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Political parties: You have a new market to impress

Samara Canada releases a visual “open letter” with recommendations for elected representatives on how to engage young people.

Toronto, June 16th, 2016 — The official numbers are in from Elections Canada, and they deliver a significant blow to the myth of youth apathy. In the 2015 federal election, 57 percent of young Canadians voted, an incredible 18 percentage point jump from the previous election. As a new generation of young voters opts-in to politics, elected representatives have a growing opportunity to engage them in the political process in between elections.

Non-partisan charity Samara Canada brought together thirty emerging young leaders from across Canada to show political leaders how to effectively reach out to young people and engage them in political conversations. The group emerged with four important messages for political leaders:

- **Youth are diverse.** Young people are rich and poor, well-educated and less educated, urban and rural. A single young person cannot speak to the experiences of all youth;
- **There are no “youth” issues.** Young people have the same hopes and fears of other generations and are interested in the same issues as they are;
- **Use social media for meaningful conversations.** Allow for authentic and two-way dialogue to build relationships with young people; and
- **Come visit us where we are.** Remember to build relationships with young people via face-to-face contact, especially in spaces where they spend time.

Samara and the young people involved hope these ideas, captured in a [clear and colourful poster](#), will be displayed in constituency offices across the country, serving as a daily reminder to politicians and their staff of the value and importance of reaching out to youth.

The poster is the culmination of a year-long project led by Samara to reconnect young people to the political system. In September 2015, Samara released the report “[Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation](#)” that found only 55% of Canadian youth were contacted by political candidates. Among all the age groups surveyed, people ages 18 to 29 reported the lowest amount of contact.

These findings led to the first Everyday Political Citizen IRL Forum, a convening of thirty youth leaders from different parts of Canada to develop recommendations for elected representatives on how to improve their communication and engagement with young people. Samara captured their ideas and turned them into a resource for politicians in the form of a poster.

The young leaders (aged 18-29) came together in Toronto from as far as Newfoundland, PEI, Yukon, and British Columbia to share their experiences working in their communities to increase political engagement.

Each leader was nominated for the 2015 [Everyday Political Citizen](#) contest, a yearly contest that highlights the political work of ordinary citizens.

“This poster is the culmination of what young leaders across Canada have learned about political engagement, and putting it in the hands of our MPs will serve as a tangible reminder that young Canadians are paying attention.” – Jesse Hitchcock, Everyday Political Citizen, Charlottetown

“I think that this youth poster has the ability to give young people the conversation starter they need to get through the door and show legislators that youth care about the political process and want to be engaged.” – Alyssa Frampton, Everyday Political Citizen, St. John’s

“As the future stewards of Canada, engaging us in the decision-making process is not just the right thing to do, it's also the smart thing to do; we bring a long-term view to the process because we are ultimately the ones who will have to fund and manage the outcomes of the decisions being made today.” – Kevin Vuong, Everyday Political Citizen, Toronto

The poster is now available for download in English and French at:
www.samaracanada.com/poster-for-elected-representatives.

The Everyday Political Citizen contest was made possible thanks to individual donors and corporate sponsor Bennett Jones. The Laidlaw Foundation provided key financial support for the youth forum.

For interviews with Samara staff or the youth involved in making this poster, please contact:

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About Samara

Samara Canada is dedicated to reconnecting citizens to politics. Established as a charity in 2009, we have become Canada’s most trusted, non-partisan champion of increased civic engagement and a more positive public life.

Samara’s research and educational programming shines new light on Canada’s democratic system and encourages greater political participation across the country to build better politics, and a better Canada, for everyone.

A samara is the winged “helicopter” seed that falls from the maple tree. A symbol of Canada, the samara is also a reminder that from small seeds, big ideas can grow.