



"Inspiring, engaging and celebrating youth through community participation."

Youth Central showcases 21 inspirational youth

ConocoPhillips Youth of Distinction Awards recognize youth for non-academic achievements

When & Where: Saturday, May 7, 2011
Doors open: 11:30 a.m.
Ceremony: Noon – 2 p.m. (recipients announced from 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.)
Location: Safari Lodge, Calgary Zoo
1300 Zoo Rd NE
Calgary, AB T2E 7V6

- Organized by Youth Central, the ConocoPhillips Youth of Distinction Awards, now in its 8th year, celebrates deserving youth ages 13-18 that bring vitality and leadership to their communities
- Award categories include: Advocacy, Environmentalism – Group and Individual, Leadership, Peer Support, Perseverance, Volunteerism
- Crescent Heights High School, Discovering Choices School and Western Canada High School had the highest number of students nominated this year. They will receive prize money for the "Race to Nominate" competition from ConocoPhillips and will be recognized at the ceremony

Photo and interview opportunities will include:

- 21 finalists and 7 recipients of the 2011 ConocoPhillips Youth of Distinction Awards (ages 13-18)
- Jennifer Hilliker, program coordinator of the ConocoPhillips Youth of Distinction Awards at Youth Central
- Barbara Simic, manager community investment at ConocoPhillips Canada

Youth finalist videos are available for b-roll and clips.

Advocacy: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFwDGgGdPXU>

Environmentalism Group: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8beewLTb1k>

Environmentalism Individual: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8UxW7U0eKk>

Peer Support: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rIVn5e1dws>

Leadership: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXFE7Ac2r_k

Perseverance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BYuKYJb8MM>

Volunteerism: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlCp6jueLGk>

See following pages for finalist biographies. Finalists may be contacted through Youth Central.

Media contact:

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The Advocacy Award is given to a youth who has committed time and energy lending their voice to a cause and bringing about change.

14-year-old **Connor Johnson** advocates for the inclusion and acceptance of people with disabilities. He has grown up with a sibling with a disability, and with his brother, Connor has had to work through struggles and barriers that a person with a disability often experiences. He has volunteered with the Between Friends Club for two years and has used his voice to educate his classmates and has recruited other youth to also volunteer and get involved.

Youth advocacy for **Lisa Bui** has permeated into every aspect of her life. She never waivers from the idea that youth can be a positive agent for change in the community. Currently, the 18-year-old is planning the Global Youth Summit, a local youth-led initiative to educate others in social responsibility. Lisa has also created her own youth-engagement movement to mobilize local youth around the issue of children affected by war. Working with her peers, Lisa has rallied the support of local high schools and other organizations in supporting the initiative.

Grade 12 student **Tori Stosky** is a cofounder and current president of a youth-in-action group called Tumaini, branched from the charity Free the Children at St. Francis High School. Tori's group aims to relieve those in poverty through access to education, clean water and alternative incomes, as well as revealing and resolving the equality and social justice issues over the globe. She organizes numerous fundraisers in order for her group to reach their goal of ten thousand, four hundred dollars to build a school in Kenya.

The Environmentalism Group Award is given to a group of youth who are committed to improving the environment and reducing environmental degradation.

The Crescent Heights Eco Club is dedicated to creating a whole-school awareness around environmental issues. They organized a water initiative by bringing in speakers and displaying information accessible to the school, resulting in a major fundraising initiative for the school's Africa project. They have also established a recycling system and run a film festival about important environmental issues.

Approximately 50 students at Western Canada High School make up the school's **Environment Club**, which is run by students, for students. The club aims to help the Earth in any way possible, be it through conservation fundraisers, local clean-ups, sustainable action, or raising awareness about environmental issues today. One of their largest projects was when they held one of the largest mayoral forums in Calgary during the municipal election campaign. 11 candidates participated in a debate about environmental issues.

The **Youth Earth Ambassadors** was created with the intention of bringing together individual high school environment clubs. There are five member schools that select two to three youth to sit on the steering committee. Before, these schools felt like they were on their own. Now, they

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come together, share information, and work together at change. Their approach to environmental conservation is collaboration and knowledge, and this group is doing both of those on a large scale.

The Environmentalist Individual Award is given to a youth who is committed to improving the environment and reducing environmental degradation.

As the head of the Youth Earth Ambassadors and the Western Canada High School Environment Club, Grade 12 student **Alec Forest** inspires others by practicing what he preaches. Alec has been instrumental in organizing many environmental projects such as establishing the Carbon Zero Schools Foundation Paper for Trees recycling program in Calgary schools, which will plan an estimated 500 trees by June. He is always thinking about how people can reduce their carbon footprints as an individual and a community.

Brenda Luo's beauty regimen is uniquely environmentally friendly. This Grade 12 student uses hot chocolate as a bronzer, eggs to give herself a facial, and a mix of lemon, coffee, tea and honey for skincare. Brenda advocates for these eco-friendly alternative beauty treatments as a way to reduce chemical landfill products. Brenda also volunteers at the Banff National Park and Weaselhead Preservation Park.

16-year-old **Nicole Evans'** innovative spirit has changed the environmental culture at Westmount Charter School. She has been a pivotal force in establishing and maintaining Westmount's Eco Committee, leading the group on initiatives like Earth Day celebrations, eco-friendly packaging in the cafeteria, contests and theme weeks. It is through Nicole's dedication and focus that Westmount continues to make great strides in its green initiatives.

The Leadership Award is given to a youth who has chosen to take a leadership role in bringing positive change to their school or community. This youth will have demonstrated responsibility and drive, as well as initiative in starting new projects and programs.

Erika Vanderwiel is a Grade 12 student at Discovering Choices School, where she has been an instrumental part of the Youth Council. She offers a quiet confidence and assertiveness that is embraced by fellow students and she has been a significant force in the growth of the council since she joined in February 2010. She is also the school representative for a Calgary Board of Education city-wide steering committee for youth.

Jesica Boran's leadership ability and passion for the causes she is involved with is evident in the undivided time and effort into every detail of her volunteer work. During her three years at Crescent Heights High School, Jesica has created projects like making sandwiches weekly for the Alex Centre, rounding up 20 students to participate in a 30 hour famine through World Vision, and a Stuff-a-Boot fundraiser that involves collecting socks and toiletries for the homeless.

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Jesica's dream is to help educate thousands of children in poverty-stricken areas so that they have a fair opportunity at success.

Someone in need of help will always find **Reema Bakshi** willing to lend a hand. Reema spearheaded her own branch of the Free the Children movement at her school, Juno Beach Academy, motivated many people to join the club and has been instrumental in maintaining enthusiasm for the cause. Reema can also be found volunteering to read with children at the library, writing letters to politicians about social justice and orchestrating other school fundraisers.

The Peer Support Award is given to a youth who has demonstrated selflessness in regards to bringing about positive change for their peers. This youth will have demonstrated compassion and kindness, as well as the qualities anyone could ask for in a best friend at the moment you need them the most.

16-year-old **Adam Rea** enjoys bringing out the best in people as a counselor and mentor. He used this skill when his sister was suddenly struck with a very rare auto-immune disorder last year that required complex open-heart surgery. Adam was a strong force to help his sister survive against impossible odds, even wheeling her into the cardiac surgical room at the Children's Hospital in Edmonton because she asked that it be him rather than their parents because they couldn't take it emotionally. He told her to never give up; a motto that they both live by.

As a Grade 11 student at Forest Lawn High school and a teen mentor at Big Brothers Big Sisters, **Mallory Kroeker** has gently guided her peers into making better choices. She has been a support to her family in helping with her brother's autism and obsessive behaviours. Mallory is always looking to include others, often including left-out children in her plan for the day at Big Brothers Big Sisters, plus recruiting her friends for the program. Mallory feels that nobody should have to go through something alone, or feel like they are the outsider in a group.

Melissa Cai has been serving as a teen mentor for two years at Big Brothers Big Sisters, and matched with the same mentee for that length of time. She has turned her mentee from a little guy struggling with sadness and insecurities to someone who is always smiling and enjoying life. He calls Melissa his sister and is very attached to her. Melissa is one of the most consistent mentors in the program, never bailing on her mentee and is patient and committed to his future.

The Perseverance Award is given to a youth who has proven that personal initiative and determination can overcome any form of adversity. This youth will have demonstrated courage, and tenacity when dealing with the enormous obstacles that an average person would normally retreat from.

Grade 11 student **Hope Sommerville** became a ward of the province at one year of age and was soon adopted, but life in her adopted family was not easy. Her adoptive father abandoned the family at a young age. As a young teen, Hope faced problems with bullying at school and turned to drugs and alcohol. By 15 years old she developed a significant addiction problem, dropping out of school for three years. One day, Hope decided she had enough and became sober, returned to school, and is now a positive force in the classroom.

At the age of 15, it looked like **Meghan Mismas** would be unable to complete high school. She suffered a sexual assault, which led to a diagnosis of social phobia, severe anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress. She began harming herself and as a final call for help, she attempted suicide. Meghan then attended therapy and learned to accept herself and those around her – she refused to give up. Meghan has taken her many challenges and turned them into positive growth experiences, and she is now in Grade 12 and on track to graduate with her peers.

Shawna Imeson has overcome many obstacles in her 18 years, starting with the death of her father on her 11th birthday. Her older sister tried to commit suicide and Shawna helped her sister fight her depression. Shawna's mother turned to drugs and alcohol and was diagnosed with cancer, and to help ease the financial burden, Shawna started to work full time at the age of 14. At the age of 17, Shawna began living on her own but remained in school and volunteers her time with the Youth Council at Discovering Choices School. Currently pregnant, Shawna remains dedicated to her studies and is determined to graduate in June 2012.

The Volunteerism Award is given to a youth who is truly selfless and dedicated to helping others. Though not necessarily in a leadership role, this youth has shown commitment to bettering their community by volunteering their time to a cause they are passionate about.

Through volunteering, **Ali Poonja** has developed a passion for working with children. For the past three years, this Grade 11 student at Strathcona Tweedsmuir High School has devoted his time to the Reading Buddies program at the Calgary Public Library. He also works with children with disabilities by mentoring students at Emily Follensbee School, tutoring them in math and helping out with athletic activities. He is a Junior Volunteer Leader in the Ismaili community and many children and youth see Ali as their role model.

Grade 10 student **Mariam Awara** has contributed time, energy and money in order to give back to the community and to create a better environment at John G. Diefenbaker High School. She has volunteered almost 500 hours in a period of six months with involvement in the Youth Volunteer Corps, Amnesty International, Student Council, Leadership, the school's environmental club, Debate club, the school newspaper and Junior Achievement. She dedicates all of her lunch hours and most of her mornings and afternoons at school to volunteering.

Shirley Qiu dedicates three hours a week to the Foothills Country Hospice, where it's not always easy to be a volunteer. She works with patients who are near the end of their lives, but

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seeing youth like Shirley helping out means a great deal to them. She also volunteers with the Town of Okotoks, the Heaven Can Wait Animal Shelter in High River and does peer tutoring at her school, Holy Trinity Academy.

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