

Local student ready to take on the World while tackling tough issues



By Brock Weir

Anna Croxon has a keen eye for the marginalized in our society.

Born to what she says is "a lot of privilege," she says she's not content to "sit on" that privilege; instead, she wants to use it to do good, using any platform she can to foster discussion about social justice issues, everything from the challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community, to sex trafficking, to the Black Lives Matter movement.

In recent years, debating has been her platform where her impassioned pleas for social justice won her a place at national level. Now, she's ready to take on the world.

Anna, a resident of Aurora, is one of three students from King's Country Day School set to square off against international competitors at the World Debating Championships, which will be held in Toronto starting this Thursday and running through April 17.

At the Nationals, Anna, who has been involved in debating since middle school, placed third overall, earning a place to compete at the Worlds.

"Qualifying for the worlds is definitely very rewarding," she says. "Along with that, it is very exciting to be able to meet a diverse group of people from all over the world and hear what they have to say about worldly issues and topics."

Anna says she has always had a passion for public speaking and pursuing that all-important

platform. She wants to be able to talk about things that matter.

?I think as someone

born with a lot of privilege, I have somewhat of a responsibility to use the platform I was given to make room for people who have not been born into the same life as I have because I can recognize how privileged I am ? and I really want to make sure I don't just sit on it and I use it to actively do good.?

At the National Level,

contestants must participate in four areas: persuasive speaking, debating, impromptu speaking and interpretive reading. For persuasive speaking, Anna focused on the assault and abuse of the intellectually and physically disabled. Debate topics ranged from ?whether or not it would be a good idea to assassinate Kim-Jong Un,? the right to protest in highly concentrated areas like highways and airports, and whether or not there should be hate speech laws.

?We learned a lot

about the community of disabled people, especially within Canada and how that issue was epidemic and hidden within the walls of Canadian society,? says Anna. ?People don't really know it is happening and because they are so vulnerable and susceptible to abuse because their disability either prohibits them from speaking up, or prohibits them from defending themselves. It can occur a lot more frequently than we think and some of the statistics were honestly just mind blowing about how frequently it does occur. A statistic that really struck me: over 85 per cent of women with disabilities will report being sexually abused or assaulted at least once in their lifetime, which is obviously a very high number and something that really amplifies the importance of the topic and how frequently it does occur, but we never see it in newspapers, PSAs, or even talked about in school communities.?

For the worlds, Anna

is branching out into the world of ?voluntourism,? addressing this issue in a speech that delves not only into the industry itself, but also into what she describes as ?the idea of the White Saviour? complex.

?I am tackling a

multitude of different issues in this speech because it is very multifaceted,? she explains. ?When we volunteer in these underdeveloped countries, we come over from the western world, we're very unqualified, for example, to build a house or to teach children English even though we don't speak their native language. Looking at the standards of the western world, we would never let a group of elementary school students go and medically take care of children within our hospitals, or teach at our schools, or build our libraries. Why are the standards so much lower in developing countries?

?I am also examining

how because of this we're depriving local workers for much needed jobs. Instead of employing people within the local communities which would, in turn, improve their economy and alleviate some of the poverty those nations face, we're

having people come over and do work that they could be doing. It is just examining how these experiences are focused on the volunteer's quest for experience as opposed to the recipient community's actual needs, and perpetuates this idea of a desperate, under-developed country needing to be saved by the western world.?

Through channelling

her passion to be the change she wants to see in the world through public speaking, Anna says she has developed a new sense of confidence in speaking to a crowd and, on a smaller scale, simply interacting with people. It has helped her organize her thoughts efficiently and write a speech but, she says, more importantly, has been the chance to improve listening skills.

?It might sound ironic

because I am there to speak, but when I get to sit back and listen to the other competitors, it is really, really interesting for me to hear their thoughts, perspectives and what they have researched, and the work they have put into their topics because I think in our modern world, we do a lot of talking and sometimes even in debating we listen to them speak as opposed to just listening to listen.

?I think these competitions are really, really helpful

in me just listening to other people's ideas in order to weave different narratives and perspectives into my own understanding which, in turn, helps me to be a better public speaker and a better debater because I am learning about what other people think and other people's ideas on important issues? I think diversity of thought is something that is so crucial and pivotal to learning and success. Along with that, being able to meet a diverse group of people from all over the world and Canada is really an irreplaceable experience I think will stick with me in my latter years of life.?