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Ottawa residents shortlisted for Everyday Political Citizen of the Year



ERIC ELLIOTT, OTTAWA CITIZEN

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Katie Gibbs is shortlisted for the Everyday Political Citizen of the Year award. *JULIE OLIVER / OTTAWA CITIZEN*

Four Ottawa residents — Katie Gibbs, Kim Peterson, Heather Rose and Joan Kuyek — have been shortlisted for the Everyday Political Citizen of the year award to be unveiled Dec. 3.

Starting in June, more than 300 Canadians shared their stories of civic engagement, resulting in three shortlists of nominees, identified by age group.

Everyday Political Citizen is run by Samara Canada, an organization that works to increase civic engagement in Canada. The goal of the award is to recognize non-elected citizens who make an effort to engage in the political community.

Comedian and jury member Rick Mercer will announce the winners in three age groups: under-18, 18-29 and over 30. Of the eight finalists shortlisted for the over-30 age group, the following four are from Ot-

tawa.

Katie Gibbs, Evidence for Democracy

Gibbs has worked in the field of science to become one of Canada's leading voices, advocating for science and evidence-based public policy. She started her activist journey in 2006, pursuing a PhD at the University of Ottawa, before she graduated in 2012 and was a lead organizer in the 2012 Death of Evidence rally to protest against the government's silencing of public sector scientists.

She says the silencing of scientists' opinions in Canada along with the elimination of the long-form census are what motivated her to co-found the non-partisan NGO Evidence for Democracy in early 2013. "When I finished my PhD, I formed Evidence for Democracy to sort of mobilize the scientific community and get them more engaged in the political process and hopefully use that engagement to create the political will to support science with evidence based decision making," she says.

In the recent federal election, Gibbs and Evidence for Democracy pushed to make science an election issue, attempting to make the link between science and democracy by explaining that, "we all benefit when the public policies are actually based on facts and evidence rather than ideology or political obedience."

She says she's now excited to work with the new Liberal government to fulfill some of their electoral promises to provide an administration that is based on trust and teamwork delivered by "evidence based policy."

"It was great to be nominated, especially because we had just worked hard during the election and we were very pleased with how much we were able to make science an issue so it feels good to have all that hard work recognized."



Kim Peterson, left, and Heather Rose are finalists for the Citizen of the Year Awards for their work on building a roadmap for youth autism services. *WAYNE CUDDINGTON / OTTAWA CITIZEN*

Heather Rose and Kim Peterson, Ontario Special Needs Roadmap for School

Two of the other Ottawa finalists were nominated as a team for their work in creating the Ontario Special Needs Roadmap for schools.

Co-workers of 14 years at Public Works Government Services Canada, Rose and Peterson began their journey over coffee after discovering they shared a unique experience — each had a child with autism. From there, the two talked with other parents and groups in the region and discovered that information about the services parents could access for their special needs children was very limited.

“The information that parents need to know about putting their child in school and the supports and services that are available, is just not there. It’s hard to find, it’s piecemeal, it’s scattered,” Rose said. “What we wanted to do was to lay it out and say, ‘look at all these policies and procedures, and laws that are in place to ensure your child gets the best education possible’.”

In 2012, Rose and Peterson did just that, transforming the complex route to services for special needs children in the area into a comprehensive and comprehensible roadmap.

With that success under their belts, Rose and Peterson continued their project and 18 months later, in September, 2014, launched the Ontario Special Needs Roadmap.

In one year, the pair accumulated 10,000 Twitter followers and have had their Roadmap downloaded 32,745 times. Neither thought the impact of their work would be so widespread.

“What we also didn’t expect was how many educators and school boards, and parents councils, all that stuff, were totally supporting us,” said Peterson. “They loved it, they were handing out our roadmap or putting it in newsletters. It’s everywhere.”

Rose and Peterson insist their work is not yet done.

“Our end goal is to actually go to every province and do a road map for them,” said Peterson. “It’s so close to us, it’s still something that’s so close to us, and we’re excited to be a part of it,” added Rose.



Joan Kuyek is the chair of the Ottawa based Gotta Go! public washroom campaign. *ASHLEY FRASER*
/ OTTAWA CITIZEN

Joan Kuyek, GottaGo!

After making the move to Ottawa from Sudbury in 1999, Kuyek has made a profound impact, becoming well known for her GottaGo! campaign, advocating for a network of open, safe and accessible public toilets in the capital.

Working in co-operation with the city administration, Kuyek was able to influence the city budget to include four new major light rail transit stops with public washrooms.

Kuyek was also able to get the city to fund a Where To Go app that would be offered to the public, allowing citizens to access a map of public washroom locations along with hours of operation and features of each washroom throughout the city.