

2019



YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AWARDEES

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



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

Established in 1990 by Past International President Leneen Forde, Zonta has given 888 awards (includes international awards), totaling US\$924,750, to 756 young women representing 56 countries.

Read to learn about Zonta International's 2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardees.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Jennifer Zhang



District 2

Citizenship: USA

Jennifer Zhang has always found student leadership to be extremely rewarding. She was her class president all four years of high school and served as the student council communications director in her senior year. She organized the cumulative fundraising of more than US\$10,000 for class activities and an online voter registration drive for students. Jennifer was also president of Model United Nations, chief editor of the yearbook, and captain and lead attorney of her school's mock trial team. In 2017, she led the team to the New York State Finals, where they placed sixth out of 350 teams. In addition to these leadership roles, Jennifer was active in her school's National Honor Society, National French Honor Society, and speech and debate team.

In August 2018, Jennifer attended the Youth 20 (Y20) Summit in Argentina with the Model Group of 20 (G20) Task Force, where she participated in official discussions. She also wrote policy recommendations and led the editing process for the first position paper submitted to the Y20 and G20 on behalf of the world's teenagers. After that experience, Jennifer worked as a legal intern at the Canton Town Court, observing legal proceedings and summarizing and discussing case files with the town justice. She also volunteered for a congressional campaign in the 2018 U.S. midterm election cycle.

Jennifer is a freshman political science major at Columbia University in New York. She enjoys inspiring others, and thus would like to become involved in political organizations and student government. She also plans to keep volunteering for political campaigns and complete an internship in Congress or a federal government agency. Jennifer aspires to work as either a federal prosecutor or elected representative.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Amal Qayum



District 4

Citizenship: Canada

Amal Qayum considers it a great honor to be able to speak on behalf of students because it allows her to influence systemic change, bettering the educational experience of thousands. As the student trustee for the District School Board of Niagara, she advocated for the best interests of 36,000 students. She influenced several policy changes, specifically around student nutrition, and pushed for investments in specialized programs, giving students a competitive advantage in the workforce and their future after high school. Amal was also co-chair of the Student Trustee Senate Committee, which brought awareness to the insufficient mental health support available for students, resulting in the hiring of eight additional social workers.

Beyond her school community, Amal served as president of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA-AECO), working to influence the decisions of the provincial government and campaign for the educational needs of students across Ontario. She led the organization—the official voice of 2 million students—through the process of advocating for a new curriculum. As one of the few females of color participating in Ontario politics at such a young age, Amal delivered speeches at numerous events about the importance of young people, especially girls, being involved in civil leadership.

Amal is in her first year at Western University in London, Ontario. She is interested in economics, politics, history and world issues, and plans to pursue a doctorate in law or a master's degree in business or education. An activist within Ontario's education system, Amal aspires to a career as a civil servant in the Ministry of Education. She hopes to continue influencing systemic change at the provincial level, ensuring that Ontario's youth are set up for success. She would also like to continue volunteering with young girls—especially refugees and girls of color—to build their self-confidence and help them realize their potential. Amal envisions a time when girls participating in civil leadership or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) will no longer be a unique sight, but the new normal.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Katherine Carranza Bahena



District 6

Citizenship: USA

To Katherine Carranza Bahena, one of the most rewarding things about working with students with special needs is seeing their smiling faces and knowing she had a part in making their high school experiences unforgettable. Katherine dedicated four years to Best Buddies, a club that fosters friendships between students with and without intellectual and physical disabilities through after-school activities. She served as a club officer her sophomore year of high school and vice president and Friendship Walk fundraising manager her junior year. As a senior, she received a leadership award for her dedication to the club and was a leader at the 2019 Lincoln Way Central Special Games. Katherine also participated in Model United Nations and an immersion program, where she studied Mandarin with a language partner.

Passionate about helping Latino and immigrant communities, Katherine volunteered with the Southwest Suburban Immigrant Project (SSIP), an organization that advocates for immigrants' rights in Chicago's southwest suburbs. Through SSIP, she participated in door-to-door canvassing to encourage registered Latino voters to vote in the 2018 midterm elections, worked as a translator in citizen workshops and volunteered weekly as an assistant teacher in citizenship classes.

Katherine plans to major in political science and study immigrant and Latino communities' social and political impact in the United States. While continuing to volunteer with SSIP, she wants to also work with other immigrant rights organizations at the statewide level to push for bills and programs that aid immigrants. She would like to intern under representatives and senators in Illinois and Washington, D.C., with the goal of becoming a Congresswoman. Katherine envisions causing waves of action that help many immigrants, including her parents, and growing the voice of Latinos in government.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Alison Cohen



District 9

Citizenship: USA

Alison Cohen prides herself on being someone who can do many different types of work. She was the president of her school's speech and debate team, where she trained underclassmen and taught them the importance of empathy in argumentation. Alison was also captain of her school's volleyball team, a mentor to 6th grade students and she started a participatory budgeting program. Participatory budgeting is a democratic process of using discretionary spending that allows students to propose projects, and then the school community has debates and public presentations on the projects that ultimately culminate in a schoolwide vote.

In her sophomore year, Alison started a Girl Up Club, which promotes the health care and education of girls in developing countries. Founded by the United Nations Foundation, Girl Up is a global movement of empowered young women leaders who defend gender equality. In three years, Alison's club held seminars on feminism, raised thousands of dollars and advocated for federal policy. In her junior year, she started the Arizona coalition, which expanded the number of clubs from three to 12 and held statewide events such as a political advocacy bootcamp. Alison is also a teen adviser, representing more than 30,000 people across the world at media events and advising Girl Up on growth strategy and communications. Additionally, she was the youth town hall chair of the Tempe Mayor's Youth Council, where she helped plan a citywide conference that allows high schools to have a say in youth-centric policy, and she serves on the 1,000 Dreams Fund Student Advisory Board, a nonprofit that gives college-aged women access to micro-scholarships.

Alison is interested in the policy-making process and plans to pursue a career where she can affect the global community. With the goal of becoming a U.S. diplomat, she is studying international relations and affairs at Stanford University. She hopes to study abroad in Southeast Asia and take Hindi classes to develop her language skills. After college, Alison hopes to join the Peace Corps. Eventually, she would like to develop U.S. foreign policy in a way that promotes the interests of the United States and supports the international community in the peacemaking process.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Olivia Luxon



District 16

Citizenship: New Zealand

Olivia Luxon served as her school's prefect for community services, interfacing with organizations including City Mission, NZ Refugees, Shine and NZ Cancer Society to fundraise and create events and programs for students to learn about these organizations and how they can contribute. Passionate about helping students connect to a bigger purpose and take responsibility for positively impacting people in vulnerable positions, Olivia leads a council of 31 students who assist in implementing community service programs. As lacrosse code captain, she works with the sports manager to implement changes to improve the sport, while also representing the players. She also coaches younger students in netball and volunteers with the Junior School Student Services and the Ethics Committee.

Olivia is passionate about raising awareness of crises such as human trafficking and wants to lead the way for people to see how they can become part of the solution. In 2018, she was appointed youth ambassador for Tearfund, a nongovernmental organization that advocates for poor, vulnerable and oppressed people. This role has allowed Olivia to combine her personal experience of visiting with trafficked girls in Manila and anti-trafficking organizations in Thailand and Nepal with her public speaking and media skills to speak on behalf of these vulnerable and abused women. She has presented at schools, churches, large fundraisers, a social justice conference, and on television and radio. Olivia also volunteers with JH Aotearoa, running camps that build relationships between parents and their children. Many guests are from vulnerable communities and dysfunctional families, and they leave the camps with restored and stronger relationships that they take back to their communities.

Olivia is currently attending Auckland University with a focus on sociology and psychology, complimenting her desire to keep fighting for social justice. She continues in her role as youth ambassador with Tearfund, and she is developing her public speaking and media skills to equip her to take on more media responsibilities for the organization. Olivia has a passion for photography and plans to use her skill to bring the stories and images of the women she has met to life.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Breanna Ng



District 17

Citizenship: United States

Breanna Ng is proud of how she has made a difference in her school. She is president of the Good Hope School Z Club, where she strives to raise awareness about gender equality. As president, she has given speeches about feminism, organized a self-defense workshop and Mother's Day charity sale and more. Breanna is also coordinator of the liberal studies club. She has arranged visits to the MA Hang Prison, Legislative Council and Independent Commission Against Corruption of Hong Kong, which enhanced students' understanding and interest in serving society as responsible citizens. As a result, these students have started to pay more attention to social needs, take pride in their identities as females and are willing to advocate for their rights. Through these roles, Breanna has also strengthened her communication and problem-solving skills.

Breanna volunteered for the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups as a spokesperson for a live webcast of a program called "Youth Speak." With the goal of solving her city's housing shortage, she presented her findings and had meaningful conversations with government officials on the issue of land supply in Hong Kong. Breanna also participated in Nature Works Hong Kong, where she conducted a project aimed at raising awareness on environmental protection and significantly reducing waste production in the community. Additionally, she has joined various activities held by Plan International Hong Kong, taught English to students in mainland China and organized several activities at the local community center to promote environmental awareness among the elderly.

Passionate about politics and policymaking, Breanna would like to pursue a Juris Doctorate and Master of Science in global studies and international relations at a university in the United States. She hopes to one day work for the United Nations in the Political, Peace and Humanitarian Job Network (POLNET) or for an international nongovernmental organization, providing legal support for the discussion and execution of various measures tackling non-humanitarian issues and speaking out on behalf of women and children. Breanna also wants to continue her work for Zonta International, bringing people together to improve society and advocate for more support, positivity and empowerment for women.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Claudette Wilson



District 18

Citizenship: Ghana

Claudette Wilson has had many leadership opportunities, but her most notable is serving as her high school's head prefect. In addition to ensuring that the disciplinary standards of the school were met by the student body, she led the prefects to ensure that they worked effectively and in unison. She also served as the CEO of her school's consortium club, which encourages students to cultivate their entrepreneurial skills. As the club's leader, Claudette oversaw the expansion of its social outreach and it began donating supplies to a local orphanage. Both experiences allowed her to make a positive impact on her community and gave her a deeper understanding of her social responsibilities.

Claudette led a multi-pronged community service project entitled Pamoja, meaning "together." Over the course of one year, the project aimed to raise funds to start a microfinance scheme that could financially bolster female farmers in the predominantly agricultural village of Aklamador. The village's women lack modern tools and therefore struggle to profit from their produce. The club's goal was to lend women funds so they could buy the necessary tools and earn a profit, causing a ripple effect that could potentially break the cycle of poverty in Aklamador. Claudette organized various events, raising GH¢76,000 (approximately US\$14,000). She also co-founded the You Foundation, which raised money to donate beds and stationery to an underfunded and understaffed youth correction facility.

Claudette plans to study biomedical sciences and then attend medical school, specializing in neurosurgery. An internship at a renowned hospital in Accra allowed her to interact with medical professionals and inspired her to want to study neurosurgery and become the first female neurosurgeon in Ghana. Claudette is determined to break the glass ceiling in this field, as she knows it will put her in an optimal position to make a significant impact on society. Frustrated by financial restraints causing a lack of access to health care for some people, she wants to volunteer for charities that advocate for quality health care for everyone.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Khushi Shelat



District 22

Citizenship: Australia

Khushi Shelat has participated in a wide range of leadership- and teamwork-related activities, developing invaluable skills in networking, public speaking, time management and teamwork. She founded and directed the first-ever TEDx event held at a Queensland state school and was captain of a team that designed a life-saving wearable device, which won the global pitch award in the Conrad Spirit of Innovation Challenge at NASA Kennedy Space Center. Khushi was also a founding member and public relations manager for her school's STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) outreach club and coached junior teams in debating. Through these experiences, she has developed a passion for genuine social impact and a love of challenges.

Khushi directed ChangeMakeHer, Australia's only youth-led and youth-founded social enterprise focused on empowering young women in STEM careers, innovation and entrepreneurship. Her passion for equality in the workplace and a growing love for enterprise led Khushi to establish the global interview series #FutureHer, run the Dynamite hackathon for teenagers and organize the 2018 EmpowHer conference. The event brought together high school girls across Queensland for a full day of inspirational panelists, keynote speakers, interactive workshops and networking opportunities. Khushi also represented her electorate as the Youth Member for Algester in the 2019 Youth Parliament, speaking on helping pass bills in education reform, ethical research and parliamentary quotas.

Khushi is studying business, economics and public policy at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. She hopes to eventually establish an international microfinance organization that integrates government and nongovernmental organization resources in developing nations to empower people living in poverty. To prepare, Khushi plans to further explore the world of leadership and social enterprise in the next few years by founding an organization to battle youth unemployment, designing a platform to magnify youth voices in politics, getting involved in extracurriculars and interning at large corporations.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

K.C. Prashansha



District 25

Citizenship: Nepal

Throughout her life, K.C. Prashansha has been a versatile student, believing that creativity is the only thing that makes us stand out among the 7.5 billion people in the world. Her focus, therefore, has been on her overall development by showing interest in extracurricular activities. She participated in many public speaking activities and was a member of readers club, where she produced monthly and yearly magazines, organized various public speaking events and helped a schoolmate enhance their writing and oratory skills. With a love of filmmaking, K.C. filmed, edited, narrated and wrote scripts for school video projects. She also participated in singing and dancing competitions.

K.C. is a social activist, working against child marriage and for the empowerment of women. In 2016, she began her activism by conducting research about child marriage to acquire an in-depth understanding of this human rights violation that is highly prevalent in parts of Nepal. She then organized two awareness campaigns among students, helping them to become self-aware and providing them with proper information about adolescence, reproductive health and malnutrition. K.C. held a workshop for mothers, where she spread awareness of child marriage, gender equality and reproductive health. She also held programs where she met with individual families to gain a deeper perspective about child marriage and the people who have lived through it. Additionally, she formed local youth clubs that provide a safe circle for survivors and connects them to legal authorities, and she made documentaries about child marriage.

K.C. plans to study science and technology with the goal of becoming a computer engineer. During her time in college, she will work hard to balance her academics and social activism. After earning her bachelor's degree, K.C. wants to teach information and communications technology (ICT) to girls in rural parts of Nepal. Her goal is to contribute to the welfare of women and empower girls to end social problems such as child marriage and gender inequality.



2019 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Ariane Colson



District 30

Citizenship: France

Ariane Colson is a participant in the Student Life Council of the Greater Nancy Metropolitan Area, a body of participatory democracy that is a place for dialogue and co-construction of solutions to improve students' quality of life. She is on the council as the head of a feminist student society, Politiqu'elles, which works to promote women in spheres of influence. Ariane leads weekly debates on her campus, allowing students to exchange, debate and formulate solutions. She also organizes workshops in women's speaking skills and conferences such as The Resilience of Women in Protracted Displacement. In 2018, she chaired the UN Women Committee of the Model United Nations conference held at the Nancy campus of Sciences Po.

Ariane co-founded the association, Dignité à nos Trousses, which collects and distributes hygienic and cosmetic products to women living in precarious conditions in the Nancy region of France. The city of Nancy financially supports the organization, which works in partnership with Restaurants du Cœur (Restaurants of Love) to redistribute their products and maintain a social bond with the women. In 2017, Ariane spent a month volunteering in a theater camp in the U.S. and she has also interned in the youth department of the British Red Cross.

Ariane is in her third year of studying politics, political science and government at Sciences Po, formally known as the Paris Institute of Political Studies. She is deeply interested in international relations and studying European institutions. Convinced that becoming aware of cultural differences between countries is crucial to adapting and advocating effectively, Ariane is currently studying at King's College in London for an exchange year.