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CivicAction announces new cohort of DiverseCity Fellowship winners

KAITLYN KOCHANY | WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2015



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It started as a place for rap videos, but over the last ten years, [Jane-Finch.com](#) has transformed into a kind of online community center. The brainchild of Paul Nguyen, the son of Vietnamese boat people, the site now hosts a wide variety of media. Videos of community events like barbecues share bandwidth with local music acts, and news coverage explores topics the nightly news only grazes. “Our story is usually told by mass media, but it was time for the kids in the area to start telling their own stories,” says Nguyen.

As part of the 2015-2016 cohort of CivicAction’s DiverseCity fellows, Nguyen now has the opportunity to take the website to the next level. The fellowship, now in its seventh year, acts as a sort of boot camp for rising leaders in the GTA. Fellows are given leadership development, access to mentors and like-minded peers, and teaches them about the emerging issues facing the GTA.

For Nguyen, those issues start off as hyper-local: “For the last ten years, I’ve been focused on Jane and Finch and neighbouring marginalised communities.” The fellowship will give him a chance to stretch out. “I realized it was time to get a bigger perspective, because there was only so much I could do on my own. I think I offer a unique perspective—I think of myself of the street kid—and a lot of the people in the program are highly educated.”

Some of the other fellows come from very different backgrounds. Gracie Goad is the manage of hospitality at the Drake Hotel, while Mrinalini Menon recruits top talent for RBC. What unites this group of 27 winners is a passion for civic engagement, and the ability to create unique visions of change. Nguyen sees his background as a chance to bond with other fellows: “It would be good to combine my street smarts with the academic side. I’m looking forward to getting other people’s perspectives, and I don’t want to take anything for free and not give back.”

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