

Youth Changemakers Exchange 2021

March 28 – April 2

Swarthmore College

Social Innovation Lab at the Lang Center

ASHOKA Japan



About Youth Changemakers Exchange

Youth Changemakers Exchange (YCX) started in 2019 as an international exchange program for young changemakers in Japan who are younger than 20 years old, identified problems in society by themselves, and carry out the solutions that they came up with.

This year, with its theme on **Building Empathy**, we are holding a virtual exchange with Swarthmore College, one of top liberal art colleges in the US!

The interaction with Swarthmore means the interaction with the world. Seven student participants from Swarthmore have diverse backgrounds, from Kenya, to Pakistan, Native American, and more. From Japan, five Ashoka Japan Youth Venturers will join the program and present their projects.

In March of 2019, 6 Youth Venturers flew to the east coast of the US to explore about social innovation. They had a chance to meet Ashoka Fellows in New York City and visited Swarthmore College in Philadelphia. The nine-day trip was full of inspirations, and the participants learned a lot from the experience.

We were preparing for the YCX 2020 last March, only to find that we had to cancel the trip due to the pandemic. However, we held an online dialogue session with Sascha Haselmayer (Founder of Citymart, Ashoka fellow selected in 2011) who they were planning to visit in New York.

Unfortunately, it is still not possible to visit the US. But we decided to hold an online exchange with Swarthmore College! In addition to 12 young changemakers' presentations, we are welcoming Mary Gordon and Bart Weetjens, two Ashoka Fellows as keynote speakers.



YCX in New York (2019)



Online exchange with Sascha Haselmayer (2020)

Join us and enjoy the talks by ultimate changemakers and presentations of young changemakers from Japan and Swarthmore College!

From Organizers

Much has happened in the world in the intervening months since March 2020. While many communities have suffered much, we know many young people have been displaced and have had their education, and future opportunities are thrown into disarray. Political unrest, economic instability, and climate uncertainty, amongst many other wicked problems, have fueled a period of intolerance, polarization, and conflict in our society. Mistrust and misunderstanding are rife and intransigent. Successful Social Innovators acknowledge others' perspectives, deeply hear and understand their point of view, working collaboratively to build better solutions to problems. We know that through empathy skills, social innovators live close to the problem with others experiencing the issue, gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the stakes involved.

The International Youth Social Innovator Symposium will have its central theme, “building empathy.” Participants in the Symposium will present their work area and reflect more broadly on the role that empathy plays in building better relationships and social innovation solutions to wicked problems.

Professor Denise Crossan
Social Innovation Lab at the Lang Center, Swarthmore College

The commitment and passion for making the world a better place is rooted in empathy. In this case, we define empathy as a cognitive ability that functions much like a muscle and can be trained and strengthened over time. Changemakers are individuals who have developed their cognitive empathy and are relentlessly devoted to translating their empathy into action to make the world a better place.

The 12 Young Changemakers whom we will present this week come from multiple global contexts: Japan, the United States, Pakistan, Kenya, Egypt and France. The permeating thread that connects these 12 different individuals is their Changemaker skills that consists of courage and tenacity to tackle systemic issues for a better tomorrow. In this one-of-a-kind online event, we will also have the privilege to hear from two of our ultimate Changemakers and Ashoka Fellows, Mary Gordon and Bart Weetjens.

Nana Watanabe
Founder and Chairperson, Ashoka Japan

Schedule for the Week

Date	Event	Where
Sunday, March 28 th 8 pm EST	Opening Plenary Mary Gordon (Founder & CEO, Roots of Empathy, Ashoka Fellow since 2002) “Empathy: Platform for Social Innovation”	Viewing via website
Monday, March 29 th 8-9:30 pm EST	Youth Social Innovator Sessions 1 Yuria Iyano, Jiro Ikemoto, Daniel Torres Balauro, Lamia Makkar	Live Zoom Webinar
Tuesday, March 30 th 8-9:30 pm EST	Youth Social Innovator Sessions 2 Tetsu Kurumisawa, Shay Downey, Aleina Dume, Juliane Ding	Live Zoom Webinar
Wednesday, March 31 st 8-9:30 pm EST	Youth Social Innovator Sessions 3 Yujin Yamaguchi, Sara Kumagai, Sannan Dhillon, Mwangangi Kalii	Live Zoom Webinar
Friday, April 2 nd 8 pm EST	Closing Plenary Bart Weetjens (Founder, APOPO, Ashoka Fellow since 2006) “Self-compassion: Empathy to the Self”	Viewing via website

*All sessions will be held in English.

*For Youth Social Innovator Sessions, each of four students will present their projects for 10 minutes, followed by 10 minutes Q&A.

For more information, please visit [the website](#) for more information.

The videos by Mary Gordon and Bart Weetjens will be made available at the beginning (03/28) and closing of the Symposium (04/02), respectively.

If you would like to join in on the Youth Social Innovator Sessions, email: yashida@ashoka.org

Opening Plenary | Mary Gordon

“Empathy: Platform for Social Innovation”



Mary Gordon

Founder and CEO, Roots of Empathy

Ashoka Fellow (selected 2002)

Recognised internationally as an award-winning social entrepreneur in the field of education, Mary Gordon has coached worldwide on the importance of soft skills, most notably: empathy.

Piloted in Toronto in 1996, these classes laid the foundation for an evidence based global program, Roots of Empathy. A global award-winning program with a mission to build caring, peaceful and civil societies by raising levels of empathy in children has been proven to reduce violence, aggression, and bullying and increase prosocial behavior on three continents.

Roots of Empathy is a classroom-based program which brings an infant and his/her parents into a class, along with an Instructor trained in a focused curriculum. The Instructor guides the children to give labels to the baby's feelings and discuss what they think the baby is thinking and feeling. The idea is that through this experiential learning, children come to understand their own emotions and to understand how their classmates feel.

The cognitive aspect of empathy is perspective taking and research from multiple randomized controlled trials have proven that not only do children who have Roots of Empathy improve in cognitive empathy but they also improve in affective empathy, emotional literacy. This “emotional literacy” taught in the program helps children become more competent in understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy) and are therefore less likely to physically, psychologically, and emotionally hurt each other through bullying and other unkind acts.

The curriculum is comprehensive and attuned to the developmental stages and interests of the children. The curriculum is divided into nine themes, with three classroom visits supporting each theme (a pre-family visit, a family visit (a baby and her/his parent visit) and a post-family visit) for a total of 27 classes. Each of the nine themes is further broken down into four age ranges in elementary/primary schools.

Roots of Empathy Instructors participate in a four-day training and receive ongoing mentoring and professional development. They are community volunteers who have an openness to understand and embrace the mission, goals, philosophy, and values of Roots of Empathy and an enthusiasm and ability to work in an interactive way with children in the program. The instructors' background is often retired teachers, early childhood educators, school and public health nurses, police and firefighters and others.

The program is now in every province in Canada, New Zealand, the United States, the Republic of Ireland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, Costa Rica, and South Korea and more than one million children have attended the classes.



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Student Profiles

Session 1 | Monday, March 29



Yuria Iyano: Yuria and her sister founded Hair Donation for Children, a platform of hair donation with high transparency that will provide wig for children who suffer from cancer for free. Over the past 4 years, they have gathered hair from 3,500 people nationwide, having 11 wigs made by a top-level manufacturer to date.

She just graduated from high school and will start her college in April.



Jiro Ikemoto: Book Project - In a depopulated town in rural Japan with no bookstore and a library with a few books, Jiro created a program “Morning Reading” for towners, both students and adults, providing an opportunity for them to gather at a café one morning a week to enjoy reading books over scrumptious French toast or pancakes Jiro makes.

He just graduated from high school and will start his college in April.



Daniel Torres Balauro: I’m a second-year student from American Samoa, majoring in Environmental Governance and Policy. The South Pacific islands are among the most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of the climate crisis. Despite this unfortunate fact, mainstream climate change discourse continues to exclude frontline communities like the Pacific leading to their underrepresentation and misrepresentation. My project aims to address these inequalities by developing a program to equip Pacific Islanders with the political advocacy tools to effectively contribute to important climate justice discourse. In doing so, it is my hope to shift the Western-centric paradigm of environmentalism to one that not only includes, but centers the voices of those most affected by climate change.



Lamia Makkar: I am in my final year at Swarthmore College, where I am double majoring in Computer Science and Anthropology. I am an international student from Egypt and France. My main focus is supporting people to create value for themselves through education and social entrepreneurship. I launched my first venture, [Haiti: Hands On](#), at the age of 13. Haiti: Hands On is a nonprofit that works with communities in rural Haiti to co-create education opportunities and today, we are educating hundreds of children every year. This experience exposed me to many of the pitfalls of the traditional foreign aid model and pushed me to embrace social entrepreneurship as a local development tool in emerging markets, as ideas can come from and be implemented by those most in tune with local needs. After 3 years of research in developing countries, including fieldwork in Haiti, Egypt, Rwanda, Kenya and Ghana, I launched Enpàk Ayiti. This project curates centralised, context-based entrepreneurship and innovation tools in Haitian Kreyol to equip Haitian changemakers with the language and knowledge to be lifetime social innovators.

Session 2 | Tuesday, March 30



Tetsu Kurumisawa: Tetsu is interested in intersections of different fields and founded Interdisciplinary High School Research Program. Combining flexible mindset of 100 high schoolers and professional knowledge of 50 experts, Tetsu created a six-month program to collaboratively come up with new solutions towards the issue of plastic pollution in the ocean. He is planning to develop this model in a more effective way. He just graduated from high school and will be enrolled in a college in the US.



Shay Downey, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, is in her third year at Swarthmore College as a pre-law student majoring in Cognitive Science. Shay is driven by intense commitment to the empowerment of Indigenous Peoples. Her project is centered on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Using a curriculum that combines financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and business ownership, Cherokee women in the program will be given the tools necessary to achieve financial stability and in turn break down a vicious cycle in the system of violence. Every participant will not only have the opportunity to develop their innovation, but also to strengthen their community and revitalize the overall economic standing of tribal lands at-large. By empowering Indigenous women, every community will have expanded their network of businesses and created role models for young Native girls to recognize the strength and historic leadership of women in tribes.



Aleina Dume is a sophomore in the class of 2023 from Queens, New York City. She intends to major in Sociology and Anthropology, with a focus on higher education. Aleina's project, FLI to Graduation, is a six-week college-transition summer program for incoming first-generation and low-income (FLI) students. She is guided by the mission that every student who wants to attend college can enroll and earn a degree. Though many FLI students receive support when they apply to college, they have lower odds of staying in and completing a degree on time. 1 in 4 FLI students drop out after their first year and in six years, only 11% complete a Bachelor's Degree. Through near-peer mentorship, project-based learning, and career exploration, a cohort of incoming college students will develop skill sets to maintain their health and wellness, achieve academic success, and begin to become career-ready. This will be achieved through collaborative workshops and activities that encourage self-expression and community building, which lead to the cohort's graduation from the program with completed portfolios.



Juliane Ding: I am a current junior at Swarthmore double majoring in Political Science and Studio Art. I pursued a post-conflict social innovation project in Hiroshima centering hibakusha testimony to connect the international audience to get involved in anti-nuclear weapon advocacy. Using digital media, we hope to push forward these stories to a wider audience in a pursuit for more populations to know of the impacts of nuclear weapons and the harm of our governments in continuing their nuclear weapons programs.

Session 3 | Wednesday, March 31



Yujin Yamaguchi: Yujin founded Sustainable Game to organize educational programs to help people take actions, sometimes for students to get interested in social issues, and other time for corporate employees and students to induce collaborative efforts. He is also producing a documentary film on the infamous detention centers for asylum seekers, raising awareness of how people are excluded in Japan. He is 16 and will be junior at high school this April.



Sara Kumagai, BookSwapJapan - Inspired by “Little Free Library” that she saw in the US, Sara started a weekly pop-up outdoor library where people exchange books and enjoy in-person socialization as well as nature, staying away from smartphone screens. Now the model has been copied and spread to three other areas near Tokyo, with two more sites in the pipeline to join. She is 14 and will be 9th grade this April.



Sannan Dhillon: I am a second-year student at Swarthmore College from Lahore, Pakistan. I’m majoring in Economics and Political Science with a focus on public policy. Growing up in Pakistan, a country with the third-highest out-of-school population and one of the lowest literacy rates, I am fortunate to now be studying at one of the leading higher education institutes in the world. This realization drives my passion to make quality education accessible to students around the world. Approximately one million school-going students in Pakistan are expected to drop out during the current pandemic and even those who stay enrolled will suffer from significant learning losses. In this context, my project titled “Helping Schools Help Themselves”, aims to design and implement low-cost interventions that help low-fee schools in Pakistan to increase student retention rates and overcome learning losses. These interventions will include teacher-training workshops, tailored curriculums, an increase in parent-teacher interaction, and the use of EdTech tailored for resource-deficient schools. EdTech not only enables distance learning but also allows the school to track student performance so that students who are at the risk of dropping out can be helped in a timely manner.



Mwangangi Kalii: I am a second year student at Swarthmore College. I am studying Mathematics and Economics. The project that I am currently working on is on economic development through education. The way that I intend to implement this project in my community in Kitui County, Kenya is through creating after-school programming in schools in the area. The problem this project seeks to address is the high number of students dropping out of primary and secondary school in the county. The change I would like to see is fewer students dropping out of school, because school is not engaging enough for them to stay.

Closing Plenary | Bart Weetjens

“Self-compassion: Empathy to the Self”

Bart Weetjens

Founder, APOPO

Founder, The Wellbeing Project

Ashoka Fellow (selected 2006)



Bart Weetjens, a Belgian Zen priest and celebrated social entrepreneur whose innovative research with scent detection is healing the explosive lands of a third of the world's countries.

There are around 55 million landmines and unexploded ordnances in over 84 countries throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, South America and Central America. Every year, 40,000 new landmines are planted in conflict zones, and every day, 40 to 50 people are killed or maimed by one of them. 21 African countries are affected by landmines, which kill, injure, or disable over 12,000 people each year. However, there was no efficacious solution to this imminent issue. The most feasible method of demining then was to combine manual demining and the usage of mine- detection dogs. Dogs can sniff explosives and scan a wide area, but a trained dog from the US or European countries are as expensive as USD \$20,000 per dog. They are also prone to tropical diseases and carry enough weight to potentially set off a landmine require lots of training skills in the handlers.

Bart recollects, ‘I got a hamster on my ninth birthday as a present. I fell in love with him and by the time I was a teenager I was breeding rodents and selling them to pet shops. Around that time, Belgian media was frequently reporting on the problems of the landmines in Africa. For example, Princess Diana’s visit to landmine victims in Bosnia was hugely publicized in 1997. Then something connected in my mind! Can we connect rodents’ olfactory sense with this imminent crisis?’



10 years old Bart

Upon graduating from Antwerp University, Bart started to experiment by training rats to detect landmines in a small laboratory in Antwerp. He recalls, ‘I received lots of criticism then because I was only 29 years old who had no experience in the field but I soon decided to set up a training field in Morogoro, 190 kilometers west of Dar es-Salaam, Tanzania’s main urban center. I thought the on-site training would be more convincing to sway their doubts.’

Bart’s idea—over several years—was proven to be the most effective and the least costly demining technology in the world, and it led him to set up APOPO, a non-profit organization that trains African giant pouched rats to save lives by detecting landmines. A trained rat can scan 100 meters in 30 minutes, twice the area covered by an expert deminer in one day besides costs being much lower than training a dog. Since its inception, APOPO has demined 86 million square meters of land to free 5,800,000 people from landmines. In 2015, they completed demining in Mozambique and the country was officially declared mine-free. They are now in Angola aided by JICA, and beyond the African continent in South-East Asia.



HeroRAT ‘at work’ on a mining field in Mozambique

When Mozambique officially announced itself free from landmines in 2015, Bart transitioned from his executive role to focus on the practice of Zen. In the same year he got involved in The Wellbeing Project, which aims to catalyze a culture of inner wellbeing for all changemakers.

While exploring the relationship between personal growth and social action, he recently undertook a new initiative to develop a holistic permaculture/wellbeing center in the French Ardennes: La Grande Terre, where he facilitates many of his Zen workshops and individual coaching trajectories.

How to join and support

Please visit the Social Innovation Lab website for more information.

<https://www.swarthmore.edu/social-innovation-lab/international-youth-social-innovator-symposium-2021>

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If you would like to join in on the Youth Social Innovator Sessions, email: yashida@ashoka.org

How to donate and support 🎁

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 From \$1,000

Ashoka Friends Membership
(Japanese network of those who share Ashoka's vision)

- Blue membership (35 or younger) \$1,000 / year
- Orange membership (36+) \$3,000 / year

 From \$10,000

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(A global network of those who share Ashoka's vision)

*For more information on Ashoka Friends and ASN membership, please reach out to nwatanabe@ashoka.org