



# Saskatchewan



# Notes

April 2011

## Next Up Saskatchewan: New Leadership Program Trains Saskatchewan's Next Generation of Change-Makers

By Shayna Stock and Taylor-Anne Yee with photography by Christina Charteris

### Introduction

A new leadership program for progressive young people is already making big waves in the province. Next Up Saskatchewan offers leadership training to young people who are committed to social and environmental justice. The program works from a broad definition of leadership to, in the words of participant and social worker Christina Charteris, “educate, inspire and engage people who believe that a better world is possible.” As part of a network of Next Up programs across Western Canada, it is the first of its kind in Saskatchewan. As this year’s program comes to a close, and planning for next year’s begins, current participants reflect on the impact of the program on their lives, and how they might integrate the skills and experiences they’ve garnered into their daily lives and future actions.



Mark Bigland-Pritchard (right) presents to the Next Up group on peak oil and energy transition

### Why do we need youth leadership training?

Whereas the conservative movement in Canada has long offered a variety of education and training opportunities for its young leaders, progressive movements have been much less proactive in engaging youth.

For years, through its seminar and internship programs, the Fraser Institute has been identifying and training young conservative leaders. Similarly, the Manning Schools, initiated by Reform Party of Canada founder Preston Manning, aim to prepare Canada’s future leaders for working in politics. There are, in the words of Next Up Saskatchewan participant and engineer Chris Richards, “direct connections between their movement’s achievements and the people who are graduates of their leadership training programs,” with many of them becoming influential leaders in Canadian media, academia and politics. Ezra Levant, tar-sands defender and co-founder of the right-wing newspaper *Western Standard*, and Danielle Smith, the leader of Alberta’s Wild Rose Alliance, are two notable alumni of the Fraser Institute.

These types of comprehensive education opportunities, which welcome youth into the movement and provide them with theory, mentorship, networking opportunities and skills development, are remarkably lacking in the world of social justice work. As Next Up co-founder Kevin Millsip says, “In progressive social change work, I think we have, for some time, relied on those who have ‘natural’ leadership capacity to simply show up and prove themselves.” This organic, laissez-faire approach to leadership development does both the movement and all of its potential young leaders a huge disservice.

## The emergence of Next Up

It was this realization that sparked cofounders Kevin Millsip and Seth Klein to launch Next Up. The two friends had been involved in education and social change work in Vancouver for many years – Millsip as co-founder of two youth education networks called “Check Your Head” and “Get Your Vote On” and as a Vancouver school trustee, and Klein as executive director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative’s B.C. office. They both found their way as leaders in the progressive community largely through chance encounters with the right people at the right time. In order to do their part to ensure that the next generation of leaders doesn’t need to rely on chance, they decided to start Next Up. The program began four years ago, in Vancouver. Two years ago, it expanded to Edmonton. This year, there are programs in Calgary and Saskatoon as well. Each program has about 14 participants between the ages of 18 and 32. It runs for seven months, with participants meeting one evening a week and one full Saturday a month.

Next Up operates from a deliberately broad perspective of leadership, defining a leader as “someone who has the ability to inspire and support others to achieve a common objective or purpose.” The program aims to nurture critical thought about social and environmental issues and to build capacity in areas such as communication, facilitation, conflict transformation, project development and building unity. It also offers opportunities for participants to network with community members and potential mentors, and to apply what they learn through collaborative, self-directed action projects.

Next Up Saskatchewan participant and International Studies graduate Kathleen Crowther describes Next Up as having a “grassroots approach and emphasis on individual responsibility to create change ... This program engages youth to create a personal world view and discover their own passions while honing concrete skills to take their activism to the next level.”

## Next Up Saskatchewan

In partnership with the Saskatchewan office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Next Up Saskatchewan began accepting its first applications in September of 2010. Through an intensive and dynamic application process including a written application, an individual interview and a group interview, 13 participants were selected. Participant Candice Klooble, who in addition to being a new mother is an adult crisis



counselor at the YWCA Crisis Shelter and a youth worker at Red Willow, describes the group: “We are multicultural, we represent all different areas of the workforce – from non-profit to health care, the City of Saskatoon, Government of Saskatchewan, private practice, etc. – and as a group our interests are very broad in scope.”

Six months into the program, Next Up Saskatchewan has explored a range of topics, and the solidarity within the group is strong. Some of the more intense and engaging sessions include anti-oppression training, conflict transformation, trade unions and activist self-care. The engagement of and support from the broader progressive community has been key to the success of Next Up Sask’s first year. Community leaders such as Vanessa Charles of the Saskatoon Anti-poverty Coalition, former NDP MLA Peter Prebble, disability rights advocate Robin East, CCPA Saskatchewan Director Simon Enoch, former NDP candidate and food sovereignty activist Nettie Wiebe and Saskatoon City Councillor Charlie Clark are some of the facilitators from the community who have come to offer their expertise in advocacy, environmentalism, media, politics and anti-poverty work.

The labour movement has also played a big role in Next Up Saskatchewan, and participants are emerging with a new understanding of unions and their role in social justice. Participant Karen Rooney, who is also a nurse and a member of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, reports, “Though I have been a union member for my entire working life, unions themselves had always remained on the periphery of [my activism] mine. Next Up has provided me with many opportunities to learn about and become involved in union issues, inspiring me to become more involved and active in my own union.”

A highlight of the program for many participants has been the community connections session, an informal



gathering that gives community leaders an opportunity to meet and mingle with Next Up participants. Klooble reflects, “It was a privilege and honour to meet so many leaders within our community.”

The day-long session on conflict transformation, offered by Vancouver based educator David Hatfield, was another highlight. Hatfield gave participants new tools to explore their own triggers, practice setting personal boundaries, and role-play past conflict situations in order to practice new skills. Charteris found this session particularly inspiring. “This session challenged me to explore the energy I put out into the world and the way I am treating the important people in my life,” she says. The program is already translating into tangible results in the lives and work of participants and their communities they inhabit. Klooble reports, “After our advocacy session with Robin East, I have been on a personal mission to comment about any flat screen pin pads I’ve encountered in retail that are inaccessible for seeing-impaired people. That’s one small example and there have been many more.”

## Participant testimonials

As Next Up Saskatchewan nears the end of its first year, participants reflect on the impact the program has had on their perceptions of the world and of themselves. Each of them will bring the knowledge and skills they have gained, and the relationships they have built, into their future experiences in their own way, enriching and strengthening Saskatchewan’s progressive community.

*“I have become much more confident in my role as a leader. I have had the opportunity to take on many different roles within the program including organizing, public speaking, writing, facilitating, group work, etc. I have also realized that many of the same fears and issues that I struggle with are ones that other people*



Trade Unionist Marianne Hladun chats with NU Participant Bryce Donaldson

*carry. It is comforting to know that I am not alone in my community on such matters and that I now have a support network to discuss these things with.”*

Kathleen Crowther, Fund Development Coordinator at Habitat for Humanity Saskatoon and International Studies graduate

*“The sessions gave me an opportunity to talk about the issues I was passionate about and learn about things that I never heard of before. But I would say the longest-lasting part of this program will be my friendships with the other participants ... We are always there for each other and support whatever another person is working on.”*

Max FineDay, first year political studies student at the University of Saskatchewan with a special interest in poverty and Aboriginal issues

*“In Next Up I am not only learning a great deal and personally growing as a leader, I am also contributing to an exciting new movement that is training and inspiring the thousands of people that are necessary to address the challenges we face. To me, that’s very valuable and very satisfying.”*

Chris Richards, mechanical engineer for the city of Saskatoon, with a focus on renewable energy

*“The program has changed the way that I view myself by unearthing some of my talents and skills, dusting them off and shining them up – reminding me that there is a need for many skills and perspectives when it comes to leadership. Next Up has also provided me with the tools for critical social analysis and helped me to understand that I have the capacity within me to move from analysis to action.”*

Karen Rooney, a Registered Nurse with a specialization in oncology and a black belt in karate.



Next Up Participants Stephanie Shyluk (left) and Christina Charteris (right)

## What's next for Next Up Sask?



Tracey Mitchell (left) is the group's well-loved coordinator. Mitchell, former education officer for Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation and currently a facilitation practitioner/consultant, is the group's coordinator. Charged with the difficult

task of balancing facilitation with engaging the participants' leadership abilities, her role is to guide the group while allowing members to display their own unique leadership skills. "We've had a great first year in Saskatoon," she says about Next Up's Saskatchewan debut. "We've heard a lot of positive feedback from the community. Several more experienced activists and community leaders have told us that the participants in Next Up are 'a breath of fresh air,' and that they feel excited about being able to pass the torch to or share leadership with these young leaders."

As the 2010/11 program comes to a close, it's time for Mitchell and the other coordinators in Saskatchewan, B.C. and Alberta to reflect on their experiences with the program and pinpoint what worked and what didn't. "Having seen over 100 participants through the program in the different communities as of this spring," Mitchell says, "we are ready to look critically at our successes and failures and make changes so that the program continues to improve in future years ... We want to ensure that when major, pivotal moments occur in our society, that progressives are prepared to step up and provide the

kind of inspired leadership that our province, country and world need."

Difficulties and challenges aside, everyone involved is generally excited about where the program will head in the following years, and to see what Next Up Saskatchewan participants will bring to the table once they're finished. "It has really been an honour for me to have this opportunity to work with and learn from all of the participants in the program this year," reflects Mitchell. "We really have a thoughtful, creative and dynamic group assembled ... I have been impressed, surprised, challenged and moved by what the participants have to say and the insights they bring. If they choose to, they will have a big impact on the world and that possibility makes me more hopeful for our collective future than I have felt in years."

This year's participants are already discussing how they want to continue to meet and work together to tackle social issues, confident that the program has provided them the necessary tools, skills and networks to make change wherever they are. In the words of Charteris, "By exploring an eclectic mix of social and political issues that affect us on both a local and global level, each of us will be able to use this knowledge to promote greater awareness, community engagement and positive change of all kinds."

For more information, please visit: <http://www.nextup.ca/>  
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*Next Up participants mingle with other community leaders at the Community Connections session at Amigos*

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Saskatchewan (CCPA-SK), is an independent, non-partisan research organization dedicated to promoting economic and social research of importance to Canadian and Saskatchewan citizens. For more information contact CCPA at: Suite G, 2835 13th Avenue, Regina, SK S4T 1N6; (306) 924-3372 or [ccpasask@sasktel.net](mailto:ccpasask@sasktel.net)