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News / GTA

## CivicAction names 2015 fellows for DiverseCity program

Twenty-seven up-and-coming leaders were selected to participate in the "civic MBA."



VIEW 8 PHOTOS

COLE BURSTON / TORONTO STAR [Order this photo](#)

Minalini Menon is a manager of talent sourcing at RBC and one of seven DiverseCity fellows that are up and coming civic leaders, photographed at RBC in downtown Toronto on October 2, 2015.

By: [Sarah-Joyce Battersby](#) Staff Reporter, Published on Mon Oct 05 2015

One created a media network for his Jane and Finch neighbours. Another, inspired by his parents' story, wants to create better work opportunities for immigrants. On Monday, CivicAction named the 2015-2016 class of DiverseCity Fellows, a group of 27 up-and-coming leaders to take part in the so-called "civic MBA." It's a boot camp in how to get things done and what needs doing in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

Meet seven of the fellows and the spirit they hope to take from the program.



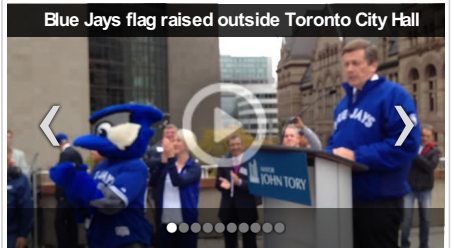
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Gracie Goad is in charge of food & beverage and training for the Drake Hotel on Queen West.

### Gracie Goad — “Humbling”

At just 26, Goad manages food and beverage for the Queen West location of the Drake Hotel. It’s the kind of burgeoning empire, with restaurants, hotels and stores cropping up from Vancouver to Prince Edward County, that can provide careers for her underemployed peers, she said.

She hopes to foster a belief that a restaurant job is not a stop gap between school and “the real world” but a chance to make a real life.

“It’s not due to a lack of talent in the workforce,” she said. “People don’t often think: Oh, there are accountants in hospitality. You can be in marketing in hospitality. You can be in human resources in hospitality.”

She’s also added training to her list of responsibilities. She taps into the talent at the Drake, organizing staff-led workshops, from whisky tastings to cocktail making, to personal finance for people living on cash tips.



AARON HARRIS / TORONTO STAR

Activist and filmmaker Paul Nguyen is passionate about the Jane-Finch neighbourhood.

### Paul Nguyen — “Up”

The 35-year-old activist and filmmaker started [JaneFinch.com](http://JaneFinch.com) 10 years ago. It’s “a homegrown operation, a ragtag bunch of volunteers from the area,” he said.

At first the website was a way to promote his friends’ music and share his own stories of the neighbourhood.

Over time, it has evolved to a community media centre, telling the stories of the neighbourhood and training people who live there to share those stories with the wider city.

For him, creating a sense of care and connection is what matters most — “just to be a good neighbour.”

“I think if we change the mentality of the residents of the community, a lot of change can happen and you don’t really rely on the money or the system or the programs.”

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AARON HARRIS / TORONTO STAR

Ritesh Kotak is an innovation strategist and cyber security expert with the Toronto Police Service.

### **Ritesh Kotak — “Energetic”**

A true child of the '80s, Ritesh Kotak can thank a Walkman for his existence. His father, an east African immigrant with a geology degree, was selling electronics when he met his future wife, who had moved from India with training in accounting and worked in a perfume factory.

Now they are living the “Canadian dream,” he said, after launching a family food-processing business.

The 27-year-old cyber whiz for the Toronto Police wants to use his fellowship time to help people like his parents.

“I see them. I hear their stories. And I lived the struggle,” he said. “If I can actually do something to help them by eliminating some of these employment barriers to entry, I feel like that will have a systemic, positive impact in society.”



COLE BURSTON

Mrinalini Menon is a manager of talent sourcing at RBC.

### **Mrinalini Menon — “Inspiring”**

Mrinalini Menon is just 34, but she has already lived, worked and studied in seven cities around the world, from Washington to Mumbai.

“Toronto, in a funny but very cool way, brings together the best of all these cities, and that’s why I live here today.”

Menon’s resume is almost as broad as her list of addresses, including work in the non-profit sector before joining the Royal Bank of Canada as a talent sourcing manager, and volunteer roles with the Royal Ontario Museum and Canadian Stage Company.

She hopes to share her broad experience and absorb the same from others.

“(The program) will help me hear so many various perspectives that I’m really excited about.”



CHRIS SO / TORONTO STAR

Georgia Whitehead is manager of the Strategy Management for Trillium Health Partners Office.

### **Georgia Whitehead — “Courageous”**

For this 29-year-old strategy manager at Trillium Health Partners, the patient experience is the “ultimate goal” in health care.

“When you or your family member or anyone ends up in the hospital it’s generally a really tough moment for them,” said Georgia Whitehead.

A healthy workforce can help make a patient’s stay more positive, from making sure she feels welcome to details like filling bedside water glasses.

That’s partly why she’ll pay special attention when she and the other fellows talk about mental health issues in the region, especially when it comes to burnout in the workplace.

“The health of employees is so important, and it’s so important when we think about it, from our friends and loved ones and those that we inevitably know who are dealing with mental health issues,” she said.



RICHARD LAUTENS / TORONTO STAR

Jonathan Azzi is a strategist with Accenture. He is passionate about mental health and mentoring new Canadians in job hunts.

### **Jonathan Azzi — “Connection”**

A neuroscience grad with a master’s degree in health administration, Jonathan Azzi spent seven years in health care before he made the switch to Accenture, a management consulting firm.

Through it all he made civic responsibility a pillar of his life.

“I’ve always had a passion for community building,” Azzi said, who has taken on volunteering jobs and pro bono consulting work for not-for-profits.

Azzi shared the other fellows’ admiration for one another: “I was honestly honoured to be in a room with those individuals.”

For him, the program will be about “connecting people with other people or with the skills that they need to be successful and then connecting people with their communities.”



BERNARD WEIL / TORONTO STAR

Scott Young is a digital strategist who teaches a workshop at the Centre For Social Innovation.

### Scott Young — “Audacious”

The 27-year-old Vancouver native moved to Toronto three years ago.

“Toronto is not my default. I chose to be in this city because I saw it as a great place to live, to work, and to build a career.”

Now that he’s here, the digital strategist and social media consultant hopes to find like-minded, and different, people to work together solving the region’s problems.

“It can’t just be one sector,” he said. “It needs to be civil society, it needs to be government, it needs to be academia, it needs to be the private sector. When those groups are talking to each other, and trying to envision what the future of our region looks like, I think that’s where things get really interesting.”

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