Who Are the Young Leaders?

By Emily Davis

Where are the next generation of nonprofit leaders, and what are they doing? The following profiles highlight the treasure trove of great leaders eager to help nonprofits reach their greatest potential.

Irene Fernando

Irene Fernando is co-founder and co-executive director of Students Today Leaders Forever (STLF), a nonprofit that builds leaders through service, relationships, and action. STLF’s core program is the Pay it Forward Tour, where students travel around the country doing service and engaging in leadership and reflection activities. STLF believes that a core of three to five people can accomplish anything if the unit stays true to three concepts: commitment to a mission, respect for each other as people and friends, and trust that success is the only option.

Irene received her B.S. in business from the Carlson School on Management and is pursuing a Masters in education in the Youth Development Leadership Program at the University of Minnesota’s College of Education and Human Development. She is on the board of the Charities Review Council and Knova Learning, a new charter school. She co-coordinates Twin Cities Marathon events and is actively involved in her sorority, Alpha Gamma Delta.

Irene’s advice to emerging leaders: “Know your values, and prioritize them in a meaningful way. Every idea is worth considering. Good ideas won’t wait, so act now. Learn always, and ask for advice whenever you can. (Take the advice every now and then, too.) We must hold hand-in-hand to really change this world. No one person, organization, or perspective will be enough to truly make long-lasting impact… which is great because that means we can do it together!”

Mike Gast

Mike Gast, the family philanthropy coordinator at Resource Generation (RG), is a social change philanthropist, donor organizer, and fundraiser. He co-coordinated the Movement Generation Support Committee, a donor circle supporting young progressive leaders. He lives in Seattle, plays rugby with the Seattle Quake, and is a graduate of Vassar College.

Mike is most proud of the number of young people with wealth he has helped move from inaction to action through his work at Resource Generation. He has always loved the initial one-on-one meeting with new members (young people with wealth or access to wealth) who are just finding out about Resource Generation and then seeing them develop their leadership over the next months and years. “It’s astounding to see folks move from not being able to talk at all about their financial resources to coming up with a giving plan to move major dollars to the issues they care about,” he says.

Some of the best advice he has received has been: Create a work plan at the beginning of the week that you can use. Learn to say “no.” Laugh. Celebrate success. Remember that it’s never the best time to take a day off…so take it now. Find mentors, and create ways to work with them. Focus on building strong relationships. And remember: “If you wish to go quickly, go alone. If you wish to go far, go together.”

Sharna Goldseker

Sharna Goldseker has 14 years’ experience in the nonprofit sector, including 11 as a grantmaker and as a consultant to families, foundations, and federations on next-generation and multigenerational philanthropy. Sharna is vice president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies (www.ACBP.net), where she directs 21/64 (www.2164.net), a nonprofit consulting division specializing in next-generation and multi-generational strategic philanthropy.

Sharna graduated with a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania with majors in urban studies and religious studies. She has a Masters in public administration in nonprofit management from New York University’s Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, where she was the inaugural Charles H. Tenney Fellow. She serves on the board of the Goldseker Foundation as well as the Council on Foundations’ Committee on Family Philanthropy, which she previously chaired. Sharna’s greatest accomplishment to date, she says, is her son.

Colin Parent

Colin Parent, co-director of the New Leaders Council of San Diego, is an attorney and political organizer who works for the international law firm PLA Piper. In 2010, the San Diego News Network named him to its list of “35 Under 35 San Diego community leaders who are shaping the region we live in, and beyond.” In 2009, San Diego Metropolitan Magazine named him one of its “40 Under 40” program honoring young entrepreneurs, and the San Diego Daily Transcript named him among its “Top Young Attorneys for 2009.” Colin attended the University of California San Diego, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in political science with an emphasis in international relations in 2003. While at UCSD, Colin was involved on a variety of levels with campus government.

Founder of the San Diego Lawyers Chapter of the American Constitution Society, an organization dedicated to a progressive view of...
As its interim director, he led the search committee to select a new executive director.

“Your network will be increasingly critical in doing your job and in finding new jobs and opportunities,” Josh tells young professionals. “Take advantage of your network and grow it as much as possible. And consider serving on a nonprofit board—they’re in great need of dedicated, passionate members with new perspectives. YNPN chapters can be a great first board—consider getting involved at the local level if there’s a chapter in your community. Or start one.”

As the director of civic engagement for the Building Movement Project, Trish Tchume helps integrate social change values and practices into nonprofit organizations. Before joining the Building Movement Project in 2008, Trish served as a community outreach manager for the Action Without Borders/Idealist organization (www.idealist.org). Additionally, she serves on the national board of the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network. Through each of these roles, Trish has helped strengthen nonprofits’ social justice work by connecting them with resources and networking opportunities.

Trish advises Next Gen leaders to take ownership of their professional development. “Connecting to networks or joining boards can help you develop in ways that are structured and enjoyable,” she says.