ask how many youth attended the first meeting?

**Kim Jones-Galley:** I feel like there were approximately 16 youth that came together. There was a lot of interest in it. I kept attendance lists and names of all the members we had over the years, and I think it was really well attended – lots of interest in having a Youth Advisory Council at Holland Bloorview.

**Aafiya:** And so far, it's been really successful. As you can see, we're at our 30th anniversary.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** How many people do you get at meetings now?

**Aafiya:** I would say approximately 20 participants on good days. When it's exam season, our council participants usually drop to 10–15, but it never really matters because fewer people does not mean a lack of ideas this amazing council has to offer.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Nice. And I bet because they're virtual, you get good participation.

**Aafiya:** I would have imagined virtual to be less engaging, but we're having our meetings and our youth have a lot to say, which is a good thing. What about your role with YAC was particularly impactful for you?

**Kim Jones–Galley:** I'm not sure if the phrase "nothing about us without is" is a common term, but it's something that I feel like I've always carried with me – just ensuring that the youth voice was always heard. And that it was the Youth Advisory Council, not the Kim Jones–Galley Advisory Council. It really needed to be driven by the youth, and their perspectives and their voices needed to be heard. I'm hoping 30 years ago that I supported that. I believe I did because I know that's one of the greatest things I've learned – that the youth have so much experience, and lots to say, and it's really important that they're heard and feel heard.

**Aafiya:** I feel like a lot of the things around the hospital wouldn't be possible if we had not listened – if we did not listen to the youth.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** I agree.

**Aafiya:** I think it's safe to say that youth are the reason that we have change.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Yeah. I agree.

**Aafiya:** How has your role with YAC informed your current role and focus on students?

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Well, like I was saying about ensuring that the youth voice was heard and that they felt valued – I see that in my work with our students. As the student coordinator, I do student orientation with all the college and university students that come in to do placements with our staff. And I feel like I really try to ensure that I hear them and that I'm there to support them in whatever way they may need me during their placement.

We have a student wellness program, and again, we say that it's important that it is informed by students. What do our students need when it comes to mental health and wellness support while they're on placement at Holland Bloorview? They need to inform it, they need to drive whatever work we're doing, and I believe that goes all the way back to when I first started working with young people at Holland Bloorview.

**Aafiya:** I totally agree with you. Okay, next question – what motivated youth to join and keep coming back to YAC?

**Kim Jones–Galley:** I think it's because they had ownership over the Youth Advisory Council. I'm assuming you still have leadership positions within YAC?

**Aafiya:** Currently, I am a public relations representative, and last year I was the special projects representative. I really miss the special projects role because it gave me the opportunity to make big changes. I hope in May – when we start the voting – I can nominate myself for the role again.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** That's where your passion is?

**Aafiya:** I actually got to help with the donor wall.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Oh, lovely! That's very cool.

**Aafiya:** So far, it's a really big project. As soon as you walk into the hospital, it's the first thing you see.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** I think that's a prime example where members of the Youth Advisory Council have responsibilities and jobs on the team, and then they see it come to fruition. How great does that feel that you've had such an impact on different things that are happening throughout the organization? We would do evaluations at the end of every year and one of the things we would ask is whether the timing still worked. Do you want to do meetings at a different time? And for the longest time our meetings were on Saturday nights.

**Aafiya:** Yeah, I heard about meetings until 9pm.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** So you can imagine, I'm new in my career – do you think I wanted to spend a Saturday night in a meeting? I live in Oshawa, right? I didn't really want to have to come all the way into Toronto on a Saturday night to work, but that's when the members wanted to have the meetings, so that's when the meetings were.

Again, that's an example of listening to the group – that's when they wanted the meetings so that's when we had them.

**Aafiya:** Crazy. Now we have meetings on Saturdays, but it's just on a Saturday afternoon.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** That's a bit better than a Saturday night.

**Aafiya:** I think so too. My next question for you – if you were to give one piece of advice to a future support staff for YAC, what would it be?

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Well, I think in line with everything else I've been saying – listen to what the youth have to say and step back. I think it's really easy for a staff person to come in and maybe be “the power” in the room, the final decision maker. And it's really important that the staff not take on that role – that they do step back and allow space for the youth to have the conversations, to make decisions, to support each other, and to help facilitate an environment that allows for all of that to happen.

**Aafiya:** Okay, my last question – is there a message that you would like to share with current YAC participants as we look forward?

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Absolutely. I think that their perspectives, their experiences, and their knowledge really drives change within the organization, and it will be listened to and valued. And to know that they have that power – that what they have to say does provide real impact into changes that happen within the organization – I think that's something I would hope that youth are fully aware of.

**Aafiya:** I feel like if a youth was unsure about joining YAC, and they just heard what you said, they would be sure about joining YAC.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Oh, that's lovely. Thank you for saying that.

**Aafiya:** That was really good advice. Anyways, that's all I have from my side.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Okay. I really appreciate that you reached out to me and asked for this interview. It was a time early in my career that I really enjoyed, and I'm so proud of the Youth Advisory Council, and that it has continued on for 30 years. I'm really excited about the celebrations that are planned for this year.

**Aafiya:** I'm really excited too, and I'm glad I joined YAC.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** What's the best thing about it?

**Aafiya:** The best thing about it is meeting new people and sharing ideas – being around like-minded people like you, without any boundaries. Nobody questions you, they just listen. I love it.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** That's awesome.

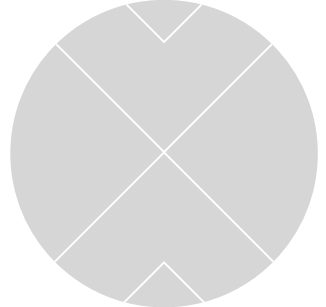
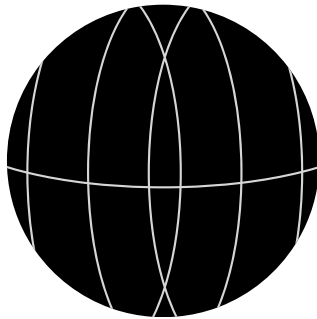
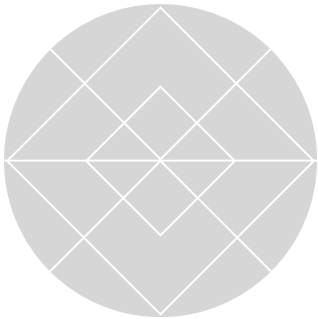
**Aafiya:** There's no wrong thing that you're saying, ever.

**Kim Jones–Galley:** Yeah. Well, that's lovely to hear from your perspective.

**Aafiya:** Well, you're welcome for that. I enjoyed meeting you today, and I appreciate you taking your time out to have this interview with me.

**Kim Jones-Galley:** Thank you! I loved meeting you, and I look forward to meeting you in person at the celebration.

disability  
advocacy  
FOR  
BY  
WITH  
youth





# PROTEST BANNER

On March 7th, 2026, YAC members designed and painted a protest banner with the following slogan: **Disability Advocacy FOR BY WITH Youth.**

The banner will be included in the celebratory exhibition at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in December 2026.



