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2020-2021 Recipient of the Jean Royce Fellowship  

A Summary Statement of the Studies and/or Research:

Project: Joined by friends and community members passionate about social justice, I co-created in 2017 a program for Black, Indigenous and girls of colour living in Kingston between the ages of 10 and 14. Our primary objective was to create a space in which the girls could celebrate their identities and be empowered to create change through three central axes: developing self-awareness and self-esteem, fostering education on social and environmental justice, and building community. Through bi-weekly workshops, we educate, empower and engage girls in an age appropriate ways to further their abilities, skills, and strengths. Our workshops and activities run from September to June every year.

Chosen by our young members, the name of our collective "Roots & Wings" epitomizes our vision and goals, namely 1) growing strong roots into our community, and creating lifelong connections to people and organizations from which we learn about social justice, identity, and culture; and 2) developing and empowering ourselves to fly with our own wings with confidence, dignity and pride. After a successful pilot year, we expanded our reach to include racialized girls, trans*, two-spirit and gender-nonconforming youth, and have been able to welcome over 35 youth in our workshops in the past three years!

Troupe Leaders: Workshops are led by 3 to 4 racialized women, trans or gender-nonconforming troupe leaders who act as mentors, role models and primary contact for the youth. By developing existing networks with various academic and non-academic units at St. Lawrence College and Queen's University, I recruited, trained and mentored 15 troupe leaders who have supported Roots & Wings through practicums, work studies, or as volunteers. Through this work, they cultivate their skills in curriculum design, educational leadership, workshop facilitation, as well as build collaborative and supportive relationships with each other. Mentorship has been a central component as both troupe leaders and youths develop support, trust, belonging, and community among themselves. Our 6 current troupe leaders are graduate and undergraduate students at Queen's in departments of Gender Studies, Drama, Education, and Policy Studies.

Activities: Through Roots & Wings, youth meet bi-weekly to participate in structured programing that introduces them to social justice topics, allows them to explore their identities, enables them to teach and share their skills, and encourages them to engage with their communities. In our first three years, workshops allowed the youth to explore such issues as Indigenous sovereignty, migration and refugee experiences, food security, consent, body image hair, healthy relationships, mental health, racial justice, STEM education, and environmental justice. They have also learned a wide variety of skills including tree identification, circus skills, visual arts, and self defense. Our programming has relied heavily on the generosity of community members and organizations who have offered their skills and time to help make the program a success. These groups include Solidarity Kingston, Kingston Circus Arts, Loving Spoonful, Peace Quest, Build Bridges Not Walls, Modern Fuel Arts Collective, Levana Gender Advocacy Centre, and the Queen's Black Pre-Medical Student Association, just to name a few.

Funding Objectives: First, I wish to alleviate some of the financial burden by continuing to provide free programing to all participants; rent space for our activities; and provide materials and snacks without purchasing them out of pocket. Second, I would like to expand our offerings to include new and exciting opportunities for our youth including field trips, professional workshops, and development opportunities for troupe leaders. Finally, through this funding I will be able to continue coordinating our yearly operations, administrative duties, over- seeing annual budgets, and supervising and mentoring troupe leaders, all the while finishing my Ph.D.

Through this work, I am also eager to continue growing my own experience in coalition building, my work in feminist, anti-racist, & decolonial praxis, and my leadership in social justice organizing.