



In Profile: Sarah Seymour



In Profile is a new feature in which we introduce you to educators and students who are making a difference in their communities. This month, we're excited to introduce Grade 11 student Sarah Seymour, one of 300 students from across Canada chosen to attend the inaugural Canada Youth Summit in Ottawa on May 2-3. This conference brought together 300 young people from across the country to discuss issues that matter to them, from protecting our environment and fighting climate change, to supporting good jobs and service opportunities, to building more equal and inclusive communities.

Hi, Sarah. To start off, what first got you interested in youth empowerment and activism?

Since Grade 9, I've been involved in many groups such as the Leadership Principal's Advisory Committee, Link Leaders and Student Voice. I think it's really important for youth to take advantage of leadership opportunities because it gives you a purpose and makes you feel stronger and more confident as a person.

You returned recently from the Youth Canada Summit in Ottawa. What can you tell us about this event?

This was Canada's first-ever national youth summit. The goals of the summit were to launch [Canada's Youth Policy](#), give participants an opportunity to talk about key issues and share their experiences, and inspire young people to give back. Three hundred youth from across Canada shared their views on important topics pertaining to youth today.



How were you chosen to attend?

I was selected through an application process through the British Columbia Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA). Mrs. Rachael Sdoutz, my principal, heard about this opportunity and encouraged me to apply. The application process included writing an essay about my leadership experience and why I should go.

What were the issues you wanted to share with others at the Summit? Why are these important to you?

There were three issues I wanted to explore with other youth at the Summit. The first is vaping. This is a huge issue with youth today – it's popular in my high school but I don't think youth know about the health risks. I wanted to ask what the federal government was doing to take on this problem and what the Prime Minister's take was on this issue.

Cannabis is another big issue. I wanted to know why Justin Trudeau legalized a gateway drug. We have this huge opioid crisis on our hands, so why does it make sense to legalize it? I also wanted to know what kind of regulations he was putting on edibles to protect youth from consuming them accidentally.



Photo courtesy of Adam Scotti, Prime Minister's Office

My final concern is around technology. I wanted to talk about how everyone's life revolves around social media and technology use, and how we are becoming a more disconnected, non-social generation because of it. I also wanted to talk about the downsides of social media, such as how easy it is to share inappropriate content on various platforms. I also believe that the government should spend more money on building new playgrounds and instructing outdoor physical activities. These are important for young people to develop their imaginations and physical and mental well-being.

How was the experience? What did you learn from it?

I absolutely loved the Canada Youth Summit! I loved meeting new people from across Canada. Our breakout sessions topics included health and wellness; employment, innovation, skills and learning; gender equality; environment and climate change; and leadership, social impact and democratic participation.

In the breakout sessions, we discussed questions pertaining to each topic, beginning by writing our ideas and then summarizing them into one main thought. These will later be taken to develop Canada's Youth Policy.



I felt empowered throughout the Summit. Just to be with 300 other passionate youth and feel the positive energy was absolutely inspiring. When I came home, I felt so empowered that I wanted to do something big someday. On a personal level, I've set a goal to attend medical school at the University of Toronto. I'd like to keep contributing to my community through leadership activities.

What advice would you give other students who are wondering how they might make a difference in their community?

To all of the youth out there, my advice to you extraordinary people is to follow your dreams. If someone is pulling you down or you feel like you don't fit in, it doesn't and shouldn't matter one bit. You are your own person, and if you keep yourself focused, positive, determined and kind, you will go way further than if you stick with the in crowd.

It took me until Grade 10 to really figure out the path that I wanted to take, and I had a hard time in Grade 8 and 9 trying to fit in. But I realized that if you are kind and positive around everybody, you can be yourself and fit in with anyone. Don't take hate and make yourself stronger because of your mistakes. I hope to see many more youth following their dreams in the future.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

Yes. I would just like to thank the BCPVPA and Mrs. Rachael Sdoutz. They have been huge mentors for me during this journey, and I am so glad that I got to represent Sa-Hali Secondary, Kamloops and the BCPVPA in Ottawa. I'd like to thank Mrs. Sdoutz especially, who guides me through my everyday endeavours and makes me a stronger person because of it. I can always rely on her if I have a question, or if I just want to see her friendly face, I know the door is always open. The mentorship from her is amazing! She is the best principal anyone could ever ask for, and if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be writing this life-changing news story about how a Grade 11 student from Kamloops made it to the Canada Youth Summit. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Know someone in your school or community who deserves to be in a future *In Profile* article? Drop us a line at educ.learn@gov.bc.ca with the details.