

Emerging Leader Awards 2026 Recipients

Arshiaa Bhayana London Central Secondary School

Arshiaa Bhayana is a Grade 12 student at London Central Secondary School, passionate about leadership, advocacy, and creating positive change. She serves as the president of her school's HOSA chapter, which enables students to become leaders in healthcare through learning and competition. She is also the Co-Chair of Community Living Ontario's Youth Action Committee, advocating for inclusion and helping challenge stereotypes surrounding disability. Arshiaa is an enthusiastic lifeguard and swim instructor, and a compassionate volunteer at Parkwood Institute, where she supports programs for veterans.

Caleb Cherian Catholic Central High School

My name is Caleb Cherian, and I am a Grade 12 student at Catholic Central High School, where I currently serve as Prime Minister of CCH and as an executive member of the Debate Club. My journey has taken me across England, Scotland, the United States, and Canada, as I grew up as a child in a military family. Moving from place to place and repeatedly finding myself as the "new kid" taught me some of the most important lessons that continue to shape my leadership today, specifically how to adapt to change, embrace the unknown, and most importantly, show kindness to others.

Being welcomed into new communities by people who showed me compassion made me recognize how powerful even a small act of kindness can be. Those experiences taught me to notice people who may feel left out and to look for ways to make others feel included, valued, and heard. I consider it a blessing from God to continue learning and growing each day, and I believe that leadership is not simply about holding a title, it is about using the opportunities you have to make life better for the people around you. I believe leadership starts within the community, through small acts of service and compassion, and then grows outward to create meaningful change in the world.

My brother, Matthew, has autism. I admire him so much and he's the hardest working person I know. He has a tremendous love for sports, but at times he finds social interaction challenging and has difficulty participating in organized sports. Watching him experience these barriers inspired me to think beyond my own experiences and ask what I could do to create more inclusive opportunities for young people with different abilities. That desire led me to create United in Friendship, an inclusive sports and friendship initiative that brings students from the SCPP program together with students from the mainstream classes in a welcoming, low-pressure environment. I wanted to create a day where every student could participate, build friendships, feel celebrated, and experience the joy of being part of one school community. What began as an idea at CCH became a meaningful event at Sir Wilfrid Laurier, bringing students together through sport, friendship, and inclusion. This year, United in Friendship is expanding across the London District Catholic School Board, allowing the vision to reach even more students and communities.

For me, leadership is about seeing a need and having the courage to do something about it. It is about listening, including others, serving with purpose, and understanding that meaningful change does not always begin with something big. Sometimes, it begins with one person noticing that someone is being left out and deciding to open the door and welcome them in. I am incredibly grateful to the schools, organizations, community leaders, mentors, and supporters who recognize the importance of youth leadership and invest in creating opportunities for young people to make a difference. When we give young people the encouragement, trust, and opportunity to lead, we do more than support the leaders of today, we inspire the change makers of tomorrow. Every young person has the potential to make a positive impact, and when we empower them to use their voices, their talents, and their compassion, we give them the confidence to believe that they can change the world. The future belongs to the young people who are willing to step forward, serve others, and make that change happen.

Thank you to the Women's Canadian Club London for this recognition. I am truly grateful and honoured to receive the Emerging Leaders Award from your organization.

Lydia DeActis
Lord Dorchester Secondary School

A Leader Through Inclusion, Service, and Community

My name is Lydia DeActis, and I am a 17-year-old Grade 12 student at Lord Dorchester Secondary School in Dorchester, Ontario. Throughout my high school career, I have made it a priority to lead through inclusion, service, and active involvement in both my school and my community. My experiences have helped shape me into the person and leader I am today, teaching me that leadership is not simply about holding a position—it is about making a positive difference in the lives of others.

One of the most meaningful parts of my high school experience has been my involvement with students with special needs. My commitment to inclusion began in elementary school and has continued throughout high school. I have participated in Special Olympics events, worked one-on-one with students in track and field, and taken part in unified sports such as basketball and bocce ball. One of my most memorable experiences was competing in the Unified Basketball Championship in Ottawa in 2025. These experiences have taught me to lead with empathy, patience, and positivity while ensuring that everyone feels valued and included.

My leadership journey at Lord Dorchester Secondary School began in Grade 9 when I joined student parliament. Since then, I have become increasingly involved in school events, helping with pep rallies, assemblies, and the 2026 student buyout, where I managed ticket sales and helped ensure everything ran smoothly. I am Prime Minister in Grade 12 because I want to continue being a strong role model and a voice for my peers.

One of my proudest accomplishments was being invited to speak at the Chief of Police Gala in London, Ontario. I spoke in front of community leaders, including the Premier, to advocate for the Special Olympics. Through my speech, I helped raise \$21,000 in less than five minutes. This experience strengthened my confidence as a public speaker and showed me how powerful it can be to use my voice to support a cause I care deeply about.

My commitment to leadership and service has also been recognized through receiving the Optimist Award and the Citizenship Award. These opportunities allowed me to continue developing my confidence and leadership skills while connecting with other young leaders.

Outside of school, I have volunteered at a children's camp every summer since Grade 6. In Grades 9 and 10, I took on a leadership role at my church's camp, helping organize activities and ensuring that every child felt included and supported. Giving back to my community has taught me the importance of creating spaces where people feel welcome and valued.

As I enter my final year of high school, I hope to continue using my leadership, voice, and passion for inclusion to make a positive difference. To me, leadership is not about a title; it is about stepping up, supporting others, and making sure everyone has a place to belong.

Yumna El Tawati
AB Lucas Secondary School

Yumna El Tawati is an engaged student leader with strong interests in community involvement, youth leadership, and contributing to meaningful school initiatives. Through programs such as X-Labs at Western University, she explored real-world microbiology challenges and strengthened her teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving skills. At school, she has taken on meaningful leadership roles in initiatives like Relay for Life, Student Council, Eco Lucas, and MSA, where she helped organize events, support peers, and contribute to projects that build community, sustainability, and student well-being.

Beyond school, Yumna is committed to serving her community through volunteering at the London Muslim Mosque, where she supports young children in learning and creating a welcoming environment. She has also contributed to local food bank fundraisers, youth community service initiatives, and elementary school programs. Her dedication to leadership, service, and uplifting others led to her selection as one of the recipients of the 2026 Emerging Leader Award.

Violet Ens
HB Beal Secondary School

Violet Ens is a Haida student born in Vancouver BC that attends H.B. Beal Secondary in London Ontario. She is passionate about science and community involvement. Violet chose to attend an out of boundary high school to take the Indigenous classes not offered at her in boundary school. She is involved in the Indigenous Student Leadership Council and is completing a Specialized High Skills Major in Indigenous Arts and Culture. Violet completed a co-op placement at the Wampum Learning Lodge at Western University this summer as well as attending the Verna J. Kirkness STEM program in Calgary Alberta studying the effects of mosquito born illness in an ever changing climate.

Violet is looking forward to combining her interests in Indigenous culture and science by studying anthropology in University. She is incredibly grateful for the support of the Women's Canadian Club London and their recognition of her work in high school.

Erica Hannam
Mother Teresa Catholic Secondary School

Erica Hannam is a grade 12 student at Mother Teresa Catholic Secondary School, and a dedicated student-athlete who is actively involved in hockey, soccer, Best Buddies, and Student Council. Beyond her school involvement, Erica is passionate about giving back to her community, whether it be volunteering at Forest Cliff Camps, or at her former elementary school, St. Kateri. Erica embraces every opportunity to lead and connect with others, and leaves a positive impact wherever she goes.

Lucas Klassen
Medway High School

Hi, I'm Luke! I'm passionate about building things that matter - from an Open-Source Carbon Fiber-Pultruder in Western's FAST Lab to assistive wheelchair tennis devices. I am a passionate tennis player, piano and tennis instructor, and a future mechatronics engineer! I am so honoured to receive the Women's Canadian Club London Emerging Leader Award!

Zoë Kudelka

London South Collegiate Institute

Hi, I'm Zoë! I am a student at South Collegiate Institute, and some of my passions include women's rights, reading, and film. I am a camp counselor, as well as a swim instructor/lifeguard, which has allowed me to work with little kids and adults in many different situations. This has taught me patience, empathy, and developed my independence, as well as given me new perspectives into different lives and families. I am an active member of many teams at my school, such as the swim team, Relay For Life committee, and student council. Additionally, I have volunteered in London for various causes, such as to support the homeless population, cancer research, and as a dance instructor. These experiences have shaped me into who I am today, as a young independent woman and as a leader, and I wish to continue to give back to my community for my whole life.