

UPF UK Youth Achievement Awards 2019 given at the Houses of Parliament

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Imagine Committee Room 10 at the Houses of Parliament, full to capacity of 100 people! Only standing room! A group of 20 bright, selfless young achievers from various backgrounds, who were nominated by Universal Peace Federation (UPF) - UK Ambassadors for Peace, had come to receive their "UPF Young Achievers Award" for their outstanding work through service and volunteering. The young achievers were surrounded by a supportive group of friends, family, as well as UPF Ambassadors for Peace.

What made the evening even more memorable was the fact that each awardee went up on the stage to deliver their speech and explain their work. Not only were they cheered by their family and friends with beaming smiles, but their own Member of Parliament came up to present the award and photos were taken to capture the important moment of the evening. The Members of Parliament included: Barry Gardiner MP, (who had four awardees from his constituency), Steve McCabe MP, Ada During, who presented the award, standing in for -Kate Hoey MP, Matt Roda MP, Vicky Foxcroft MP, Neil Coyle MP, Virendra Sharma MP, the Rt. Hon. Tom Brake MP, (who was hosting the event as well as presenting an award to his constituent) and he together with Afzal Khan MP CBE, a friend of UPF who kindly stepped in, to present the awards to the awardees, whose MPs could not attend. Rt. Hon. Justine Greening MP also could come and hear Maisha's story and present the award outside Committee Room No. 10, just before we started the event.

What pleased the awardees, was the tremendous praise and words of encouragement they received from Members of Parliament and others. Not only that but each and every one gave recognition to the UPF for organising the events which have been going on for the past 10 years. To hear UPF being acknowledged by the recipients and MPs, was very rewarding for the organisers. Listening to each person telling their stories about a cause they are passionate about, one wonders how many more self-less young people are out there carrying out self-less acts of kindness, we could build a wonderful world!

The final impetus for the inspiration came from the achievers themselves who were so interested in each other's work and deeply touched by their peers. So much so that they asked us to organise a get together to meet and have discussions on how to go forward. Therefore UPF North Region is sponsoring a Dinner on the 14th of September at 6pm – which will be preceded by a meeting at 3pm when we will meet and share about each idea on how to work together. Through brainstorming and the process of hackathon we will try to develop a project, for the coming year. we will do the same process, as last year because we successfully developed a project which was "Challenging the Stigma of Mental Health issues in Young People". All young achievers concerned, seem happy and fulfilled.

UPF Youth Achievement Awards 2019 was truly an inspiring and wonderful occasion, full of idealism and passion. Please see the accounts of the young achievers below.

Olanrewaju Jaiyeola (Virendra Sharma MP)

Lanré read law at the University of Kent and then went on to complete the Legal Practice Course at The University of Law. She is in the process of qualifying as a solicitor through the equivalent means route and due to qualify next year.

Lanré is also the Founder of AskMe: Legal, a social enterprise that she started in order to address the issues that were created by the cuts to legal aid. She realised that people from low socio-economic communities were left without access to justice so she created a service that allowed people to submit their legal queries online and receive legal assistance.

A couple of years after launching, AskMe: Legal started running workshops and seminars for young people interested in pursuing a career in law - the aim was to give them access to legal professionals that they wouldn't ordinarily have access to and allow them to benefit from the advice and experiences of the guest speakers. AskMe: Legal have been fortunate enough to work with a number of regional and international firms, as well as partner with a high street firm in order to offer the young people in their network work experience.

Kirsty Wragg (Neil Coyle MP)

Kirsty Wragg is an entrepreneur, writer and speaker in the field of mental health.

Kirsty founded an online and offline community "Thrive Beyond Mental Illness UK", where over 500 members attend free events to support each other, feel empowered and answer the question: "I am stuck - where should I turn next?"

Alongside this, she runs a coaching business, providing accessible and empowering life coaching exclusively for people diagnosed with mental illness. This involves researching and creating new strategies to address the stigma and misinformation that she experienced as a client in the life coaching industry.

She also writes and speaks at events on the topic of mental health. Recently, she also worked with the UPF and other Young Achievers to write and launch the Suicide Guarantee Petition, which went on to receive over 10,000 signatures.

Zethu Maseko (Vicky Foxcroft MP)

Through her social action project, "Kuphilisiwa", Zethu organised and delivered a series of healing and empowering art workshops for young women survivors of gender-based violence in townships in South Africa and Swaziland.

Her workshops culminated in exhibitions and received enthusiastic feedback from the participants and members of their communities. Zethu's artworks from the sessions have been nominated to feature in the exhibition of the European Development Days 2019 conference in Brussels. She is an undergraduate student at Goldsmith's, University of London, studying Fine Art. Zethu is a musician and performance artist currently working in the medium of Short film and recently delivered healing art workshops for women of colour at the Institute of Contemporary Art London.

Christelle Tambi (Matt Rodda MP)

It is no secret that Africa today is passing through turbulent times with armed conflicts, natural disasters etc and this has meant that more and more women are at the helm of their families, doing jobs and tackling affairs that society could never think they were capable of doing before and this is the reason why patriarchy in Africa needs to be overthrown and we need more people to join the fight.

Coming from an educational background where I studied sociology with human rights at under grad level where my dissertation was on the institution of marriage in Africa and at Masters level where I studied human rights and cultural diversity, I focused on a human rights and development approach to tackling violence against women in Cameroon. Mapping out a world where African women are free from the shackles of patriarchy has always been a passion for me and the more I advance in my mission, the more I understand just how much the parasite of patriarchy has eaten deep into African society but this is still a positive for me because it shows me that even though I still have a long road ahead, I am on the right track.

It is also very important to include young men in the conversation to overturning patriarchy because they are the key to the younger generation of men coming up and if they get the right education, I am convinced we will see a steep decline in patriarchal norms and traditions in our African societies. We also have to use every tool available; be it social media or small focus groups; do not let the conversation burn out, we witness the ills of patriarchy everyday in our personal and professional lives. It is a fight that we must all join in.

Kanav Moudgill and Imran Irfan (Barry Gardiner MP) (Kanav left,, Imran right)

Kanav- I immigrated into the UK at the age of 11 and integrating into the schooling system was a challenge. I faced many obstacles. I spoke English to a very basic level, had very few friends and naturally felt quite alone. As I progressed from primary to secondary school, these challenges carried themselves along and I still felt quite isolated. As time went on, I started developing some meaningful friendships and Imran was one of them. We became good friends and as I spoke to him about my struggles in the earlier years, we felt something had to be done.

Imran- Knowing there was an absence in emotional support, with our shared passion of helping others, we decided to work on a scheme; a scheme that will allow students from all backgrounds to feel comfortable, confident and happy. This led to the formation of the Peer Mentoring Programme.

Imran- We asked teachers from every year group for students that they believed could benefit from our programme. We then allocated a specific trained senior student to these students with the aim of improving their experience in school.

Kanav- Over the three years we have run this programme, we have seen a huge improvement in their well being. We've received positive feedback from the teachers of these students saying how they have witnessed an incredible difference over the years. Alongside this, being peer mentors, we saw a boost in the general morale of our mentees. One of the students went on to captain the handball team a year later, winning a multitude of trophies.

Imran- As we finish with year 13, we are leaving behind a school that now includes an impactful programme that will be led by the safeguarding team at school allowing students to prosper. We can also proudly say, there is now an inclusion club run by a senior member of staff as well as one of the students, where students are free to express themselves in an open and safe space.

Imran- Knowing we will be preventing the emotional isolation that we know was previously experienced we are confident that students will learn to embrace challenges regardless of wherever they are, whatever their situation and whoever they may be.

Heli Shah (Barry Gardiner MP)

I have carried out volunteer work during my NCS (National Citizen Service) programme, helping out the elderly in a care home by setting up a tea party for them. Furthermore, I have also had the chance to visit a homeless shelter to interact with the people and provide for them a sense of warmth and care. In the future, I will also continue to volunteer and help those in need.

Wasifa Khalid (Barry Gardiner MP)

In order to make a difference in our community, my friends and I organised a campaign for the homeless. I helped to make packages for the homeless in London, and we had them distributed through the charity Trinity. We ensured that the needs of both the homeless men and women were met. There were a lot of challenges to overcome, and organising this wasn't easy, but I am proud to say we went beyond the target we had set for ourselves. I also volunteered at a care home, where I spent some time with the elderly people, having tea together, and even participated in a little play for them to watch. I helped organise a sale to attract more people to come and spend their free time at the care home. All the challenges I faced meant nothing knowing we had made the elderly people happy and that the staff at the care home were thankful.

In the future, I want to make further positive changes for my community and be active in many different aspects of the environment.

Shreen Mahmood (Steve McCabe MP)

"I am a firm believer that helping others is one of the most important and rewarding things we can do and working together for peace is imperative to a better cohesive society."

Shreen is a voluntary radio presenter on Unity FM, a community radio station in Birmingham. She discusses women empowerment, community issues and current affairs in relation to a variety of themes including family values, self-love, domestic violence, knife crime, culture, racism and many more on her show called The Inspire Show.

She is the founder of Muslims Connect community group, which focuses on interfaith and social integration for a shared British future. With Muslims Connect she has organised community events, workshops, talks and mentoring. Shreen loves organising charity events and trips. She has climbed Mount Snowden twice this past year to raise £12500 for Rohingya and £10000 for Yemen with a team of young trekkers. She also took a group of six ladies out to Morocco for an Orphanages Project with £145000 to support several orphanages.

Shreen also works with many other grassroots organisations and charities. For example, she recently spoken at an inner-city school about aspirations, time management and exams. Shreen is also a World Hijab Day Ambassador a member of Women's Federation for World Peace (UK).

Jefferson Iweh (Tom Brake MP)

I was very honoured when Kian Bakhtiari founder of The People, nominated me for this award, as personally this something I am not used to. But I will share my story, for the past nine years, I have been advocating for young people to live a better life and to not be boxed in by their environment, where they came from or what they have done. This passion started from where any good story starts and that is from myself, I had seen the harsher side of life from an early age (which is now becoming a normal scenario nowadays), through friends being killed, others being incarcerated, and the other bad situations that befall young people. I developed real hate for being an observer of this, and not being able to do anything to allow people who have come from a similar background as myself to see the better outcome of life.

So I started by volunteering with my local authority to become one of the founding members of an initiative called Sutton young advisors, which allowed us to win a Diana award for our work such as getting young people to vote in the elections, to speaking on behalf of the young people in our local area decision making meetings

But with any good thing it came to an end, so I continued to advocate for young people in different boroughs throughout London, such as Wandsworth, Merton, through different roles such as working as a teacher's assistant in PRU (People Referral units), as well as BME mental health leadership project called Black minds matter, to raise leaders in social change, to delivering workshops on financial management, digital skills in Microbits, digital marketing, gun and knife crime awareness and prevention. I believe that receiving this award, won't be just for me, but for those who came from a similar background as me and just wants to fight for the better future that is promised but doesn't seem tangible.

Marral Shamshiri-Fard (Kate Hoey MP)

Marral is an Iranian-British young person who is passionate about education, justice, and equality. She volunteers and works as an educator, researcher, and workshop facilitator. After completing a Master's degree at the University of Oxford in Modern Middle Eastern Studies and Arabic in 2018, she was offered a PhD scholarship from the London School of Economics (LSE) where she is currently doing research on Iran, Oman and the Global South. She is focusing on revolutionary histories of national liberation and anti-colonial struggle in the context of the global Cold War.

Aside from her research, Marral volunteers as a teacher at Iran School, Harrow, a community Saturday school which teaches Farsi to Iranian, Afghan, Tajik, and other students of Persian-speaking heritage. Marral attended the school throughout her childhood to learn her mother-tongue and joined the school as a teacher after learning that it was going to close due to lack of staff and funds. She is passionate about the school's initiative to allow immigrant communities in London to hold onto their culture and heritage through language. She is committed to giving back to the community which gave her the language skills to come this far in her own endeavours, especially her language-based research.

Marral is most passionate about education, and wants to continue working on educational projects that will benefit her community. She advocates better knowledge and understanding about the Middle East, and immigrant and marginalised communities. She is working towards an academic career and remains involved in local politics and community activism at the grassroots level.

Johnny Boy and Michelle Ellison (David Lammy MP)

Describing themselves as non-runners, Michelle and Johnny ran 630km across the width of the UK from St David's Head to Lowestoft, to raise awareness and gain signatures for a UK government petition, to improve the level of care in all our AandE departments across the country for those people suffering from suicidal thoughts.

Johnny and Michelle met years ago when working as volunteer counsellors for Childline. Inspired by the workshop 'Challenging the Stigma of Mental Health' and their drive to make positive change in our world, Michelle became committed to finding a way to engage others in signing this petition, by taking on a challenge that would mentally and physically push her, like she'd never experienced before. Johnny learnt about the shocking suicide statistics and Michelle's plan to run 630km across the country and didn't hesitate to say 'Can I come?' They trained, they planned their route, sorted the logistics, took time off work and started running an average of 15 marathons over 17 days in March, engaging with as many people along the way, who openly shared their struggles with mental health and their support for the petition.

Since returning from the run, the petition successfully reached over the 10,000 signatures required to ensure a government response. The petition team hosted an event in the House of Commons, engaging a diverse group of Londoners in the conversation about what we can all do next in reducing the number of avoidable deaths lost through suicide, and how we can support each other in our mental health struggles

within communities.

- Look out for the film *Four Ordinary Feet*, which documents the journey.

Tobi Adesuyi (Wes Streeting MP)

My name is Tobi Adesuyi and I have been helping young people figure out who they want to be and what they want to do after graduating from university. I believe this is a significant time in many people's lives where identity comes strongly into question as for after the majority of your life you no longer identify as a student (in formal education). As a result, I come across young people, especially young black people to guide them through getting to know who they are as a person, not just a job title and find value in that rather than a salary.

I've worked with youth for a while helping them establish confidence in themselves and figure out their career with searches, applications, CVs as well as preparing mock interviews or even setting up businesses. It's always a pleasure to see them achieve what they set out to do and see the people I've helped succeed in media, consulting, photography, finance and the public sector. I'm now also helping out to become a youth leader in my church in North London to continue making a difference and helping young people become all that they can be.

Growing up an only child in a single parent home I know how important guidance, support and having someone believe you can be and I believe that everything they need is already inside of them even if its a seed that needs some nurturing and a little support to grow and that's where I believe I can continue to create change just like someone did for me as a child. Seeing someone that looked like me be inspirational, successful and a help to his community reminds me every day that representation is important and whether I like it not someone I play a part in someone else's narrative and I have the pleasure of adding value to a young person's life where I can.

Fatou Bah Bah (Shabana Mahmood MP)

My name is Fatou Bah Bah, I am 26 years old and I was born and raised in The Gambia one of the smallest countries in west Africa. Currently I work as a retail Team Leader at Costa, a position I have held through Sodexo at Birmingham children and Women Hospital since March 2016. Although my title is retail Team Leader, much of the time I found myself seating with costumers (the parents) and stressed staff empathising with them to be in a peaceful state of mind. For me it is not just about the cup of coffee or tea I make for them, it's about that peacefulness they feel when they leave the Costa. In November 2018, I finally celebrated my 3 years of hard work at the Coventry University with a first-class degree in International Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care.

Jack Clayton (Keir Starmer MP)

I completed an International Citizen Service health programme in Malawi with Voluntary Services Overseas last year. I am also volunteering for CAFOD working on a climate change campaign and helping organise a parliamentary lobby.

I worked cross culturally in Malawi teaching on a health programme, particularly raising awareness about how to prevent HIV, as well as discussing gender equality and sexual rights. I was a central part to delivering lessons about sexual health. I particularly took a lead in discussing how to end the taboo around seeking medical services for sexual health. I talked with Malawian students about why getting sexual health treatment shouldn't be any different to receiving any other healthcare. I worked in Malawi to promote gender equality. Debating with young Malawians in classrooms what makes a good and healthy relationship. When I was in Malawi I also worked to raise awareness about mental health, which is not a subject often spoken about there. It is a widely held belief that it is not a real problem, and I lead lessons discussing why people must talk if they feel down instead of hiding it.

My future plans also include my hope to go to Israel and Ramallah this year to help work on olive harvest picking, as well as working with peace activists on the ground there. Though I believe it is still early in my efforts towards peace causes and look forward to doing more in the future.

Maisha Sumah (Justine Greening MP)

"helping the voiceless find the voice they lost by being the voice for them and given them the vision to see the power in their voice."

Maisha is a passionate motivational speaker and has delivered her message of hope in schools, universities, television and online. Through her life story she imparts wisdom and challenges others to succeed despite their obstacles; to be confident and grow towards a future of joy and peace.

Maisha has organised workshops and seminars to raise awareness about youth violence and has succeeded in creating a safe space for open dialogue among BAME teens and young adults. Maisha is also a volunteer mentor with the largest youth group in the UK. Her one-to-one sessions help youths and

domestic violence victims from different backgrounds and ages. Using her experience she blends positive affirmations with real-life examples to inspire, and offers tailored advice to those that seek her council.

NHS - I have a meeting with the Director , Chief executive of St. George's hospital and other mental health activists to discuss change for the BME community in the UK for their mental health by observing and getting response of the changes the youths want to see affected by mental ill health or people around them. And things like opening more youth centres where they can express themselves as many black guys find it hard to express themselves from database collection. But performing arts helps them too. So creating these spaces and whatever they need with the 250 million pounds available I get to help suggest where it should be invested in.



Jemima Amy Lovatt (Mark Field MP)

Jemima Lovatt is an activist, policy maker and aspiring barrister. She has been campaigning to end domestic abuse for the last five years. Her work has spanned setting up youth council branches at universities, making the business case and running training sessions at corporates in the City of London and advocating at UN General Assembly and One Young World. She has recently launched a campaign to extend the proposed Domestic Abuse Bill to include migrants and refugees and to include a commitment to a Bill in Northern Ireland. Her international work to end domestic abuse has been recognised by the Royal Commonwealth Society who made her an Associate Fellow.

In addition, she is President of the Lincoln's Inn Students' Association where she advocates for student barristers with a particular focus on diversity at the Bar. Previously she has worked as the Policy Lead on judicial diversity at The Law Society.

Siji Alonge (Margaret Hodge MP)

Siji Alonge - 25 Year old Social Entrepreneur who is very active in the local community of Barking and Dagenham and local boroughs. He is notably known for his mentoring sessions to young people (young boys, from deprived backgrounds who are prone to gang culture and mental health issues.

He has successfully transformed the lives of many young guys, installing in them the spirit of entrepreneurship through his workshops which he invests his time, skills and experience into building a better future for these young people.