

?Agents of Change? honoured by Pickering College at inaugural ceremony



Pickering College aims to give its students real-world experience tackling real-world issues through its Global Leadership Program (GLP), and students recently had the chance to learn from local heroes who are doing just that through their school's inaugural Agent of Change Awards.

Last week, The Auroran highlighted community organizations honoured by Pickering College (PC) during the ceremony, including Aurora's York Region Food Network and Blue Door Shelters, but individual difference-makers also had their time in the sun.

One such individual was Gabriel Allahdua, Activist-in-Residence at the University of Guelph.

Allahdua, according to event organizers, ?has taken his personal experience as a migrant worker and galvanized others in the agricultural community, government and others to be more aware of the injustices faced by migrant workers in Canada.?

PC hosted Allahdua for a full day in the 2022-2023 school year where he delivered this message to students of all ages.

It was, said Allahdua, a learning experience for him as well.

?It is only at Pickering College that I see the playing field and the attempt to make the playing field level and I am very grateful for this opportunity,? he said.

In his speech, the activist said the global pandemic re-framed many realities as they relate to migrant workers.

?During the pandemic, the borders were suddenly closed only allowing citizens and permanent residents to come in, but?your food is not secure if migrant workers are not involved, and the truth is migrant workers are not treated with the same respect and dignity that everyone deserves,? he said.

Another change-maker honoured was Megan Glanfield, founder of Revolution Now.

?Megan is a teacher and founder of Revolution Now, spreading awareness for a variety of issues and raising over \$14,000 for charities such as the 519 and the Woodland Cultural Centre,? said organizers. ?Revolution Now is a sustainable fashion venture with messages of inclusivity and social change.?

While Glanfield was unable to attend the ceremony, the award was accepted by designer Noah Wright, whose Black Excellence shirt raised more than \$3,500 to fund scholarships for the York Region District School Board's Alliance of Educators for Black Students.

"Anyone can be an agent of change," said Wright. "It's all about spreading positivity and just giving the most positive energy you can with what you can and anyone can be an agent of change."

This was a sentiment echoed by fellow honouree Jerisha Grant-Hall, founder of the Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association.

Grant-Hall was hailed for her support of the Black community in Newmarket and efforts to "build inclusive spaces, build connections in the community, opportunities for young people, and inter-cultural understanding."

"Back in 2017, I was going through a number of local magazines on the floor of my room, trying to create a vision board for what I wanted 2018 to look like. I didn't have a glass to see into the future, but I wanted to create a vision for myself."

As she looked through the magazines, she said she couldn't find representation of local Black families and she stepped up to shine a spotlight on the individual, Black excellence, and to create further opportunities.

"As soon as the New Year started in 2018, it took more than 10 attempts to gain somebody's attention to say we needed to do something, we need to make our community more inclusive, and we need to see everybody in our community for who they are," she said. "Nothing that I do is done by just me. It takes a whole village. It takes all of you, it takes me, it takes our politicians, it takes our councillors, officials, all of our schools, our educators, our students, our young people, our seniors. It takes our donors, our sponsors, and it takes a Board of Directors to do the work."

"On behalf of everyone who has contributed to equity, not just to diversity but to equity, to dismantling anti-Black racism, to visibility for all of us, to everyone who contributed to that work in this Town, to make our community better than we found it? I say thank you and this is for you."

Wrapping up the evening was the final honouree, Dr. Mehta, Medical Director, Psychiatry, for Southlake Regional Health Centre.

"As a consultant addictions scientist, he is dedicated to serving vulnerable individuals with serious mental health illness and complex needs, many living in shelters or group homes," said organizers. "His passion for research and education has enhanced several mental health programs."

Responded Dr. Mehta, "I would like to thank most importantly all the patients and their families who have to live with the ordeal and the complexities of serious mental illness and the stigma that comes with it. The only way we can overcome this is creating partnerships in the community, collaborating with each other to serve our patients in the best possible way."

By Brock Weir
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